

FINDING HOME NEWSLETTER – WINTER 2023

SANCTUARY LONDON

A PLACE TO BELONG



We are so excited to share that in the Month of February we finally went back to using real dishes for the first time since March 2020. What a difference this makes in helping our community meals feel like home!

COMMUNITY UPDATE

We continue to host monthly Community Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month. These meetings are an important way for our core community members to have a voice, and to contribute to the shaping of our community. One of the things that has been discussed at length is our community's desire to eliminate disposable waste and return to using washable dishes. Can there be a greater way to create community than washing dishes together? I don't think so! After using plates the first week, one community member shared, **"It felt so special, and way more intimate using plates, rather than just having those containers shoved at you."**

Using real, ceramic dishes is only one of the ways we try to create and foster a sense of home, belonging, and belovedness at Sanctuary.

Our Community Celebrations are intrinsically important to who we are as a community. It's an opportunity to get together for no other reason than to celebrate the goodness of life. And with the way things are, we need every excuse to do that we can get! February 10th was no different. We celebrated our 12th Year Anniversary with a Hairband-themed Karaoke Party. We even had a surprise visit from Richard Simmons (Thanks Dean)!





We have noticed recently that even in the winter, a number of community members take off their shoes whenever they come into our space. When asked about this, one person replied, "**That's what I was expected to do when I had a home, so now thats what I do here.**" Another said, "**It just feels more like home that way!**"

"...when I come here... Somehow a little bit of hope begins to grow somewhere deep down inside..."

Growing Hope

There is a gentleman in our community who we have known for some time now, just from interactions downtown, but who only recently started coming around to our community meals and other events. He was a tough guy, always with a critical eye of the various services in London. He wouldn't hesitate to stir up a scene, and cause disruptions. This has happened during Community Meetings, causing challenges for some in attendance to be able to continue.

"Talk is cheap!" He would yell out. "Why are you wasting our time with all this talking BS? **Why don't you actually start doing something about people living on the streets.** Start building housing! Stop taking, and do *something!*"

These were really painful interactions, and they really dug at the core of who we wanted to be as a community. But just last week, after our Karaoke Party, he came up to me (Darryl) and shared:

"I know I often give you guys a hard time, and I don't fully understand it, but everywhere else I go in this city, I just see people dying inside, a little more everyday. But when I come here.... I don't know what it is..... but you're doing something right. People come here, and I can see it on their faces. Somehow a little bit of hope begins to grow somewhere deep down inside them."

LONELINESS, MADNESS, AND LOVE

At their root, all of our addictions, self-harming behaviors, neuroses, and mental illnesses arise, and then come to dominate us, when we feel as though we are completely alone in the experience of something unbearable, devastating, terrifying, or incomprehensibly horrible.

We tend to associate the feeling of loneliness with feeling unloved by others, but there is more to it than this. An essential component of loneliness is the repudiation of one's efforts or ability to love and, more specifically, of one's ability to still be capable of loving well in the midst of aftermath of the unbearable, devastating, terrifying, or incomprehensibly horrible. Loneliness cuts us to the core precisely because when we reach out to others to try and love them, we discover that our best efforts to love are treated as undesirable, inappropriate, grotesque, or repulsive. Loneliness, in other words, is not simply the product of the refusal of others to love us; it is simultaneously the product of their refusal to permit us to love them. Sigmund Freud comments on this: "The realization of impotence, of one's own inability to love... has an extremely debilitating effect on self-feeling."

We witness the outcome of this in the lives of people who are deprived of housing and classified as "non-compliant" because they "choose homelessness" and refuse the "help" offered to them. Apart from a good deal of practical reasons people have to refuse that so-called help—such places might be unsafe for the person, the person may have been treated in a violent and dehumanizing manner last time they stayed at one of those places, the person may not want to be separated from their life partner or animal companion, or whatever else—refusal to accept help at the level of basic needs (in terms of Maslow's Eurocentric, post-Enlightenment hierarchy of needs), can be a way of asserting one's basic human dignity. You want to help? Then, first and foremost, treat me like a person who is considered worthy of being loved by others and capable of loving others.

We can say that our core desires, the central demands we make of others, are not strictly about food and shelter and socks and gloves. They are about how we are or are not treated as members of a beloved community (to use Martin Luther King's term). And if someone wishes to think



they can be over and done with me and my needs simply by offering me some granola bars and a cot in a church basement, I might very well refuse that offer so that people recognize, hey, there's a lot more to me than my hunger and my exposure to the cold. I refuse the satisfaction of my basic needs to prevent the other person from thinking they have satisfied my core desires. **I refuse to accept their provision for my basic needs unless they first recognize not just that I am a person who deserves to be well-loved, but equally a person who is capable of loving well.** If that does not occur, then I am, indeed, being offered cruel charity by people in a comfortless world—a world I will then refuse to join.

And comfort, it should be added, is an essential part of loving well. Russ Leander, an art therapist working in the AIDS ward of a Chicago hospital during the AIDS epidemic, has this to say on the subject: "For me, the ultimate message, meaning gift, whatever of this epidemic is that there are many different ways to heal. If you can't heal or cure, then comfort. Truly care for people."

So, also, in our current epidemic of COVID, housing deprivation, austerity, and greed, there are many different ways to heal, or at least try to feel okay, in the midst of all of this. Going mad is one of those ways—especially when you are overwhelmed by loneliness (as Christopher Bollas says: "At the root of all character disorders there is mental pain... each disorder is an intelligent attempt to solve an existential problem"). **But if we, in the limited companionship we offer to one another, cannot heal or cure, then at least, in the midst of addictions, self-harming behaviours, neuroses, and madness, let us see whole persons for all they are, recognizing both the beauty and the pain, and be comforting.**

Dan Oudshoorn

FIND 'HOME' WITH US!

Ever since COVID, the needs in the City of London continue to increase, and our attendance continues to skyrocket. Every subsequent week in January was the busiest week we have ever had, with the last week seeing over 300 unique individuals receive a meal on Wednesday evening.

We continue to see deaths happening on the street at an alarming rate. In January we lost a beloved community member named Mary (pictured with Darryl, bottom right). She was an absolute delight to have around for 10+ years, and her absence keeps our community reeling.

And yet, we continue on, with the support of one another. We love seeing community members caring for one another, and caring for the community as a whole. This is by far the biggest thing we missed during COVID. Being able to invite our community members in to set-up, clean-up, and cook **WITH** us, rather than simply providing a service.

We're Hiring!

Sanctuary is looking to hire a Community Kitchen Coordinator. Much more than a cook, we are looking for someone with experience working with vulnerable populations, and the skills to turn our kitchen into a welcoming community space where all people are invited to participate.

We're also always looking for Community Outreach Workers, and Drop-In Staff.... And volunteers!

If you think you or someone you know might be a good fit, please connect with Darryl, or search "Sanctuary London" on Indeed.ca

Dave and Todd love helping in the Kitchen!



ON BEHALF OF OUR COMMUNITY: THANK YOU!



More than anything, we hope this brief community update helps you to feel a little more connected to all the goings-on at Sanctuary. We know that none of this would be possible without the support of our extended community members, like you! So thank you so much for being a part of this community.

We hope you will pop in for a visit soon!

Sanctuary London

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Please Stay Tuned...

We hope to share plans for a community fundraiser happening this spring with you over the next couple of weeks!

