

# IMPACT

M2/W2 ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2020



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The buzzer sounds. A white minivan is parked at the side entrance. Ron sets down the lamp he's been fixing. It's a quintessential thrift store item: cool and kitschy, with three porcelain horse figures on its base. Outside Ron greets a woman unloading bags of clothing from the van. He takes three bags, places them inside on the sorting counter, and returns for more. Once empty, the van pulls away; Ron sees it off with a friendly wave.

At Hidden Treasures Thrift Store in Chilliwack, BC, names, dates, and messages are scrawled on the drywall around the side door. The various colours of ink and disparate penmanship resemble the inside cover of a high school yearbook. While the words weren't scribed by wide-eyed teenagers looking ahead to graduation, many of the messages are imbued with a similar spirit of hopefulness.

Often expressions of gratitude, the words were put there by staff, volunteers, and inmates like Ron, who is completing a work release term at Hidden Treasures.

"They all knew where I was coming from," Ron says, "but I didn't feel judged."

"I know some guys get out and they feel like they have 'convict' tattooed on their forehead. I just didn't feel that way. I instantly felt like I was part of the team here."

## Tools for the Trade

Whether it's fixing a lamp, staining a table, or moving furniture, Ron takes on projects with enthusiasm and skill.

"The good Lord has given me the



▲ Ron puts his sanding block to work at Hidden Treasures in Chilliwack

## Hidden Treasures: A Place to Share Skills & Prepare for the Road Ahead

hands and mechanical mind. One of the volunteers asked me, 'Where did you learn all this stuff?' I just pick it up. Show me how do something once or twice and I'll pick it up."

This past December, Hidden Treasures built a room to store and repair electronics. Ron offered to help with the wiring. Before his incarceration, he was an electrical apprentice. He gave the staff a list of supplies and took care of the rest.

"To me electrical is second nature," he says. "I think I got into it the first time I stuck a pair pliers into a socket when I was seven. I thought, 'I know what I'm doing when I'm older.'"

## Building a Relationship, One Visit at a Time

Later next month, when Ron completes his four month work release term, he'll be one step closer to day parole. Then, after a year and a half or two, he'll be eligible for full parole, and with that, a chance to live each day alongside his wife. Ron has been incarcerated for 28 years, and he's been with Rita for 25 of them.

They met at a church social in jail.

"She came in wearing jeans and a sweatshirt, no makeup," Ron says with a smile, "She wasn't trying to impress me—which impressed me. A friend of ours had a baby, maybe six months old,



and the baby needed feeding. So I said, 'Here, hold him.' And I started feeding the baby. It didn't faze her. I thought, 'Okay. This chick is cool.'"

Earlier in Ron's incarceration, their visits were limited. But now that he's on work release and staying at a halfway house, Rita usually sees him twice a week and often brings meals. When he returns to Mission Minimum at the end of April, he hopes to resume a schedule of weekly visits home, with a citizen escort. Like almost every relationship, Ron and Rita's isn't simple, but Ron's incarceration adds a significant wrinkle that most couples don't have to iron out.

"I respect her so much. She has stuck with me for so long, while I was inside," Ron says. "You miss everything. You don't have somebody to go to movies with, to go out for dinner with. You don't get to sleep next to your partner every night."

"When there's a lockdown," he continues, "she knows that something is wrong—maybe somebody's hurt or they find drugs at the institution—but she doesn't know if I'm okay. And for the time period of the lockdown, she has no idea."

### Preparing for What's Next

Ron has lots of plans for day parole: He's lined up a job building fabricated homes. He'd like to take Rita out for dinner, even though she's a "phenomenal cook." They both like second-hand stores, too, so he looks forward to stopping by Hidden Treasures.

"When I get day parole," Ron says, "We want to get involved with older

couples in steady relationships, people we can go out for dinner with, have something in common with."

"I want to have older guys around," he continues. "Guys in long-term relationships, so they understand, but they'll also call me when I'm wrong."

"You need those kind of people in your life. Compassionate yet honest. Pascal is that type of person. His words are always meaningful."

Ron and Pascal, an M2/W2 Volunteer Coordinator, have been meeting for almost 20 years. Pascal is Ron's mentor, and Ron recognizes his positive influence: "He's willing to listen and talk, and tell you when you're full of crap," Ron says. "If he thinks you're going down the wrong path, he's gonna tell you. It's what a lot of us need."

When Ron finishes his work release this April, and walks out the side door at Hidden Treasures, he might look up and read the message he wrote when he first arrived: "Glad to be part of the team!"

For Ron, the road ahead will have obstacles, yet when he talks about his future, his voice is hopeful and certain. His confidence, when held against the light of his thoughtful planning and bright demeanour, appears well placed. Perhaps it's been reinforced, in part, by the acceptance he's experienced at Hidden Treasures.

"It's a different experience when you do a work release, especially when you've been in a long time," he says. "It's that walk back and forth. You come to understand that you don't have 'convict' written on your forehead. You're treated


## ABOUT US

At M2/W2 Association, we run three programs, each designed to support and encourage people who are committed to change yet face the emotional, spiritual, and physical obstacles that often result from incarceration.

For over five decades, our **one-on-one mentorship program** has been equipping volunteers to go into prisons and mentor people behind bars.

At **Hidden Treasures Thrift Stores** in Abbotsford and Chilliwack, inmates on work release gain employment experience alongside store staff and volunteers from the community. The proceeds from selling quality used items help support our ministry.

The **No One Leaves Alone (NOLA)** program lifts up former inmates as they seek restoration and healing as free men and women. Each NOLA member works with a circle of volunteers and staff, who help that member find their place in the community and make the most of their second chance.

with love and respect here, and you're treated like everybody else." 



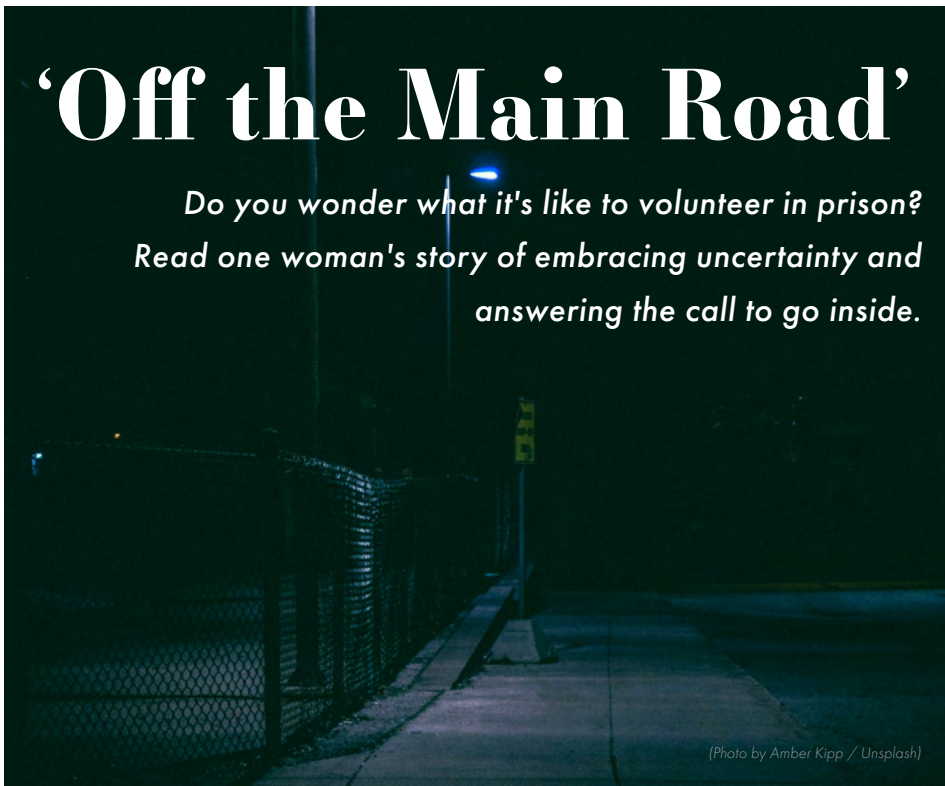
(Photo by northfolk-px / Unsplash)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- MAY 2** Volunteer Appreciation Event
- MAY 29–30** NOLA Training Session
- JUNE 25** Annual General Meeting
- OCTOBER 3** Annual Fundraising Gala

# 'Off the Main Road'

*Do you wonder what it's like to volunteer in prison?  
Read one woman's story of embracing uncertainty and  
answering the call to go inside.*



*(Photo by Amber Kipp / Unsplash)*

**B**ecoming a volunteer with M2/W2 had been on my heart for a long time. I first heard about the organization through a church I attended years ago, and when I was in school I studied mental wellness and learned a lot about the effects of loneliness. One professor, in particular, talked a lot about how people in prisons often struggle with mental health issues, and how those struggles can be exacerbated through isolation from the community. At the time I was living out of town, but when I returned to the Fraser Valley, I knew I wanted to get involved.

I took the M2/W2 and Correction Services Canada (CSC) training sessions. I filled out all the paperwork, and I spent time preparing, planning, and waiting for things to fall into place. Going into prison felt intimidating on its own and since I'm a quiet person, the idea of having a two-hour conversation with a stranger also made me nervous. I planned a few conversation topics and hoped we'd have something in common. In spite of this uncertainty, I felt so sure about my calling to volunteer.

Finally the day had come. I was going to the prison with the W2 group and I was going to meet my match for the first time.

About three hours before I left home, a feeling of total panic and unpreparedness came over me. I felt overwhelmed, like I had lost all confidence in following this calling. I tried reminding myself of all the training I had completed, and repeatedly said little prayers for peace and guidance. These prayers continued as I sat in the parking lot at the prison, trying to perfectly time being early, but not too early.

It was a cloudy and grey evening. Everything was lit up, but there was very little activity. Even though the institution is just off a main road, it felt like a totally different world. I watched other cars arrive, and women who looked like volunteers made their way to the prison gate. I said yet another prayer and got out of my car.

I had been to the prison twice before for training and fingerprinting, and I knew the gate had to be unlocked. On

an earlier visit, I had pushed the button beside it, assuming that's what I was supposed to do. The guard inside kindly told me it was not necessary and that they would unlock it from the inside. I remember feeling very out of place.


Trying to hide my anxiety, I followed the women in front of me. As I was being processed, little bits of the training came back to me. The other volunteers recognized me as someone new and began introducing themselves. Everyone was so welcoming and inclusive.

At this time Luminita, our volunteer coordinator, had arrived. She promised to walk me through the evening. We made our way from the processing area to the gym, where a few volunteers and their matches had already begun meeting. One thing struck me right away: I couldn't tell who was a volunteer and who was a match from the prison. I didn't realize the matches wore regular, everyday clothes.

In the gym, matches and volunteers sat across from one another, each pair had their own table. Some were drinking coffee, and stopping to say hi on their way to get refills. Others were deep in serious conversations. Still others were laughing together and playing Scrabble.

Everyone seemed to be themselves and appeared comfortable and relaxed. I realized my anxiety for the night was unfounded.

Luminita introduced me to my match and sat with us as we began getting to know each other. My match works at the on-site kennel, and she brought a dog with her for part of the evening. That energetic, friendly dog helped us break the ice, and we found ourselves in conversation. The two hours slipped away and soon we were saying our goodbyes.

I left with my confidence renewed and am looking forward to attending more W2 evenings in the future and growing my relationship with my match. 

# Each Step Forward Brings Encouragement



Through mentorship, accountability, and positive influence, the No One Leaves Alone (NOLA) program helps people on parole reintegrate into society. NOLA also works with inmates in prisons, helping them prepare for release. NOLA participants are known as dynamic members, which speaks to the challenges they face—and overcome—as they journey back to everyday life.

## River Baptism

In December, one of our dynamic members was baptized in the Chehalis River. He has been living successfully in the community for the past six months, and the day was a celebration of everything that God is doing in his life. Chaplain Phillip from Mountain Institution organized the event and baptized him. Afterward the group roasted marshmallows and enjoyed the campfire.

## Reconnecting Amid Trials

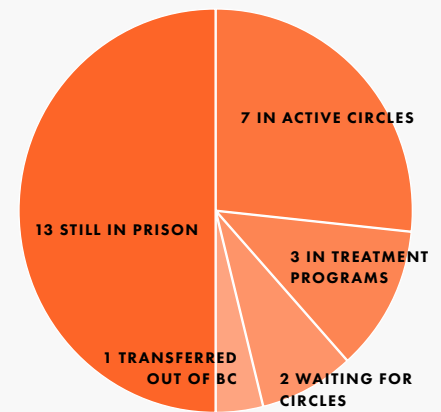
With the help of his NOLA circle, a dynamic member was able to get to

the hospital in the nick of time—He was experiencing acute renal failure. His NOLA circle visited him in the hospital and encouraged him greatly. During this ordeal he was able to speak to his son after 10 years of separation. This is an answer to prayer and a step toward reconciliation. God truly works all things for our good!

## Meeting Transportation Needs

God answered our prayers again when a van was donated to a dynamic member in need of transportation. Now he's able to get to and from work. We're also thankful that other dynamic members

## 26 ACTIVE NOLA MEMBERS



Since its inception, NOLA has had active contact with 40 inmates. As of March 2020, there are 26 members in the program, including two waiting for circles. The NOLA program is partially funded by Public Safety Canada and the generous donations of M2/W2 supporters.

Thank you!



Public Safety  
Canada

Sécurité publique  
Canada

can access resources and recreational activities with the help of volunteers in their NOLA circles.

## Thank You, Volunteers!

NOLA exists because volunteers give their time and hearts to help people successfully transition from prison. Our community is growing—one relationship, one step, one conversation at a time. Thank you to everyone who makes this possible.



## ON THE MOVE: HIDDEN TREASURES ABBOTSFORD

This past January, we sold the building that's been home to Hidden Treasures Abbotsford since it opened in 2000. After two decades at the corner of West Railway and George Ferguson Way in downtown Abbotsford, the store will move to a new site sometime in the near future. The search for a new location is already underway.

Hidden Treasures will continue to operate at its current location for three years or until a new site is secured. This means business and work release programs won't be interrupted during the transition, and we'll have time to find the best location possible, where the store can continue to grow and serve the community for many years to come.

