

SANCTUARY LONDON

GREAT THINGS GROWING

Join us at West Lions Park in London from 10am-Noon every Thursday from May-September. We'll be planting and caring for a 'Food Forest', playing games and laying in the sun!



Please remember that all of the people written about in this newsletter have either given their consent, or their names have been changed to protect their identity within our community.

SUMMER STAFF

Summer is an exciting time for us at Sanctuary London, with lots of opportunities to meet with our friends outside in the beautiful weather. And this year we are so excited to have two incredible young women join us on staff! We are truly thankful for the joy and energy that they bring to our community.



LeeAnne Bennett

I started my time with Sanctuary last September. As a high school co-op student, I was new to the community. Soon after joining the community, I met a person who shared some of their struggles with addiction. When I first met that person (we will call that person Chris), I was drawn to Chris's straightforward and open personality. And then Chris disappeared. No one knew where Chris had gone. After a few weeks, Chris contacted us from the hospital. And I began weekly meetings with Chris.

At our weekly meetings, we would discuss trauma, mental health issues, and addiction. Up to that point in my life, I had no exposure to anyone with addiction. Each meeting had its own ebb and flow but one thing kept coming up. In every meeting, Chris swayed between hope and hopelessness, and leaps forwards and stumbles backwards in progress. I would share that each new day offered the promise of the sun rising to new opportunity. And each sober day was a victory. Some days Chris welcomed this news. Other days, hope fell far away from Chris. I witnessed the addiction begging for Chris's attention and I saw many back and forth struggles that were both won and lost.

Each day, we all struggle with good and bad days. But, I have found that in community, with friends, with each other, it can become easier. Since I started at Sanctuary as a student, I still feel that I am learning and will continue to do so throughout the summer. There is much to be learned here. And in Chris, I am beyond grateful to be given the opportunity to continue to learn and become a friend. *L.B.*

SUMMER STAFF

Continued!

We strayed from the path and headed towards the river. We were in search of a man whom I wasn't familiar with yet but he is a friend to Sanctuary. I was eager to meet him. Darryl was unsure if he was still residing in this space. He explained to me that we can never be sure of the length of someone's stay, as often times people are forced to relocate.

With smiles on our faces we saw him sitting down with his legs outstretched looking at his foot. He had his sock and shoe off as he tried to relieve the damage frostbite had caused over the winter months. He smiled back and greeted us kindly into his space. Even though I was a stranger, intruding, I felt welcomed. An experience comparable to meeting a new friend in their home. The differences being the structure protecting him was made of cold concrete, coated with spray-painted art. The ground below him was dirt that was dark, jagged and weedy, sectioned off with layered blankets covering a small space he claimed as his own. The view surrounding his space was rather beautiful, with the river flowing before him and birds taking their natural course. The heaviness of vehicles crossing over was frightening to me. How could I not feel small under all of this busyness. We crouched down to secure an equal eye level with him, rather than sitting down on the bare ground. It seemed like his face dropped and transformed into fault and he instantly apologized. "I am so sorry for my lack of hospitality. Please sit down.", he said, tossing his own pillow into the dirt and nudging his

sleeping bag over towards us. He motioned for us to sit and be comfortable. We thanked him and conversations continued – as they would with an old friend. Humility washed over me, in awe of his kindness – sharing his only items of warmth and comfort. On this particular day I learned that straying from the familiar path is no longer what fears me. Rather my fear is remaining on that path. What will I miss if I stay and aimlessly follow this safe path? I would miss the honour of becoming familiar with new faces, to hear stories of people's harsh realities. I would miss the comfort of feeling welcomed and the opportunity to welcome others, the chance to build relationships, and ultimately... community. *L. V.*

Leanna VanWyk



TRAUMA *Gil Clelland*

When I try to approach Karen, she sees a predator.

When I don't respond to his texts fast enough, David assumes that I hate him.

When I disagree with Emily about the simplest of subjects, she begins to believe afresh that she is worthless and stupid.

When I banter playfully with Jim, he can hear his father demeaning him.

As many of you know, for many years I did not like the beach. A near drowning episode in the tumultuous undertow of Lake Huron when I was seventeen taught me all I needed to know about water. It was a traumatic one-time event that formed a present day response.

This is trauma in its simplest form. We experience a traumatic event and afterwards we avoid things that remind us of that event. I know many people that won't eat certain foods, or avoid some places, actions, or people - all because of one traumatic event.

What happens when that event repeats itself? For example, if I had gone to the beach several years in a row and every time, I ended up struggling in the water.

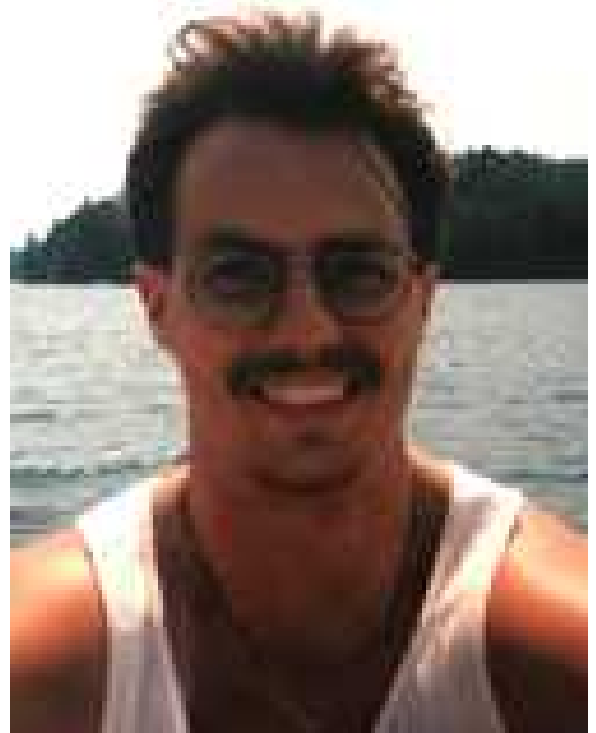
Soon, our minds begin to avoid not only things that remind us of the trauma, but things that remind us of the reminders of the trauma. If I had had multiple drownings, I may not only get traumatized by the beach but anytime I saw any body of water. But what happens when the trauma is not just in one form (drowning episodes) but multiple forms from multiple sources (sexual abuse, abandonment, and neglect by our most trusted relationships)? One's mind tries to protect itself by avoiding anything that reminds it of the unsafe times. One might withdraw. One might create alternative realities. One would definitely see the world quite differently than most others. And the triggers of those traumatic events may be too numerous to count.

We are just now beginning to learn how trauma informs present interactions, character, and beliefs. We have known for a while that challenging events/situations change people. But, we're expanding our understanding of trauma, triggers, and trying to find ways towards resilience. It feels like we have just started to scratch the surface. But in many ways, it has led to greater understanding. Karen sees in me a man - and is triggered to the many predatorily men that have traumatized her life. David did not hear "I love you" from any person of trust growing up (in any way of "hearing" that expression) and that abandonment has traumatized him to assume he is not loved. Emily's upbringing reminded her daily that she was worthless and stupid. And Jim's father used "humour" as he physically abused Jim as a child. My jokes trigger Jim to hear not me but his dad.

This is reality for many of the folks we know...and if we're honest, all of us to a certain extent. Trauma has shaped and formed our friends to respond in ways in which they feel they have little control. It is frightening and lonely - especially for the most traumatized. But most trauma research has concluded that it is in true community that the most traumatized can once again feel safe enough to deal with the past and sort out the triggers. But, as you may know, intimacy of a community is (ironically) a trigger for most folks that have been hurt. So, we grow and learn and love slowly. We forgive. And we hurt. It's not easy. It's often heart-breaking. But I am honoured by every little step. Last week, Karen approached me and felt safe enough to shake my hand for the first time in my life. After giving one of my female co-workers a hug, she looked back at me, "I can give you a handshake, not a hug yet though. One day. One day I might be able to trust...for now it's a handshake." G.C.

The Pain of Loss...

At Sanctuary, we understand the value and fragility of life, and sometimes we are reminded of this in extreme ways. Over the years we have lost many dear friends and the past few months were no different. Join us in grieving for the loss of two beautiful brothers, Bart Algra (on the right) and David Hayes (below)



...The Joy of Being Together

For this reason, it is so important for our community to take every opportunity available and make any excuse we can to celebrate life. Two weeks ago we threw a Country Line Dancing Party (photo below, left), just because! And this past Saturday we had an incredible time at the West Lions Food Forest for planting day and making Bee Hostels (photo below, right).

While life is hard and we never know how much longer we will have, it is worth celebrating... Together.



Ears to Hear *Darryl Reckman*

A few months ago, after a verbal argument at one of our drop-ins, two of our friends bumped into each other downtown and there was a major altercation.

That situation continues to present a challenge for us as they are both valued members of our community. We yearn for healing and reconciliation in their lives and for this community. And we believe this is only possible if we continue to welcome both parties into the same safe space.

Recently, on a Sunday, Gil was teaching from the book of 1st Corinthians, about Paul's charge to the Church to have "one speech" among us. In other words, Paul is trying to tell us that as a community of followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to work towards a unity in which we welcome all people, and the way we love one another becomes "one" wonderful "speech|" of the love of our Maker.

Throughout the service, one of the two gentlemen involved in the incident became obviously upset and irritated. He started blurting out vulgarities and mumbling under his breath. It was distracting and frustrating for many of our people. I got a few 'looks' from the community. What are you going to do? Aren't you going to ask him to shut up and stop interrupting?

The truth of this whole situation is that the grumblings of our friend were deeply prophetic and pierced me to the depths of my inner being. He wasn't just babbling. He was wrestling with the idea that we are called by God to be a welcoming community, but in his brain, the individual that he had fought with just couldn't fit. In so doing, he was speaking truth into my life.

As I looked around the room, there were people in our circle whom I had labeled as "can't fit". I don't fight or argue with these people, but I do dismiss them, and continue on in my own self-righteousness. I welcome them into our community, but I never let them get close.

So, I thank God for the prophets among us, whom He has sent to teach us about the humility of admitting our weaknesses and our struggles, and wrestling with the scriptures, rather than moving on and focusing on the passages that we follow well.

Lord give us ears to hear when you speak to us in ways and through people we would not expect. Forgive us when we fail to recognize Your voice. D.R.

HOW HE LOVES *Tessa Buckley*

I was sitting with my guitar with some of our folks after drop in. After playing a couple silly tunes and having fun, someone requested the song "How He Loves" and I couldn't help but roll my eyes a little. I've played this song what feels like thousands of times. But I obliged, and the circle of people began to sing.

They know this song so well they don't even need the sheet music.

I look around and realize how much these words mean to them. In the line "...when all of the sudden/I am unaware/of these afflictions eclipsed by glory..." I knew that every person in that circle faced some real afflictions, but the glory in the room that moment was even stronger and was reflecting on their very faces.

I'm sitting with those whom Jesus calls the Guests of Honour at his banquet, and these words, "How He loves us!" is their invitation. T.B.



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