



## *Raven's Moon Resource Society*

is a charity with a distinct difference. The grassroots Abbotsford group works at the community level to trigger positive results that are unheard of within larger, more established organizations.

## *Just get it done: homeless people need housing*

Raven's Moon is the brainchild of Jeanette Dillabough and Sharon Forbes, two women with deep experience in the community sector, who had grown weary of the status quo approach of many mainstream organizations, which they viewed to be top-heavy, overpowered by funders' mandates, and low on impacts.

Without a business plan, an office, or a funding stream, the pair rolled up their sleeves to help those whom they had felt helpless to assist while working in the traditional social services sector: people who were already homeless or who were at the brink of homelessness.

These were the groups who were falling through the cracks in Abbotsford: those leaving correctional institutions with no community support, people with disabilities who had somehow lost family ties, and folks wishing to move away from active addiction.

The response of the dynamic founders was simple and immediate. Their first experiment launched in 2009, housing ten women who had been living on the street. This was pure no-barrier housing, providing many lessons learned. After this experience, the duo decided to



## *A true 'wrap around' approach at work*

Without funding or even a legal structure, the pair rented a home, and offered housing to the first group of five men. Funding for the rent came from the residents' social assistance housing stipend, with efficiencies gained by pooling these monies together. The first group formed a close bond, assisting each other, and taking pride in their new home.



At that time, working as unpaid volunteers, Sharon and Jeanette knew that in order for their new ‘people’ to build greater lives (from the start, they refused to view them as ‘clients’), more than a roof was needed. The pair built trust with their people by demonstrating that they were so much more than landlords,

accompanying them on medical appointments, addiction recovery support meetings, court hearings, grocery runs, and social outings.

### *Growth mode fed by need*

As word of the small project’s success grew, a non-profit society was formed to house the activity, a medical doctor was approached to support the residents (he now serves as Board President), and students flocked to the work as volunteers.

The University of the Fraser Valley continually provides practicum students from its Criminology and Social Work departments, reporting that Raven’s Moon by far provides the most hands-on, ‘real’ experience. The competition is fierce among students to earn a Raven’s Moon placement.



Now, Raven’s Moon operates ten houses, which run at full capacity. All homes are appointed with good quality furnishings and supplies, with basic cleaning and toiletries included in the cost of rent.

When the waiting list reaches a point at which another home should be added, another is rented. Landlords who own multiple houses are eager to rent more homes to Raven’s Moon, knowing that the properties are kept immaculate, and that the residents engage positively with their neighbours. Since operating in 2009, only one police call has been logged across all Raven’s Moon houses.

The homes are strategically located within walking distance of each other, enabling folks in each house to develop relationships with

those in other Raven's Moon houses. The annual Christmas dinner hosted by one of the houses has become legendary.

## *The results speak for themselves*

Still without a desk and core funding, Raven's Moon devotes all resources to generating real impacts and improving people's lives.



A snapshot of the people being currently housed reflects the stark fact that 42 of the 54 were homeless before being connected to Raven's Moon through parole officers and other correctional staff, social services agencies, word-of-mouth referrals, and exposure to the housing solution at community forums where Jeanette, Sharon, or volunteers appeared.

More than 40 of the 125 people touched by Raven's Moon this year were enjoying some form of employment by the end of the same year. This speaks to the fact that folks are moving up the developmental ladder, getting their basic needs met, and growing to greater self-actualization and positive community participation.



The average age of the 125 people supported this reporting year is 41 years (nearly three quarters are male), with 16 children also being supported during the reporting period. Nearly one-third have Aboriginal heritage, 117 people arrived with addiction challenges, 82 presented with mental health issues, and 90 have disabilities including brain injuries and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Ninety-nine of the 125 people have criminal pasts.

The vast majority of people leave a Raven's Moon house to 'move up', not back to the streets. They remain in contact with the Raven's Moon team, continuing to draw support from them. The relationship does not end when the people leave the houses.

There is no time limit for housing supports: people are encouraged to 'move up' when they are comfortable doing so. Of the 54 current tenants, 25 have been living in a Raven's Moon house for over a year. Eleven people have been housed with Raven's Moon for over three years.

## *Next steps, and how you can help*

Now a registered charity, Raven's Moon is in a position to receive cash donations, and provide tax-deductible receipts in return. 100% of these gifts flow to direct community impact.

A diverse Board of Directors supports Jeannette and Sharon, who now enjoy paid positions with the charity. The Board is composed of those with experience in medical, social services, financial, and corrections fields, plus industry.

Long-term goals of the organization include building an asset base through home ownership (versus renting the homes), and financial sustainability through the operation of a thrift store, which will also provide employment training to its people.

If you are impressed by the considerable positive impacts made by a small, responsive, and nimble organization, consider extending financial support by donating. Simply visit [www.ravensmoon.ca/donate.htm](http://www.ravensmoon.ca/donate.htm) and click on the orange 'Donate' button.

If you're unsure, connect with us to visit a Raven's Moon home. Visitors report that they have been forever changed by being hosted by those who were once Abbotsford's most vulnerable.



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