



SANCTUARY LONDON

FINDING HOME NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2022

Sitting in Discomfort

by: Darryl Reckman



On the last week of January this year, my buddy Steve and I decided to attempt a winter camping trip. We found some Crown Land on Google Maps about an hour north of Parry Sound and decided to just go for it. After a few minor hiccups, including a tow truck pulling us out of a ditch, we set out at dusk with packs on our back and snowshoes on our feet. Ok, to be fair, we first set out without snowshoes, thinking they would be more cumbersome than helpful. After a few kilometers, we took our first few steps off of the beaten path and immediately plunged down to our hips. We quickly realized those cumbersome snowshoes were going to be absolutely critical. So, we dropped our packs, hiked back to the van, then back to that spot, and our journey finally truly began. With snowshoes on each of our steps only sunk to our upper calves in the freshly fallen snow.

We knew it would be a cold week-end, and we thought we were well prepared. That night, temperatures plunged to a bitter -35°C . Needless to say, we weren't quite prepared for the coldest night (literally) of the year. As long as we were moving, we were fine, but as soon as we stopped the trouble began. We brought three back-up lighters to ensure we would be able to start a fire... none of them worked. At least not until Steve warmed them up in his underwear for 20 minutes. We brought winter specific fuel canisters for our camp stove to ensure we would have hot meals to warm us up. They too were entirely useless until we warmed them up by the fire for a while.

Hunkering down for the night we filled water bottles with hot water to put inside each of our doubled up sleeping bags. Even with my coat and snow pants on, and my sleeping bags cinched up as tight as I could around my head, a deep breath would draw in frigidly cold air that hurt the skin around my lips and nose. Unsurprisingly, I didn't sleep that night, and we made the decision in the morning to forfeit our second night of the trip in favor of not being sick in bed for the rest of the week. As I laid there, constantly moving my hands and feet to try to stay warm, I couldn't stop my mind from wandering to specific people in our community who are stuck weathering the elements night in and night out. One of our friend's face is so leathery and worn from years of sleeping in the cold, he easily looks decades older than he really is. Others have lost fingers and toes. I don't know how they do it. I couldn't last two nights out there myself. One thing is for certain, these people, deprived of housing, are forced to become incredibly resilient in order to survive!

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...Discomfort (continued)

It struck me that I was out there with all my high-tech gear, choosing to sleep in the cold, for pleasure and adventure, while others are sleeping outside on cardboard because they have no other options available to them. What's more is that I had the option to head back home early, knowing that warmth was only a couple of hours hike away if I wanted it. For people deprived of housing there is often no end in sight. Their only focus is to survive one more night, one more hour, one more moment....

I'm not trying to suggest that I didn't have a great trip. In spite of the extreme cold, and cutting it short, I had an amazing time. I love adventure, and this was certainly a trip that will be remembered for a very long time. I am also not trying to suggest that we should not allow ourselves to enjoy the privilege of vacationing or other extravagances from time to time. I just think it is important for us to recognize them for what they are, and remember that others simply do not have the same options that we do. Lord willing, the humanizing act of sitting in the tension of these polarities will cause us to be full of gratitude and generosity towards others.

Just a few days after getting home from this trip, I was out shovelling snow at the end of our driveway when a gentleman was dragging a tent down the middle of the road. I watched as he slowly made his way down our block towards our house. Presumably, he was working his way up from the bank of the Thames River a few streets over, towards downtown. The tent was still set up, and was full of cardboard. First, he would push his bike past four or five driveways, set it down, then go back for his belongings, a garbage can and a duffle bag both overflowing with stuff, and drag them to his bike. Finally, he would go back and drag his tent over. He went on like this, back and forth, back and forth for what seemed an eternity.

I was reminded of my own experience sleeping outside in this weather, and I knew I couldn't just stand idly by. I was nervous, and unsure of how to approach the situation, but I told myself that my feelings don't matter, think about how this man must be feeling. Besides, I work for Sanctuary... this is precisely my job for crying out loud!

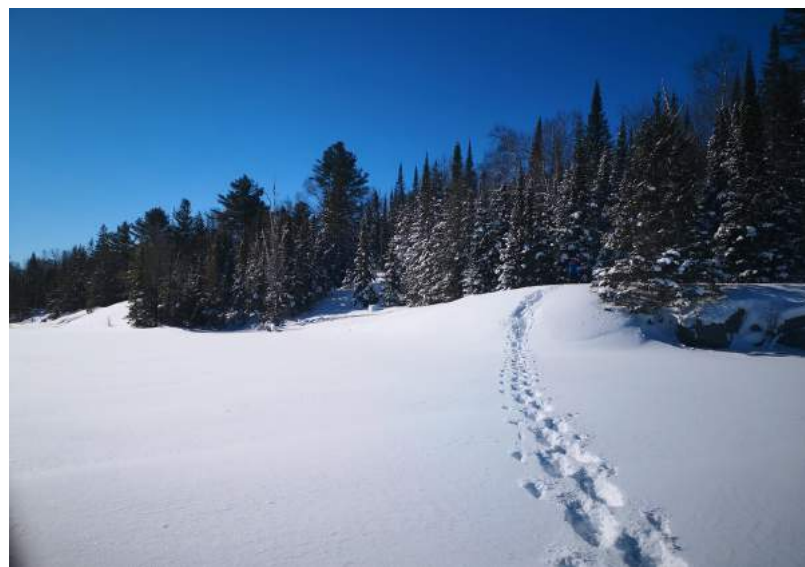
So, I went for it. I greeted the man, "Hi, how are you doing today?"

"Just great" he replied, obviously full of sarcasm. I immediately felt like an idiot. What was I thinking? He was obviously going through a hard time; how could I be so stupid? I stumbled over what to say next. I wanted to explain to him that I wasn't trying to make light of his situation, that I cared about him deeply, and that my intentions were good.

I managed to blurt out, "Is there anything I can do to help you? I've got a van and a trailer...?"

"I'm good" was all he said as he continued to drag his stuff right on past me. On his way back for the second load I asked if he had a safe place in mind to set up his stuff. His response was so mumbled, I couldn't even make it out, but he certainly wasn't slowing down to stop and chat with me. I eventually got the message and stopped imposing myself upon him. In another few moments he was well past me and working his way down Riverside Drive and across Wharnccliffe Road. I was left with my heart pumping and my mind racing. What could I have done better in that interaction?

A few weeks removed from this situation I've had some time to reflect upon it. What are we to do when someone denies our help? Shall we blame them? If this man is inherently beloved, and good, and dignified, as we all are, then how can I best honour his irrevocable humanity in the midst of a deeply dehumanizing situation? How can I best honour my own irrevocable humanity, situated as I am, on the other side of this deeply dehumanizing situation? I don't believe there are any easy answers to these questions. But I do believe that there is something healthy about sitting in the dissonance and discomfort of being rejected, and allowing the somber reality of my privilege and helplessness in this situation to sink in. *-D.R.*



COMMUNITY AND BELONGING - DOES IT MATTER?

By: Mechele TeBrake

There are times in the middle of the night when I can't sleep.

Thoughts float around in my head and things start to swirl. I wonder about things and ponder about big questions. A couple of questions that keep coming up for me at Sanctuary, especially as we journey through our visioning/strategic planning are, "What are we doing exactly?", "Does it make a difference or matter in the grand scheme of things?"

The last couple of years have been a challenge for all of us. Sanctuary has seen a lot of transition and we've had to quickly make adjustments many times. Often, Sanctuary has had to make adjustments that have left us feeling like we were providing a service for people over creating community with people. The needs in our community are great and ever increasing, so services are useful and needed for people. Sanctuary's core is and always has been a desire to create community and relationship while exploring what it means to find home. It has been a difficult tension to navigate with so many necessary restrictions and protocols to keeping our community safe. We have been challenged to take a long hard look at what the priorities are. Do we settle with providing needed services and be happy with that or do we continue to find meaningful ways to connect amidst the limited contact we have with each other?

As we wrestle in the tensions of the realities and limitations of how we grow together in community with all the ups and downs presented in our world, city, community, and personal lives, we consistently feel the strong pull that we belong to one another. We must continue to find ordinary, unique, mundane and wonderfully meaningful ways to foster belonging.

I have had the wonderful privilege of journeying on an advisory team for a combined study with Western and Queen's Universities called, "Transition from Homelessness to Housed". The study includes policy makers and people with lived experience. In short, the outcome, which was surprising to some on the team, is that individuals who have meaningful connections and a sense of belonging to community are more successful in remaining housed for the long term.



The study's findings are a particularly exciting outcome for the work that Sanctuary has been prioritizing from the beginning. Relationship, community, a sense of belonging, and finding home together actually is key to people moving from surviving to thriving. It may seem like such a simple concept but it takes huge amounts of energy and intentionality.

This week I overheard two people chatting over a coffee in our newly re-opened dining space. One person shared how they didn't really need the meal, that they were at Sanctuary to connect with other people because living alone is lonely and hard. The other person responded saying that they did need the meal, but they come early and stick around until close because they like visiting with others and enjoy the conversations.

The past twelve years, Sanctuary has intentionally set out to become a community that holds core values around being created as people who have inherent value, who are beloved, and people who belong to one another. We really do all need each other. We are creating an important and meaningful piece of community and connection. Continue to explore with us at Sanctuary as we take the next steps in finding home together.

-M.T.B.

Finding Our Way Forward Together

BY: DANIEL OUDSHOORN

One snowy and bitterly cold morning in January, 2022, the City of London announced in a meeting with local social service providers that their winter solution for homelessness was working. They mentioned that the trailer site they were funding at a remote golf course was at capacity and they felt that everything was well under control. What they did not mention was that the night before, people who were sleeping outside down by the river reported that bylaw officers evicted them from their tents, before a front-end loader flattened their sites, and all the belongings they could not carry were loaded into a waiting garbage truck and taken away to the dump. These are the kinds of contrasts, tensions, and contradictions that those of us on the frontline are forced to reckon with more and more. On the one hand, the city invests some funds into trying to address the fact that some people are forcibly deprived of shelter and housing. On the other hand, the funds invested are far too small, as even the best-intentioned workers and bureaucrats struggle to stretch a tiny band-aid over a wound that grows ever larger by the day. After all, as the City itself reported, in December, 2021, the service they provide for people experiencing housing crises experienced more repeat calls and more first-time callers than any other month on record.

Ongoing austerity has devastated local job markets, housing affordability, and the ability of services to provide meaningful, transformative care to people who are impoverished and oppressed. It's not simply that services have had cuts to funding and that people receiving social assistance are forced to try and make do with less and less every year, it's also that the number of people who need to access those services and receive assistance is increasing all the time. We can't keep doing the same things we did before. The need is too great. We're barely scratching the surface of it.

One of the reasons why this is the case is that, as a society, we have increasingly lost our sense of community-mindedness. We see ourselves as individuals required to grow our human capital and responsible for whatever successes or failures we experience. We have become fragmented from one another, public spaces have been gentrified and privatized, people who are already marginalized have found themselves deprived of spaces where they feel like they belong. The loss of a sense of belonging is what makes homelessness move from simply the state of being unhoused or unsheltered, to something more existential—something that you feel within your very soul. Therefore, if we are to begin to find a truly liberating way forward, it is essential that we recover a sense of mutual care as well as a sense of responsibility and accountability to and for all members of our community.

At Sanctuary London, we are thinking deeply about these things, we are talking about them with people who are sleeping outside, with community members who come for dinner every week, with other service providers, and with a broader network of people who want to dream impossible dreams and find new ways to move forward to a better future together. The shift from surviving to thriving can only be accomplished collectively, with the needs of the most oppressed and vulnerable members of our city being prioritized. At Sanctuary, we are dreaming about how we can help to make this happen. We are in a transition time and we are excited to see where it takes us. We are excited for ourselves to be part of something life-giving, but we are also extremely serious about this because we know that if things don't change, our friends will continue to die. We are planning our next steps and know that we can go where no roads have gone before. We will make the road by walking it together—with you and with others who are dedicated to caring deeply for their neighbours. -D.O.





A Time of Growth and Change

Here at Sanctuary London, we are going through a season of learning and growing. We have recently began a process of (re)visioning and strategic planning, and we are so excited to share with you that we have been working with Karen Fryday-Field from Meridian Edge Leadership and Governance Consulting.



Please stay tuned with us as we will be looking for ways to invite the greater Sanctuary community into this process with us. You are a part of this community, and we want to hear your voice!

Thank you so much for supporting the Sanctuary community. We are so excited to be on this journey with you, as we continue to seek towards Finding Home. Together. Much love from all of us!

