

IMPACT

M2/W2 ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER • SUMMER 2020



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20 Years of Hidden Treasures

From the bank meeting that kick-started an idea to the sale of the original building, this is the story of how Hidden Treasures became the best little thrift shop in town.

Downtown Abbotsford has changed a lot in 20 years. Its heritage buildings, once vacant, are now home to thriving small businesses. New condos have been constructed, and with so many businesses and homes in proximity, the neighbourhood has become one of the most walkable in the city. Along West Railway Street, though, one thing remains the same: Hidden Treasures Thrift Store is still the best little thrift shop in town.

who launched Hidden Treasures in 2000. They've volunteered in the store almost every Friday since. It's people like Jose Goedbloed, who shared her vision to create work experience opportunities for incarcerated men and women, and managed the store for 13 years. It's also people like Arnie Melissen, the ideas man, who saw Hidden Treasures as a way to bring stability to an organization near to his heart.



The early days



Wayne, Mayor George, Arnie & Anita

The Beginning

Hidden Treasures today has two locations with over 100 volunteers. Yet it started with an idea and a handful of volunteers. "I put a fleece down," said Arnie, who was a member of the M2/W2 Board of Directors at the time, and has been on and off for the last 30 years. "I said, 'God, if you want this thing to happen, I need five people.' And in Abbotsford, we had five people: Anita Kasdorf, Bev Adams, a couple from Maple Ridge who helped get it started and then I never saw again, and myself."

"Once you've got a core of dedicated people," Arnie continued, "the thing can build."

The idea for the store came to Arnie a few years earlier. It was summer, and he

and M2/W2 fundraiser John Friesen were at the bank to see if they could extend the organization's line of credit.

"We went prepared," Arnie said. "We showed the bank how we'd get the money back in the fall. The loans officer said, 'How did you get that line of credit? I should be cutting you back!'"

"There was no way he was going to give us money," Arnie said. "At that time the organization had been around for 35 or so years and had no assets, nothing. A broken-down computer, a typewriter, a couple of office chairs. That struck me. This organization has been around, but it doesn't have anything to back up what it's doing."

At the same time, Arnie was also volunteering with Bibles for Missions (BFM). He and his wife, Janet, helped start BFM's Maple Ridge thrift store, and

What makes Hidden Treasures so beloved among customers, volunteers, and staff? The people, of course, and the cause they support.

It's people like Dick and Corry VanReede, who, after being involved with M2/W2's in-prison mentorship program, joined the group of investors



he saw how a similar operation would benefit M2/W2. When it came to the building, however, Arnie took a different approach.



The old truck, ready for a dump run

"In Maple Ridge, BFM rented a store. We were not going to rent a store. We were going to buy something to start building an asset for M2/W2."

At an M2/W2 fundraiser, Arnie asked if anyone was interested in investing. "That's where Dick and Corry VanReede come in," he said. "Dick was my high school math teacher, and I flunked math, but he still liked me."

"We needed about \$350,000, and we ended up finding it," Arnie said. They bought the former dance studio on West Railway Street in November 1999. The store opened in the spring of 2000. They established a separate company to run the store at arm's length from M2/W2. The store would pay its expenses, pay down its loan, and then donate the rest to the organization.

The Heroes of Hidden Treasures

While the VanReedes started as investors, they became regular volunteers. Corry started helping at cash register on Fridays—and still does. Dick borrowed a truck and drove it to the recycling depot and dump, and later, to institutions to pick up people on work release.

Before getting involved with Hidden Treasures, Dick and Corry had both volunteered with M2/W2's in-prison

mentorship program. "I had always considered myself too busy," Dick said. "Then I was at home doing the dishes, and a voice in my heart said, 'What kind of an excuse do you have for not visiting prisoners?' I said, 'Go away, voice!' But it kept coming back."

When Dick realized that he was called to visit people in prison, and be a friend not an evangelist, he thought to himself, I can do that.

Over the years, the couple has made many good memories at Hidden Treasures.

"A young fella came into the store," said Corry. "He was on his way to a job interview, and was looking at suits and dress pants and nice shirts. He found what he wanted, it was actually very cute, but he didn't know how to tie a tie. So I called Dick, I said, 'Okay, Dick, tie this tie for this fella. He's on his way to an interview.' Dick tied his tie nicely and got him set up. He felt like a million dollars."

They also appreciated volunteering alongside people on work release. "The sign out front wasn't working," Dick said, "So I said to one of the guys, we should try to get the light working. We had to figure out how to open it, get the right kind of bulbs. He was very helpful. We wouldn't rest until it was working."

"One guy was in tears when he came here," said Corry, "and I asked him what the matter was. He said, 'It's one day a week we get treated like people.'"

One thing we've learned," Dick said, "is that most of the people who come to the store [on work release] don't cry the blues. They acknowledge they've transgressed, and most regret their actions."

"It's been a two-way street." Corry continued. "We've benefitted greatly from their friendship. And they from working at the store."

According to Corry, Hidden Treasures is a place that's "very simple, down to earth, with small moments that are fun, and you think, 'This is a good

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 incarcerated people.

At **Hidden Treasures Thrift Stores** in Abbotsford and Chilliwack, prisoners 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.

place and it is good to be here."

"The heroes of the story are the volunteers," Arnie said, "At the end of the day, it's nothing without the people on the ground."

A Community-Minded Store

After the store opened, Arnie and his wife departed for a two-year missions trip to Africa. By that time the volunteer base was growing. Among these volunteers was Jose Goedbloed, who would later

join the staff and manage the store when the original manager and bookkeeper, Kay Rempel, retired. Jose was manager from 2005 to 2018.

"Jose had a bigger vision than I did," said Arnie. "That was to include people on work release and make the store a ministry to prisoners."

"We were always short on guys," said Jose, describing where the idea started. "And there are a lot of heavy-duty jobs."



Dick & Corry, June 2020

By the end of 2000, Jose had completed her escort training and presented the idea before the warden's board at Mission Institution. "It was unique for them," she said. "It was a very good experience; we went from one person once a week to four guys three times a week."

In addition to providing work opportunities to incarcerated men and women, the store partnered with other socially minded non-profits in the city. "People from Abby House got involved," Jose said, "as well as Pacific Developmental Pathways and recovery houses. They could make a difference."

"That was a big part of the store," she said, "the change in the people who came to work and volunteer. From being shy in the back, not showing their faces, to coming out to help customers. Seeing that change was rewarding."

As the store's sphere of social impact expanded, Jose and the team worked hard to make the retail environment great. "Our aim was to be the best thrift store in Abby. We weeded out a lot of the junk that came in and sold only good stuff. We were the smallest store, but we focused on quality. And we were tidy."

"The store matured. We learned as we went along. We found a place."

What's Ahead?

The present building holds many great memories. Yet Hidden Treasures has outgrown it. "We've maximized the space," said Maggie Klassen, the current manager, "but we still have to turn down donations."

The building was sold in January, and now the team is looking for a new, larger spot.

According to Maggie, the ideal location would accommodate more retail and storage space, as well as a workshop for fixing furniture, repairing upholstery, sewing quilting squares, and mending clothes. "Right now, Corry takes the mending home," she said.

"The people from the institutions could help repair and restore furniture, and make planters and boxes from old pallets. They can apply the skills they already have or learn new ones for the future."

When Hidden Treasures finds its new location, it will no longer be the smallest thrift shop in Abbotsford. What will carry over? The community and inclusiveness of this one-of-a-kind social enterprise. As will the volunteers, staff, and customers who make this place so unique. 

Thank you, Dick and Corry VanReede, Arnie Melissen, Jose Goedbloed, Maggie Klassen, Kim Mitchell, Anne Thiessen, and everyone who shared a story. Due to considerations of length, we couldn't include them all.



Food Grant from United Way

We are pleased to announce a \$25,000 grant from the United Way of the Lower Mainland to provide food for local people in need. The funding comes through the United Way's Emergency Community Support Fund (ECSF), via Employment and Social Development Canada, and will be used to supply groceries to former prisoners living in the community.

"Even though the pandemic has limited the ways we can support people affected by incarceration, thanks to the generosity of the United Way and the government, we can provide food to those who might otherwise be struggling to access it," said Executive Director Raymond Robyn.

Starting the week of July 6, we will distribute gift cards or food parcels once every two weeks to about 100 people, including NOLA members and their families.

"Providing food is part of our community outreach," said Raymond. "This funding will help people build resilience and stability during a challenging, uncertain time."

The food security grant will run for six weeks, and after that, we plan to reapply and continue the program.

Moving Online in Challenging Times



While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges for NOLA dynamic members and our team, we have had many things to be thankful for over the past few months.

In early June, a dynamic member reached warrant expiry, which was the end of his sentence. He was the first NOLA member to hit this milestone, and we can't wait to see other dynamic members progress to warrant expiry.

We also moved our NOLA volunteer training online. Twenty-one people participated in the three one-hour sessions held on Tuesday evenings

between May 26 and June 9. That's a record attendance for NOLA training—praise God! We hope and pray that those who attended the training will continue along the road to become volunteers with NOLA.

One participant, Hilde Jones, said her favourite parts were when dynamic members joined the discussion. "They seemed so focused. They weren't afraid to share and collaborate with us."

She also gained some insights into the obstacles people face as they leave prisons. "They've just moved out

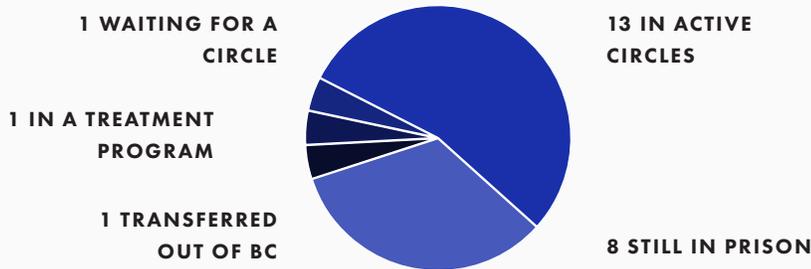
of their comfort zones into something completely new," she said. "They didn't have to look for jobs or find a place to live while they were in prison. They need trust from people. They don't need to be judged."

When she joins a circle, Hilde looks forward to learning from her dynamic member, and being there to listen and provide support. "I've got that capability," she said, "to be someone they can trust."

Right now, NOLA case managers aren't allowed inside the institutions. Volunteer visits remain suspended due to the pandemic. Thankfully, we are still able to contact some members over the phone. Now that social gathering restrictions have been eased, we can meet in person with all of our dynamic members in community. This is a blessing for everyone.

It has been a unique and challenging season. As a team, we've found resiliency and worked together in new depths. We continue to move forward and are excited to empower and support more dynamic members as our program continues to grow. 

24 ACTIVE NOLA MEMBERS



Since its inception, NOLA has had active contact with 40 inmates. As of July 2020, there are 24 members in the program, including one waiting for a circle. The NOLA program is partially funded by Public Safety Canada and the generous donations of M2/W2 supporters. Thank you!



UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 24, 2020 Annual General Meeting

We plan to hold our AGM as an in-person event. However, due to the pandemic, this may not be possible. We will continue to follow the recommendations of our health authorities and, if necessary, will move the AGM online.

OCTOBER 2020 Annual Gala

This year our gala will be online. Look for details in the coming weeks!