

**THE
PEOPLE
OF**

**cool
aid.**



WINTER 2026

SUBSTANCE-FREE RECOVERY HOUSING—AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A NEW START

In just a few weeks, Cool Aid will open its first abstinence-based recovery housing community, creating space for 20 people who are ready for a new start after homelessness and addiction.

The program will be home to men aged 19 and older who have completed medical detox and treatment and demonstrated at least 60 days of abstinence—showing a strong commitment to recovery.

“We’re creating a soft place to land for people who want to distance themselves from the toxic drug supply,” says Angela Moran, Director of Housing and Shelters with Cool Aid. “They’ll be individuals who don’t have a fixed address or who are transitioning from other supportive housing.”

Angela explains that the program responds to a critical gap in the recovery journey. “Treatment is an intense experience, but what happens afterward matters



just as much. Without the right supports in place, moving into housing where substances are still being used can feel isolating and increase the risk of relapse.”

Cool Aid’s recovery housing will offer structured group programming and individualized case planning, both of which will be grounded in peer support and mentoring. These leaders will share practical strategies drawn from

their own journeys, helping residents build stability, routine, and connection. Residents will also be required to work or volunteer as part of rebuilding purpose and independence. Stays are expected to range from six months to two years, after which residents will be supported to move on to more independent living.

“Recovery housing is a critical addition to Cool Aid’s continuum of care,”



“LET’S DO THIS!”



Hello!

In my first months as Interim CEO of this remarkable organization, I’ve had the privilege of meeting our team and clients and visiting many of our sites. What stands out most is that even amid real challenges, there are powerful opportunities—for connection, better health, and meaningful second chances.

Having experienced poverty in my own youth, I feel a deep personal connection to Cool Aid’s life-changing work. I know firsthand how vital second, third, and even fourth chances can be. I share the passion of the entire Cool Aid team—and supporters like you—for housing, health equity, and ensuring people have access to opportunities when they need them most.

Alongside my formal education, I have spent many years volunteering with anti-poverty organizations and local housing groups. When I first moved to Victoria in 2017, I was introduced to Cool Aid as a volunteer, and I have continued to be inspired by the breadth and impact of the work done here. I am especially impressed by how responsive and nimble Cool Aid is—meeting urgent community needs, such as

recovery housing and dental care, with compassion, experience, and insight.

Serving as CEO of Cool Aid represents the intersection of my lived experience and professional journey, and it is an incredible opportunity to work alongside this dedicated team to make a lasting difference. I look forward to meeting you—our supporters—and continuing conversations about how we can work together to improve lives and build a community where everyone is valued and cared for.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Waheeda Esmail'.

Waheeda Esmail
Interim CEO

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Angela says. “It fills a gap in the housing and health care systems and supports a healthier transition—from shelters, to supportive housing, to independent living—when that support matters most.”

When the project was announced, many neighbours

shared that it felt like a step in the right direction—recognizing that housing solutions must include recovery and wellness. “We encourage community members to join this important conversation by expressing their support for recovery-focused housing models,” Angela adds.

Thank you for being part of this important step forward. As we prepare to welcome our first residents, your support helps make recovery, stability, and new beginnings possible. Stay tuned for more updates later this year. ●

THANKS TO YOU, EVERY PATIENT—AND EVERY SMILE—MATTERS

It's February, and that means it's Every Smile Matters Month at Cool Aid!

Since the launch of the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) in 2023, we're often asked why Cool Aid still needs outside funding for our dental clinic. We asked clinic manager, Kathleen Quast, to explain.

"We are extremely grateful for the plan, but it isn't always a perfect fit for our patients," Kathleen shares. "For starters, to qualify for the plan, people have to file their taxes every year, and on time. That is not always easy for the people we see."

She also explains that most of our patients have experienced medical and other trauma, requiring extra care and time each appointment. "And because we see urgent walk-ins in addition to our booked



patients, we are busier than most practices," Kathleen points out.

And finally, the plan does not always cover the level of care needed by Cool Aid's patients. "As an example, the federal plan covers one hygiene appointment a year and many people we see need up to four," Kathleen says.

Because of generous supporters like you, our dental clinic offers accessible, compassionate treatment to more than 3,000 patients with low income every year. **If you donate to the Every Smile Matters campaign by February 28, your gift will be matched dollar for dollar by an anonymous donor. Please visit coolaid.org/dental to learn more.** ●

Your **GENEROSITY** in Action ●

HERE'S THE DIFFERENCE YOU MADE IN 2025



3,000

DENTAL APPOINTMENTS



2,500

COUNSELLING APPOINTMENTS

COMING SOON



20

SUBSTANCE-FREE RECOVERY HOUSING UNITS

MELANIE EHRLICH: Giving back and honouring her daughter's life



You can hear deep emotion in Melanie Ehrlich's voice as she talks about her daughter, Emily Maya, who passed away almost a year ago.

Melanie remembers Emily Maya's love of nature, especially birds, and how she lit up any room she walked into. She says, "I want to share my daughter's story to help other people struggling with recovery and keep pushing for better housing and support. Emily Maya was so vibrant and so funny, but she'd had a tough time growing up and dabbled in alcohol and cannabis."

Over the years, Emily Maya's substance use increased and her mental health spiralled. Her family tried to help, but

she would disappear and live on the street. Finally, Melanie brought Emily Maya to Sandy Merriman House, a Cool Aid emergency shelter for women.

"Sandy Merriman House said 'yes.' The staff welcomed her with open arms. I'm so grateful for the support Emily Maya received there on her hardest days—and that she was safe and warm," Melanie says.

To honour Emily Maya's life and help other young women, Melanie finds comfort in giving back to Sandy Merriman

House. As a long-time director of the Peninsula Players, she and her fellow troupe members raised more than \$6,000 from their production, 3 Short Sketch Comedies. Melanie has also donated clothing and bedding to the shelter. "Whatever they need, I want to give," she says.

Thank you, Melanie, for your heartfelt generosity and care. *If you would like to organize your own community fundraiser for Cool Aid, please contact 250-414-4793 for more information.*

