

FINDING HOME

Sanctuary London Newsletter

Sanctuary turns 8!

It's been 8 years since we had our first Monday lunch drop-in as Sanctuary. Four people showed up to that first drop-in. Since then, thousands of folks have come through a drop-in, service, or have been met on the street. We have built friendships with many folks who have experienced oppression. It has been a great starting point. Yet, in listening to our folks, we realize that our response is only the beginning.

What's next? Got ideas?

It seems to us that friendship is not enough. We're presently going through a process as a community to figure out what's next for us. What is clear is true friendship is bigger than a few weekly meals and hangout time. Systemic challenge, housing partnerships, medical advocacy, and growth in the arts are just some of the ideas being tossed around. If you like to participate in this process, send ideas to us at gil@sanctuarylondon.ca

Learning to feel, again.

"Numb. After so many years, that's how it feels. What started as self protection has become a lifestyle. I don't open up. I don't let anyone in. I don't celebrate. And I certainly don't mourn. To feel is to trust and I certainly don't trust."

For many folks we meet this is the sentiment if not their words. Trauma from childhood onward has taught a good number of people to stop trusting. And in the process, they stop feeling.

Something happens in relationship: we start to feel

Over coffee and time, we build something together. I share a bit. My friend shares a bit. Comfort grows. A sapling of trust sprouts up through the dusty ground of broken promises and abuse. And we both begin to feel a little bit more than before. Sometimes that's not pretty. Life seemed easier when we didn't have to hurt. And sometimes... We celebrate. We dance. We worship. We love.



Enjoy this newsletter as we explore what it means to trust and feel again.



Welcome Mechele!

Please join us in welcoming Mechele TeBrake to the staff of Sanctuary London. Mechele first heard about our work in London over 10 years ago. Gil was speaking at a week long youth service project and Mechele was a parent volunteer there! Soon after, Mechele helped start an arts drop in called "The Mess" for folks experiencing poverty in Kingston, ON. When Mechele and her family moved to Exeter so that her husband Kevin could begin his calling as the pastor of Exeter CRC, it wasn't long before Mechele was again working alongside our friends on the street, this time with a local service agency. She began volunteering at Sanctuary almost immediately and recently served on the board.

Mechele joins Sanctuary staff with a great heart for our people. She loves our methodology of putting friendship above all else and trying to walk with others in mutuality and respect. In the few short weeks that she has been with us, it has been a joy to watch Mechele go out of her way to welcome anyone new to our community! We are excited to have Mechele as part of our team!

The Consequences of Saying NO

Saying no to a friend in need doesn't feel good, even less so when you say it to someone with whom you are trying to build a friendship.

As we were cleaning up at the end of one of our community evenings together, Dorothy relentlessly came to me again and again, asking for just one more moment of my time to talk. Knowing Dorothy, I knew a moment usually turned into quite a lot longer. Partially frustrated, partially hesitant about hurting her feelings, I turned around and said "Dorothy, it is not going to happen right now. I am not going to talk with you. Tomorrow I will sit with you, and I will make sure I give you my full attention, and we will chat for as long as you need, but right now the answer is no." As I feared, Dorothy did not take this well and muttered something about my character and stormed off.

The next day however, I kept my word and we sat and chatted for as long as she needed. I started by saying I had missed seeing her and was looking forward to catching up. It



was actually one of the best conversations I've had with Dorothy yet.

I took the risk of saying no, even when it could hurt a friendship I valued. Dorothy, who has probably been brushed aside and refused countless times her whole life, realized that I was not going anywhere in the end. Both of us feared the dreaded 'no' as being a means to an end of relationship, a slammed door. And both of us later were able to communicate better and give each other the time each of us needed to be heard and respected.

This past year, I have had to take the risk of 'no' countless times. As someone who deeply values relationships, and fears disappointing or hurting others, saying no does not come easily. And there have been times that it did not end well. But in practicing this- as difficult as it is for me- I have also found a way to connect and go deeper in trusting others with the risk of 'no'.

TB.

Finding Spring in the midst of Winter

Why do I keep trying? Have you ever felt this way?

Life is exhausting. Sometimes I wish I could just turn it all off. The kids were up through the night again. Interruptions caused me to fall behind another week in my school work. Dishes, laundry and vacuuming are still left undone as I rush off to meet another one of our friends at the hospital. Years of building relationship with someone and they choose to retreat yet again. Another friend goes back to drug use. You love people like crazy, and mental health issues just continue. Benjamin's health was finally starting to improve, when a sudden accident took his life. So much brokenness.

And these are just some of the small things that touch my own life. When I begin to think about the bigger issues in the world, global warming, the destruction of ecosystems because of garbage, human trafficking, pipelines, and on and on and on, I simply get overwhelmed. It hurts. And sometimes I wonder if it would be better to just not feel. I already do this in my own way. I allow myself to be overly busy all the time, so that rather than being present in the moment, I am always thinking about the next thing that needs to get done.

This week at our worship service we read from the book of Isaiah about Isaiah's calling to preach the word of God "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate" (6:11). But as you may know, this is not the end of the story. God promises that a shoot will appear out of a stump, and God will make all things new in God's way and in God's time. I begin to remember some of the small things God is doing in our community.

At Benjamin's memorial service Lynn was sobbing profusely. She was the last person I expected to see crying as I have never once seen her show any sign of emotion before. She didn't even know Benjamin well. But it turns out she had never been to a funeral before, and a lifetime of grief was bursting forth.

Jim is beginning to be able to taste things again after quitting many years of drug use.

Kara is sharing her pain in community and relationship with others rather than isolating and destroying herself.

Brad is making mistakes and beginning to trust that he will be loved through those mistakes rather than dismissed or abandoned.

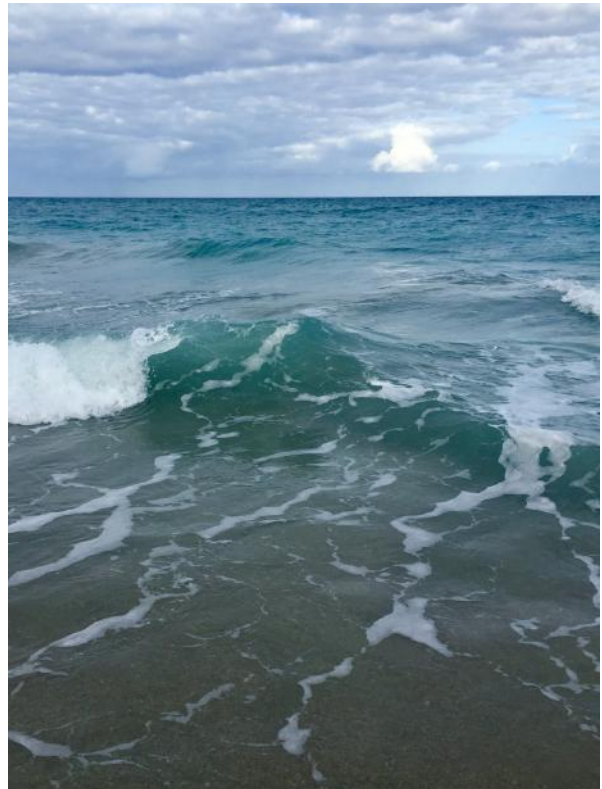


I am reminded of how small I am, and how big God is and how vast God's love for us. God is our refuge and strength, and that does not guarantee prosperity or that things will always go right. God's nearness is a reward in itself and is evidenced in the beauty of nature around us and the healing of being in community with one another. It is still winter, but spring is coming! DR

Waves of loneliness and love

Do you ever get that “look” from others after you say something? Maybe you were trying to be silly. Perhaps a serious moment. Maybe it was a declaration of your belief system. With that “look” you know that your words were not well received. And you feel alone. Like a single wave on the vast calm ocean. I feel like that a little too often. As a boy, it was even worse. I would sit in my bed at night in regret over my words, replaying my interactions, and hoping for a better outcome. At times, I sense that my self-confidence has increased since my childhood. Other times, after I receive that look, I don’t even want to talk anymore. I use humour to mask my pain and escape the situation. In reflection, I sometimes blame the others. Often I blame myself.

My heart races when I’m in a good conversation. When I can get past shallow topics and dive in deep to share my deepest and often darkest thoughts while attentively listening to a friend do the same, I believe there is nothing better in the human experience than that. Love washes over me like the coolness of a summer swim. I have run 50 miles, eaten some amazing food, climbed rock faces without ropes, experienced the warm salt water rush over me as I watch a barracuda follow a school of soon-to-be prey, seen the expanse of the universe in the stars, and smelled a dense forest that was thousands of years old. But it is that connection between two people that truly gives me life. Trust. Love. Connection. There is nothing better. The quiet peace of souls in the same room not even needing to communicate. So good! The joy of a kind word. The simple gift of “I love you.” The best. And it’s that knowledge that drives me to two different responses:



I keep trying to communicate with others. No matter how hard it is, how many looks I’ve received, how many times I’ve sensed rejection, I keep going. I know it’s worth it. And I know it’s better than anything else.

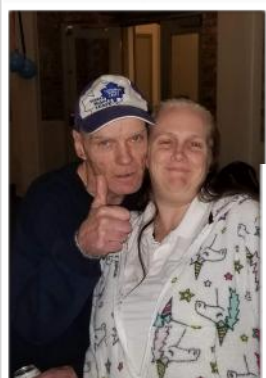
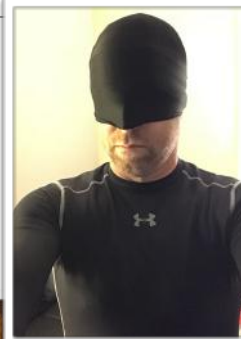
I want it for others. My friends at Sanctuary have experienced poverty, trauma, loss, oppression - since childhood for most of the folks I know. Trust and vulnerability are overruled by self-protection. Trauma teaches you that. But we keep trying even after pain-filled interactions. Love drives us.

It’s not easy. Every year at this time, I am reminded that Sammie died five years ago in early January from an overdose. She had been in and out of group homes, foster care, and prison throughout her short life. It was a life of great pain but had one true highlight. Greg was there for her during it all. For the five years since Sammie died, I had not seen Greg. He kept his distance from this community that reminded him of the life that he will never get back. A few weeks ago, after I was finished cooking a meal on a Wednesday, in walks Greg. “Can we talk?” For the next hour on that cold winter’s evening, we walked down by the river and spoke about those last few hours of Sammie’s life. Greg was there with Sammie. He never told anyone until now. He shared regret. Loss. Anger. And how he’s tried to move on since then. He asked me about my boys and was honestly happy to hear how they’ve grown since he last saw them. He told me about his job. His new life in a different part of the city and the parts of him that never really left this community. It was exhilarating. And I was honoured by the trust. Sometimes, love still wins. All the pain, trauma, and miscommunication sometimes get overruled. Sometimes. GC.

Sanctuary London Turns 8!

And we celebrated as our favourite heroes!

Over 100 of us gathered as we sang Karaoke, ate great food (including home made pretzels), and had a fun time celebrating together.



Good-bye to Breezey!

After two and half years on staff at Sanctuary, Breezey Allen has decided to move on to other things. Our community will miss her passion for others, her sense of welcome, her silliness (no one sports a unicorn onesie like B) and her amazing cooking that always reminded everyone of coming home! We always appreciated her humour, her love for God, and her straightforward approach with others. We wish Breezey all the best and pray for her in her next endeavours! Much love, my friend!

"At Sanctuary, we are becoming a healthy, welcoming community where people who are poor or excluded are particularly valued. This community is an expression of the good news embodied in Jesus Christ."

In some ways, 2018 was a challenging year. As the year was winding down, we lost two dear friends of the community - Bill and Benjamin. Both men taught me so much about life. In Bill, I saw a soul who kept trying in spite of some difficult circumstances. He kept wanting better. He passionately kept fighting. In the end, it was too much.

In Benjamin, I saw the impact of childhood trauma, a system gone awry, and years of neglect. But I also saw a man who persevered in spite of it all. He knew he was hard to deal with. He knew he was slow. He knew all his struggles. And he appreciated every kind word, every moment of time we offered, and every act of love. On the last night we saw Benjamin, he was the last one out of drop-in (like usual). When he finally got on all his layers of clothing and shuffled to the top of the ramp, I held the door for him. He shuffled past with one more apology for all he did wrong that evening. I stopped him and said, "Benjamin, we're in this together. I love you." He stopped and thought about the words, "I love you too." And he began to slowly walk away as he sang a song from a Broadway musical. He walked into the night. The next week, we heard of his tragic accident. Our community was at a loss.

In many ways, Benjamin represents us all. Slightly awkward. Tough childhood. A knowledge of all the trouble he was. And keeping going in spite of it all. He tried to love and understand God but the people who claimed "god" in his life were not always kind. He longed for community but more often than not, felt alone. Just like us all. Benjamin kept me honest. I couldn't hide my pain in front of that man. In his sharing of his troubles, he gave me permission to be broken too. I began to feel again. To trust again.

I am a better person today because I met Bill and Benjamin. And I miss my friends.

This community is not easy to join. Our friends carry the weight of broken systems, families, and some poor decisions. But they also carry with them perseverance, joy, much silliness, and a desire to matter to someone. If you want to be a part of a community like that, come join us. We have two drop in meals a week: Monday lunch (11-3 followed by a Bible study from 3-4), and Wednesday supper (2-9pm, and we eat at 5:30pm). Each week, we have a worship service at 5:30 on Sundays. Doors open at 4pm. All at 513 Talbot St. Come join us. Love deeper, trust more, and feel again.

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