

sanctuary london



FINDING HOME. TOGETHER.



A Place to Learn. A Place to Grow.

At Sanctuary, we desire to be a place of learning and growing. For this reason, both Gil and Darryl are both in school part-time (Gil pursuing a doctorate in Classics Studies at Western, and Darryl a Masters of Theological Studies at Tyndale Seminary). All new staff are required to research and attend all the other service providing organizations in the city of London related to poverty when they first join us. Every semester we have two nursing students from Western, and we regularly host placements for other university and college programs as well.

We want to learn, but we also want to share what we are learning with others. That is why a significant portion of our time is spent leading educational walks for groups of people who want to learn just the beginning of what it means for someone to be homeless. We also present at various speaking engagements, engage in poverty reduction conversations at many different levels, and host a Bible study every week after one of the Sanctuary drop-ins.

[We hope you enjoy reading through the rest of our newsletter a little bit more about what we are learning here at Sanctuary. As always, thanks for journeying with us!](#)

We also desire to get involved at the city level, advocating on behalf of our community. They say that of all levels of government, it is the municipal level that has the most profound impact on any individual's day to day life. Therefore, one way we are attempting to get involved is by hosting an evening at Sanctuary where we have invited all of the City of London mayoral candidates to join us for our Wednesday Family Style Meal, and after the meal, each candidate will be given an opportunity to share their vision for London that includes a response to poverty. Please join us! -D.R.

Wednesday October 10, 2018 @ 513 Talbot Street

2pm - Doors open for drop-in

5:30pm - Family Style Dinner served

6pm - Presentation on voting and 5 minutes/

candidate on their response to poverty

AFTER SPEECHES - informal meet, greet, and

questions with the candidates over coffee and dessert

To Feel Normal

BY TESSA BUCKLEY

Alvin is new to our community drop ins. Between interruptions from my own kids running around and playing, I sit across from him and lean in to listen as he quietly tells me; "I used to be close with my family, but when my addiction got really bad, they didn't know what to do or how to react. I can't see my two boys anymore, but they're incredible. They love me no matter what. I think they understand."

"My parents don't let me come visit", he continued. "They only write once in awhile. I think they are scared of me and what I could do, they've never been around a junkie before, they only know what they've seen on TV and ads about the terrible things people do when they're high, and they're afraid. I don't think I could ever hurt them, but sometimes when I am high I don't know what I am doing. But, God, I miss them all so much, and I miss going home, I can't get better being where I am now..."

He trails off as one of my sons come to talk to me. Once he runs off to play again, Alvin smiles sadly. "I really like this place. I feel like I can relax here and be safe. I can't believe you guys let kids come here around people like us. That's amazing, I feel normal."

Alvin's story is heavy and full of regret and sadness. I imagine how his family feels, I'm sure they love him and miss him too, and likely are not sure how to love him the way he needs. But I remember how I used to think about people who struggled with addiction before coming to Sanctuary. A lot of it was based on fear and pity, and a lack of education on the whole story of addiction in people's lives.

I am so thankful for the opportunity that I and my family have to become a part of this community and learn from Alvin and so many of our friends about the reality of addiction and the deep need for love and connection in all our lives. -T.B.





Saying "Yes" and "No"

BY GIL CLELLAND

I had just stepped outside for my morning run when the phone rang with Carl's name displayed on the screen. I knew Carl might be calling because he had just moved into a new apartment this week. It had been a long struggle to find and keep housing and Carl was nervous about how it was going to go. We spoke briefly and I found out why he called. His phone had fallen and the screen had cracked. Carl hinted once or twice that perhaps I could help him financially to replace the screen. I replied that I would not do that. Carl changed his tactics towards self deprecation. And I reinforced my friendship and love for him. We concluded the conversation and I continued my run.

I said no to helping my friend. Sounds almost cruel doesn't it? I have been accused of that by some people I know. If I was truly a friend, I would help where I was able. It is the most prevalent mindset of people who want to join our community as a volunteer. They believe they are called to help folks who have experienced poverty and oppression. And helping means giving stuff. But, after hanging out with some folks for nearly a dozen years, I am starting to learn some things. Let me share with you what I am learning along this journey:

When we help, we rob our friends the opportunity to solve the problem with their own resources and creativity. This may seem counterintuitive but follow me on this. By saying no, I am saying no to a professional relationship where I provide and my friend receives. This establishes an inherent power differential and co-dependent relationship. And that style of relationship robs me of the opportunity to be a true friend. It also declares that I believe that person cannot solve their own problems. I am their superman! They are not wise enough, creative enough, and resourced enough to help themselves. It keeps the poor oppressed. And that is dehumanizing for both of us. So, I say no. And the person may go somewhere else for help...or they may begin to understand their own capabilities.

Continued on page 5.

"Yes" and "No"

Continued from page 4.

When we help, we do so from our perspective of what is important and not the perspective of the one we are trying to help. We are declaring to that person that we have figured out life fully and they have not. And our way is the best (and maybe even the only) way. I have had too many conversations with folks who received the wrong kind of help. This help was imposed on them by someone with good intentions but who did not listen to the one they were trying to help. Maybe, just maybe, the person might know what is best for themselves.

So, what do we do if we are not helping people? Many people give up at this point and walk away, afraid they might cause more harm than good. Please do not do that. Instead, try this: we join them.

When we give up helping, we can begin to walk with a person. I will accompany anyone pretty much anywhere. Court, hospital, family visits, or just to get coffee. I will walk with folks. Listen to their stories. Hurt with them. Celebrate with them. And we move slowly towards friendship. All these things are not possible if our primary relationship is one of help and service to the other.

When we give up helping, the other can actually walk with us. This may seem obvious but if we abandon the helper relationship, we can enter a relationship of mutuality. We can walk with people who want to be there with us as much as we want to be there with them. This re-humanizes both of us. This is the goal! -G.C.





Just Listen BY BREEZEY ALLAN

I often focus on what our friends need from us. The key things we should be teaching in order to help them become better at making their way through life. Then at our Wednesday meal, I was taught something invaluable. To listen.

I spend a lot of time listening to problems, usually trying to jump ahead, guessing at the problems before they are done speaking, and then offer solutions. I would interrupt and cut off, anticipating their next words and wanting to sort out the best route to resolving the problem as quickly as possible. This week, I couldn't do that. When my friends were done talking, I'd look at them, and wait. Every time they had more to say. Sometimes, others at our table would jump in for advice and I would simply listen to what they have to add to the conversation. The advice and support being shown was amazing!

I found myself wondering if I have been unintentionally getting in the way of relationships being formed simply by opening my mouth too much.

We live in a world of do-ers. We see the value in getting things done. Moments when you aren't being productive are wasted. I often find myself caught up in this mentality. It's easy not to value the time spent just talking with someone and feeling heard. In an age where everyone is incredibly connected through various social media outlets, we've lost the ability to have genuine conversation. Most conversations nowadays have a reason, or a point. Something to accomplish. What if that accomplishment is simply letting someone know they aren't alone and deserve to be heard? One of the things I love about Sanctuary is that every time I start to get a little too comfortable and complacent, something unexpected happens to remind me of what's important. -B.A.



Much Left to Learn

BY DARRYL RECKMAN

Over the past few months, I have been pelted with phone calls and other conversations from people who are concerned... What is going on with downtown London???

There's no hiding or denying it: Homelessness is a rapidly growing problem. I'm sure you have noticed it too. Someone curled up in a worn out sleeping bag by a storefront just after dark on Richmond Street. Or a gentleman 'flying a sign' during rush hour at almost every major intersection. I've been spending time with people on the streets here in London for over ten years now, and for the first time ever, we are hearing reports that the shelters are all filled beyond capacity. Furthermore, in December of last year, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced that the apartment vacancy rates in London hit an all-time low... and those numbers have not improved since.

We have a problem here, and something has to be done. But how can we as concerned neighbours respond? What can we do? What would actually help?

Honestly? I wish I had some better answers for you. I am far from sure about what to do myself. Allow me to explain...

Throughout September there were a number of people camping out in a wooded park very close to our house. I visited with these people a couple of times. It was obvious that some of them struggled with addiction, but for the most part they were people who just couldn't find a safer place to stay because of the overcrowding in the shelters. They weren't trying to bother anyone, they were simply fighting to survive.

We have a FaceBook group for our community to help people stay connected, and hopefully increase the sense of neighbourly friendship, comradry and togetherness. Someone shared a post in this group about the people sleeping in the park and posed the question of what should be done about it? As you can imagine, the responses were wide and varied.

Continued on Page 8.

Much to Learn

Continued from Page 7.

Some people became very angry, demanding that the police be called immediately to evict them. Others became defensive of these people, offering all sorts of ways we could help and care for them.

As someone who has dedicated his life to caring for people in these situations, I felt obligated to respond. I tried to offer a bit of an explanation as to why people are struggling more and more, and that, as I've already stated above, these people intend no harm, but are simply trying to survive. I tried to be as gentle, loving, open, and non-confrontational as I could be.

I quickly received a few messages. Among them, someone mentioned that their house backs on to the park, and that they have kids, and they have found needles back there. Would I allow these people to live in my backyard? This was a hard question to hear. I don't let people sleep in my backyard. I've had people in our community ask if they could. I've even had friends try to sleep in our backyard without asking. And every time I have asked them to leave. Do I really have any right to comment on how others should respond to these situations?

Still I know that these people, all people, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. I don't believe at all that they have intentions of hurting or bothering anyone. If this is true, could we simply have an open and honest conversation with these people? Can we ask and learn directly from them why they are in this situation and how we can help appropriately?

Can we discuss with them and explain that we understand they need somewhere safe to stay, and we respect that, but that they also need to respect that we have children who play in these parks who deserve to be kept safe too? Are we advocating with these people to the city about the huge need for affordable housing?

Since then, the police have come to evict the people, and the city has come to clean everything that was left behind. Just yesterday, while walking home from work, I ran into Ryan. Ryan was one of the guys who was staying in our park. I was heartbroken to hear that he was now staying on the other side of the river, in a spot that he feels is less safe, less 'homey'. He said if things don't work out in this spot, he will probably try to go back to the shelter to find out if any space has opened up there. "If not, I really don't know what I am going to do for the winter" he said.

It's really easy for me to justify why I can't let people stay in my backyard, or even in my house. I know all of the reasons and the right things to say. But what if all those reasons don't really matter? What if the only thing that really matters is people? They are, after all, human, just like me.

What I am also realizing as I write this is that I really don't want anyone to come and give me easy answers to all of these questions that I have. What I really need is for people to just hurt with me, give me space to wrestle, and perhaps join me on this journey of learning together. And maybe I need to realize that the needs of our friends are really not that much different than mine. -D.R.



531 TALBOT STREET
LONDON, ON N6A 2S5
WWW.SANCTUARYLONDON.CA

