



SUPPORTIVE HOUSING OF WATERLOO

March 2020 Newsletter

Supportive and affordable housing has been a long standing interest of ours, especially now that the need seems greater than ever with 1000's of names still on the waitlist. We see almost daily reports on the issue of housing and the seemingly limited options for local governments in working with developers; we are encouraged to see that building affordable housing on municipally-owned lands is an option that is being promoted. Still, the need for places such as SHOW continues.

We have been supporters of SHOW since it began as an interfaith concept which addressed the homelessness that the Out-of-the-Cold program was witnessing every week. I (Grant) have been the most directly involved with

SHOW, joining Deb Schlichter from Knox Presbyterian Church as a Knox representative during SHOW's early planning stages. I also edited, with Karen Gastmeier, the first newsletter and served on the Board of Directors. During a memorable June 2010 I, along with many others, made numerous car and trailer trips moving furniture to 362 Erb Street West. There was genuine excitement as we prepared the home for its first tenants. More recently, it was great to see Mike's Place open up, as well.



Femmy and Grant Birks

Now, ten years later, we are thankful that SHOW continues to be in good hands and we look forward to supporting the staff and Board as they move forward in future endeavours.

Femmy and Grant Birks

My Story

by Nick Hoffos



Nick Hoffos

In September 2001 I was trying to stop using drugs and alcohol for the first time after a lifetime of alcohol and drug abuse.

I was in my first of what would be several addiction treatment facilities. The next day I admitted to the counselors I had a plan to take my life. I spent thirteen days in the Grand River Hospital psychiatric ward. That was the start of a two-year journey that went deeper into despair than I ever dreamt possible. By that time, I was a regular crack cocaine user. I was injecting and sharing needles. I started selling anything I had to feed my addiction, plus I stopped paying my bills or showing up for work. Eventually, I lost my car, my house, my job, my friends, and family. I was a liar, a thief, and void of any trust-ability. When I sold my house there was very little of my possessions left and I would have been homeless. I went into a treatment facility. Something happened while I was waiting in that treatment facility.

After a few weeks in treatment hope started to creep back into my life. I began to deal with the depression I had hid from for all the years with drugs and alcohol. I began to admit I had grown up with sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. I became open to asking for help. I even found a spiritual faith I never imagined possible. I spent eight months in a long-term treatment home learning about myself and how to live free of drugs and alcohol. When I left the treatment home I rented an apartment. I got a job driving trucks throughout North America.

In 2012 everything changed again in my life. I had been dealing with a degenerating back problem that was making driving and walking more difficult. Stress and anxiety were starting to take an emotional toll on me as well. On the advice of several of my supports, I gave up driving trucks. Depression came quickly and again I ended up in the hospital psychiatric ward trying to find hope. My savings were gone quickly and I lost my apartment.

I began seeking counselling and started going back to school. I took Academic Upgrading at Conestoga College. By this time, I was living on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and living in shared accommodations students housing apartments. I got through over three years of academic upgrading and signed up to take a course at Conestoga College.

I had become a member of Highview Community Church in Kitchener and had been given the opportunity to be a part of a very special Christmas show the church put on. The “Let It Be Christmas” show tells the Christmas story through the music of the Beatles. The show was to raise money for Supportive Housing of Waterloo (SHOW) and Gael Gilbert would come and give a short talk about SHOW near the end of the performance. After a few years of doing the Christmas show I got to meet and get to know Gael. She heard about my situation and told me about a place SHOW was building for geared to income housing people like me that lived on fixed income.

I moved into Mike’s Place in March of 2019 and in October 2019 I graduated from Conestoga College (with honours) from the Human Services Foundations Program. Having my own apartment again has given me back some dignity. In February 2020 I will attend my convocation and Gael was the first person I thought of to attend. I still have issues with mental illness, but today I have the hope and joy of knowing I have a place I can call my apartment. A place where I can go and lay my head down at ease every night. I am very grateful for SHOW, and I pray for those that are still waiting for their hope to open the doors.



In the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair

Howard Thurman

A Special Thanks To Our Donors

All too often when we talk about homelessness, addictions, mental health challenges we can become immersed in the enormity of people's struggles to survive, but every once in a while those of us privileged to work in this community, witness triumph. Take Nick for example, life was not easy having been bullied, abused, beaten and forgotten, he knew that he would need to battle his demons, build a community, and catch up on his education. We are so enormously proud of Nick who, on Saturday February 29th, graduated from Conestoga College in Human Services.

It was you, our donors, who helped make this happen. When Nick first needed a home, he moved into SHOW and began his life again in a new apartment, with a support system, neighbours, staff and volunteers who helped him find the success he needed to continue with his schooling. When Mike's Place opened, Nick was invited to move there and is now happily ensconced in a beautiful apartment and well on his way to a life of stability and peace. To all of those who have supported SHOW and our tenants, we thank you for helping change lives.

You can count on my support for SHOW!

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