



December Highlights

November 23 - Victoria Christmas Parade Float

Brought out of storage from Sidney, the Dandelion Society float was assembled by Board members and subsequently took part in the Island Farms Santa's Lights Parade on November 23.

December 16 & 17 - Rooming house dinners provided.

December 1 - Excursion to Butchart Gardens

Two bus loads of street family were bussed to Butchart Gardens for an evening of pre-Christmas enjoyment at this Victoria Iconic event.

December 19 and 20 - Flyer distribution at concerts

Board members distributed Dandelion Society flyers to entering audience members at a Fiddle concert. It was gratifying to note that well in excess of half the concert attendees were aware of the Society's activities.

December 22 - Turkey Dinner at Christchurch

Originally planned by AI for the tent city residents, Christ Church Cathedral jumped in, organized and executed a truly wonderful meal for the "family" in their beautiful Lady Chapel. The number of congregation members involved paid tribute to their commitment to this great cause. We are all very grateful to Christ Church!

December 25 - Midnight vigil on the Legislature Steps.

On December 24th at midnight, my street family and I gathered on the steps of the legislature buildings for a candlelight vigil, to remember those we've lost as well as everything that we've gained. As we stood in solidarity and silence, I had time to reflect on how deeply grateful I am for every gift that's been given during 2015.

Tent City - the circle

The real answers of Tent city will not be found in old ways of power and legislation. Real answers can be found in listening, respect of one another and respect of mother earth.

Our First Nations people offer us a way of seeking answers through the talking Stick; a new way for many of us, a way of listening, respect of mother earth and respect of our sisters and brothers.

There is another important teaching of the Talking Stick which is time. Time stands still. This is very difficult for many especially the powerful and bureaucracy to live out. Real solutions are not found in time lines but in respectful listening.

The circle and the Talking Stick are the listening, open ear and heart. The heartbeat of the tent city, its future and direction are only possible when all voices are heard and new collective, creative answers are found by all for all.

Because we've been called to tent city, we are a people of celebration, but in our celebrations there is always a note of sadness because not all the people in tent city can celebrate with us. Not everyone is rejoicing. Why you may ask? You see their past pain, suffering, and oppression: Yes their crucifixion, prevents them from joining our celebration. For many of them live in the Good Friday world, and Easter is not in sight. Many people are so lonely, so sick, and in so much pain. Yet, in tent city there is a celebration that rises up from the community. A celebration of thanksgiving. There is a note of pain but also a note of hope. We have been drawn together by God to be a sign of the resurrection and a sign of unity in this world. A world where there is so much division and pain.

Wishes for 2016 from Reverend Al

How do I begin to thank you all on this the first day of January 2016? Without you the Dandelion Society would not have been able to continue on its vital work downtown among the weak, vulnerable and sick that live on our streets. With no government funding and no foundation funding, I have to count on all of you. Once again this year you have responded with generosity. Thank you, one and all, thank you!

Some may ask what is the heartbeat of the Dandelion Society what is its ethos? It's pretty simple, pretty fundamental, really a building block of life itself: "PRESENCE". I would argue that change does not start within any society; change, begins within the individual themselves. I believe that that change is only possible when a person comes to realize that they are loved and accepted for who they are without condition.

Placing a sleeping bag on the young man in a doorway on Fort Street certainly was not the answer. When he awoke and saw that it was me, a smile came over his face and he said "God bless you"! Relationship became possible, a listening ear became available, and the ability for us to open a few doors for the young man that he could walk through, became a reality this year. He is now working full-time in a tire company in town.

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It's been a year of much growth and many milestones, thanks to the incredible generosity of people like you, throughout Greater Victoria. We've seen our total gift amounts double since last year! But just as importantly, this means that an awareness has been spread further and deeper throughout the city, with a better understanding of our street community sinking into our collective knowledge.

Early last year, we challenged you all to an Easter Match campaign and you more than rose to the occasion, spreading hope for renewal and rejuvenation. Thank you for contributing and exceeding our expectations!

During the Thanksgiving season, you supported us in making and distributing 100 turkey sandwiches. You also helped us as we partnered with Victoria's Christmas Backpack Project, an annual grassroots initiative to provide our street community with backpacks full of necessities on Christmas day. Over the course of the year, you helped by stuffing more than 140 backpacks that we handed out to men and women in need. You also provided us with the means to hand out a total of 32,500 cups of hot coffee and "piles" of warm socks and outerwear.

This year, we saw more than a few people housed for their first time in years. One of these people was Terry, whose apartment we were even able to renovate before he moved in, thanks to your support. Terry had been in and out of transitional housing for over two years. Although he finds it difficult to see so many people still struggling while he lives in a "palace", he is beyond thankful for everything he's been provided with, through your gifts.

Recently, some other men, who we housed together in a community living arrangement on Bay Street, invited my outreach workers and I to a Christmas dinner that they cooked themselves and were very proud to present to us! It was amazing to see their empowerment and this beautiful expression of their desire to give back.

I am truly heartened by each gift that was given and thankful for all of the ways we've been supported to use these gifts to create hope. Times are changing. Our team is changing too, with Geoff moving onto law school outside the city and Chris joining us as we continue to seek out opportunities to provide comfort, dignity and hope.

**Upcoming Meeting & day-long seminar:
Tuesday, March 8, 10am - Sands Funeral Home.**

Our Core Values



Relationships

Relationships keep our sense of belonging alive. All relationships require vulnerability and trust, so we meet with the street community where they are at, patiently and consistently developing our connection over time.



Acceptance

Everyone in our community is deserving of love and we all have inherent value, despite the most difficult circumstances. We work hard to combat the negative stereotypes that are too often experienced by our street family. We approach every day as a new, hopeful day.



Solidarity

We stand alongside those without supports and promote their rights when they need it most. Poverty is not just an issue of those experiencing it but of the whole community, and we work to address it at the street level.



Respect

We encourage the inherent talents and gifts in everyone we meet. Everyone has something to offer, and we approach every interaction with love and respect.