Oscars Place

Home! What does this word mean to you? I am writing this article to create thoughtful reflection for our community readership and explore the topic of homelessness.

Home to many is a place where you feel safe, secure, protected and provided for. It is a place filled with loving family members, children, youth, teenagers, adults, pets, belongings, fridges, tv’s and technology. A place where you can sleep, rest, cleanup and entertain. A place where you are supported and have that sense of belonging. A place you can relax and feel at ease.

Home for some, is a place of anger, violence, non-acceptance, punishment and alienation. Home for some is in the back alley, in the street, in the woods, rolled up in a blanket in a tent, outdoors in the harshest and ugliest climates, ranging from bitter cold to extreme wind, rain, heat. No running water, drinking water, or facilities to clean up and no flushing toilet. Things that I take for granted. Each day we witness the struggle of homelessness in our community. Human beings who struggle to find meals, supports, kindness, work, skills, and acknowledgement of their existence. Some of the homeless really do not have a home to go back to. There is no home. Home does not exist.

Oscars Place is one place in our community that has stepped up to assist the less fortunate, the homeless population. This organization works tirelessly to keep the shelter sustainable, reaching out to other organizations to provide services to help their clientele reach a goal of achieving self-reliance and possibly, one day, a home of their own.

A little background about Oscars Place to feed the conversation. The homeless shelter was run by The Pas Friendship Center for 10 years. In 2017 Manitoba Housing purchased the current building on Ross Avenue. The facility houses 26 cots with a 3” pad, (not beds) in a common room. These cots were provided through the generosity and kindness of The Pas Huskies. The Pas Huskies initiated a campaign Good Deeds Cup and won the national contest. $15,000 was donated to Oscar’s Place to allow of the purchase of the cots and the mattresses so that the homeless would not have to sleep on thin mats.

Many of the clients who utilize the shelter are vulnerable. Some have been subjected to poverty, substance abuse, trauma, mental health issues or just plain bad luck. Oscar’s Place provides emergency shelter for these individuals who are less fortunate. The clients cannot stay all day at the shelter. It operates from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. The staff prepare a before bed meal during the day in their commercial kitchen to serve at 9 p.m. In the morning they provide breakfast at 7 a.m. Sometimes breakfast is what was left over from supper, depending on the amount of donations received and the numbers being sheltered.

We know how terrified some of our community are with the current pandemic looming across the country. Imagine sleeping in a common room with others, who may have come in contact with the virus. I can imagine it but would not want to experience it.

Dave Brauer, interim board chair and longtime advocate for Oscars Place spoke to me about taking precautions himself to protect the clients and the staff. He personally bought a digital infrared thermometer to check the temperature of each person coming into and out of the shelter. Trying to keep everyone safe in desperate times. Doug has also initiated connections with The Pas Health Complex to refer individual who may be experiencing the symptoms of this virus.

Dave has formed solid trusting relationships with his clients as well as other organizations within the community. He has a strong bond with The Pas Friendship Center (TPFC), the Living Waters Soup Kitchen and the Northern Gateway Community Chaplaincy. Together they ensure that this vulnerable group of people have an opportunity for food, water, rest, laughter, and conversation. These are the critical most basic needs of all humans.

These organizations are putting their efforts further in programming for the homeless. They are working on expanding the board to ease the load on those currently involved. They have put forth initiatives to change the inside of the center to provide for confidential office space for their clientele to meet with external services who can help them move upward and forward. Things such as case workers and mental health workers. This has huge potential for more groups to get involved to align their working relationship to offer much needed supports.

Oscars Place is always looking for financial support to kick start some of their ideas for beautification of the outdoor and improving the indoor space at the shelter. Landscaping, seating, possibly a public day washroom. Creating a place for people to gather, rest, visit, and socialize and feel a part of the community. There is discussion around engaging the homeless clientele to find that sense of belonging through their direct involvement in creating and building some of the projects presented here. Similar to Habitat for Humanity, involving community and the people who are receiving the benefit. Art projects are not new to the Town of The Pas, but ideas have been building to inspire the artistic to partner with the schools, youth, and local business as well as the homeless community. There is an opportunity for incredible exchange of learning, empathy and connection while we work towards making shift happen. It starts with a dream and moves forward step by step with ideas and action.

The concept of creating purpose, building self-esteem and worthiness to contribute back to Oscars Place. Promoting opportunity and generating hope by employing those that buy in to short term, hourly, daily, weekly job bank. Job banks that are generated by businesses, community groups and individuals in our area. We already see some of the homeless clearing snow and doing work for local businesses. I think that there is room for expansion here.

The topic of homelessness is not going to be solved overnight. It is going to take the efforts of the entire community through collaboration, sharing of resources, spaces, and shifting thinking incrementally to make it happen.

This is how you can become involved and start to Make Shift Happen

Become a volunteer – as an individual, group, organization, business

* + Volunteer to work in Oscar’s Place commercial kitchen for an afternoon, once a month or quarterly or yearly. Every little bit helps
  + Donate groceries, your time, or a small financial contribution toward the shelter if you are able. If you can donate more, donate more.
  + As a classroom project, ask your class to come up with creative solutions towards eliminating homelessness. Teachers have incredible power to plant seeds as well as initiate partnerships with outside groups. Shops classes can Initiate partnerships with Oscars Place and their clients to assist with building projects. Helping hands!
  + As an individual, organization or business, tell us what you see working. Do you have ideas that you think will help Oscar’s Place? The world is full of solutions, we need to look harder.
  + Make a commitment to become involved in Oscars Place as a Board Member
  + Call Dave to see how your organization can connect to provide better services for this group of people if you work in education, mental health, substance abuse, health care, or just care.

Inclusiveness…. We are all in this together. Let’s create a better world for all of us to live in.

Make Shift Happen.