

# IMPACT

M2/W2 ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2022



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## Beyond the Basics: Finding Housing and Work After Incarceration

**S**topped by the grocery store recently? Filled up your car? You've probably noticed that everyday essentials are getting more and more expensive. It's not just food and fuel, either. From December 2021 to January 2022 rent in BC increased by 4.3 percent. Due to increased demand, fewer available spaces, and corporate property owners that maximize profits, this rate will continue to climb.

According to Statistics Canada, inflation is rising faster than it has in over 30 years, passing the 5 percent threshold for the first time since 1991.

For someone leaving prison on a fixed income, finding affordable, stable housing is next to impossible. Take Neil (not his real name), for example. He has been in the community for over a year, yet he is still living in less-than-ideal conditions, sharing a house with four others.

"I can't find an apartment," Neil said. "Those that are affordable have two- or three-year waiting lists. It's outta my reach."

A recent report by CMHC shows that Neil isn't alone. The report describes "an acute scarcity" of affordable rental options across Canada. In the Vancouver area, which influences the rental market in the Fraser Valley, only 1 in 1,000 rental units is affordable for renters who earn the lowest one-fifth of incomes.

Neil said that a better housing situation would add stability to his life and provide a foundation from which to grow. "I want to make gains, but I feel like I'm in limbo."

### 30-Year Gap on a Resume

Trying to keep up with skyrocketing rental costs, Neil is looking for part-time work to supplement his fixed income.

Like his apartment search, his job search has obstacles.

Neil participates in No One Leaves Alone (NOLA), an initiative that helps people reintegrate into the community after incarceration. Through NOLA, Neil can access as-needed support and one-on-one mentorship. Since his release last January, he's been meeting regularly with Elder Pascal Adam, who has been mentoring Neil for nine years.

"When you're inside a prison for over 30 years," Elder Pascal said, "what do you have to say on your resume? But Neil has a lot of skills. Both Glenn and I are helping him look for work, and I'd go right along with him to interviews and such, to let them know we're here to support him."

Elder Pascal and Glenn Burchart, Program Director at M2/W2, introduced Neil to a resume writer through Connective.



As he recovers from shoulder surgery, Neil can't commit to a job that's overly physical. He said he would like to train to become a security guard, and Elder Pascal and Glenn are working with him to access the necessary training.

Elder Pascal said, "Neil's no slouch. If he gets a job, he'll prove himself in two or three days."

Neil is open to a variety of jobs, too. "Don't matter what kind of work it is. Work is work," Neil said. He knows that finding a part-time job is a key part of improving his housing situation, and his life. "If you're working, people see you working, and then you have possibilities."



### Beyond the Basics

During Neil's first year out of prison, Elder Pascal walked with him as he learned to use technology, found a doctor, etc.

"I got the basics done," Neil said, "but the two things with barriers are the apartment and the job. It's outta my reach. No one wants to give you a chance. They want you to come out and be better in society, but they don't want to take a chance on you."

Elder Pascal tries to encourage Neil by reminding him of the ways he's helped others since his release.

One snowy morning in February, Neil witnessed a collision on the icy hill outside his house. He went out and helped the driver. He directed her to a safe spot to park while she waited for her husband.

"We believe in Neil," Glenn said. "We want to see him flourish in the community. NOLA is designed to help people find success in the areas they identify. For Neil, that's housing and employment, and we will continue to walk alongside him as he builds his life outside of prison."

*If you know of available accommodation or a part-time position that might be a fit for Neil, please contact Glenn at [glenn@m2w2.com](mailto:glenn@m2w2.com) or 604-859-3215.*

## Being a Prison Mentor Is Challenging and Rewarding

When Heather started as a prison mentor five years ago, she had some reservations. "I thought a women's prison must be the scariest place on earth. And if it's the scariest place for me, I can't imagine how hard it must be to actually be in prison."

After completing volunteer training with M2/W2, Heather toured Fraser Valley Institution (FVI) as part of her orientation with Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). She found her preconceptions of prison weren't necessarily true of FVI. "I was surprised by how safe I felt," she said. "There was more space than I realized."

Heather's early days of volunteering weren't without their challenges. "At first it was hard," she said. "After I met with my match, I got to leave. She was confined."

### Journeying with Others Through the Years

Since 2017 Heather has been matched with three different women at FVI. After her first match was released, Heather was paired with Holly (not her real name), who has also been released. Last year, when FVI re-opened briefly to volunteers, Heather began meeting with a third woman.

While Heather is just getting to know her new match, and has fond memories of her first match ("She is doing

UPCOMING EVENTS

**APRIL 24 - 30, 2022**  
Volunteer Appreciation Week

**SEPTEMBER 2022**  
Annual General Meeting

**OCTOBER 22, 2022**  
Annual Fundraiser

really well. Got a good job and a good guy... She seems to have solid support.") it's her relationship with Holly that stands out.

"I remember meeting Holly and walking away thinking this will never work. The only thing we have in common is that we are women, created by God."

With time, however, that all changed. "I became a mother figure in her life," Heather said. "She became a daughter figure to me."

***I love the simplicity of it...  
You just show up, be kind, and get  
to know somebody.***


Heather had one other thing in common with her matches: experience with substance use disorder. Heather, a recovering alcoholic, has been sober for 33 years. She walked with Holly as she began her journey to recovery. When Holly was at a treatment facility, Heather visited her and took her outside for a few hours at a time. They even attended church together.

"I'm thankful that she has faith," Heather said.

Holly is getting married this spring, and she invited Heather to the wedding. Heather is happy to see the progress in Holly's life. "She has a solid job. She owns her own vehicle. She attends AA," Heather said. "The first year on the outside was a struggle and we would talk a lot. Now that she's found some stability we chat or text about twice a month."

### **Why Volunteer?**

Most folks in prison have few people supporting them on the outside. Heather volunteers because it's a chance to build a consistent relationship with someone who might not have one. "I get to be a healthy, responsible person in their life, an outside support."

Heather also appreciates the straightforward process of being a prison mentor. "I love the simplicity of it—once you get through the background checks and paperwork, once you get your match, you just have to show up, be kind, and get to know somebody." 



To learn more about volunteering, visit [m2w2.com](https://m2w2.com). You'll find info on programs, training, and more.

**◀ SCAN THIS QR CODE FOR A VOLUNTEER APPLICATION.**



## **NOLA Now Offers a Spectrum of Support**

It's been a year since our Board of Directors voted to make No One Leaves Alone (NOLA) a pilot program. In that time, we've worked hard to improve NOLA and bring its community reintegration support to a broader group of participants.

One recent, notable change is that NOLA now offers one-on-one support along with the circle-based support it has provided in the past.


Currently, NOLA has 51 participants. Some meet with a circle of volunteers and M2/W2 staff; others meet with a single volunteer or staff member. Either way, NOLA participants can access practical support in five areas: housing, health, employment, education, and relationships.

Each participant identifies the areas they want to focus on, and their circle or mentor works with them to set goals, take action, and move forward.

"NOLA meets people where they are and empowers them to make good choices as they rebuild their lives," said Program Director Glenn Burchart. "While the model has evolved through the years, it has always promoted healthy community reintegration."

Initially a research project, NOLA launched in 2018, backed by three years of federal funding. The funding came to an end in March 2021, and the Board voted to continue NOLA as a pilot program. In the time since, with many prisons closed to volunteer programs, NOLA remained relevant, providing vital post-incarceration support to people in the community.

"Thanks to our excellent program staff and volunteers, as well as our generous donors, we know that NOLA will continue to grow and reach more people in the future," Glenn said.

NOLA is funded by the generosity of M2/W2 donors, the Province of British Columbia's Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant program, and the Envision Financial Community Endowment. Thank you! 




a responsible, productive member of the community. For Ian, completing a work release is an important step toward day parole. It's an opportunity to earn trust and interact with everyday people.

"It makes me feel part of something," he said.

Ian said that everyone at Hidden Treasures—from volunteers to staff to customers—has embraced him. "They know I'm from prison. For me it's come in, do the work, and let my work ethic speak for itself."

Ian, a certified chef, also works in the kitchen at CCCC five mornings a week. He said he likes to keep himself busy and has spent his incarceration working and learning as much as he can. In the past he has volunteered as a dog trainer, worked in the sewing shop, taught WHIMIS courses, and even volunteered at the Abbotsford Hidden Treasures store in the mid-2000s.

"I could sit here and say, 'Poor me.' Why? What's that going to get me? It's going to make me feel sorry for myself, 'Oh, I'm the victim here.' I'm not. I created a victim and I'm paying the price for it. But I'm learning so much along the way. This is my way of giving back."

Ian hopes he can volunteer at Hidden Treasures again once he is approved for day parole. "I'm grateful there are places like this. The people here are awesome, and they don't mind helping." 

## 'My Way of Giving Back': A Work Release at Hidden Treasures

Like many of us, Ian (not his real name) wants to make a difference. At Hidden Treasures Thrift Store, he's found that a friendly smile and a solid day's work can do just that.

Ian has been on work release since last November. He's staying at Chilliwack Community Correctional Centre (CCCC), a halfway house a few blocks from the store, where he's been volunteering three days a week. He sorts and tags items, organizes the storage area, and helps wherever he's needed. His favourite job, though, is accepting donations.

"I get to meet new people and interact with them," he said. "I greet 'em with a smile and say, 'Hey, how are you doing today?' That's enjoyable. It's a chance to make somebody's day, cause they're making mine, just by interacting with me. It makes me feel human."

Ian's road to Hidden Treasures was a winding one. He applied for work release in 2019, but the paperwork hit a snag and his application was delayed. By the time it was approved, work release programs were suspended because of the pandemic.

He remained at Mission Minimum, waiting for a chance to prove he can be



### LET'S END IMPRISONMENT, ONE PERSON AT A TIME

At M2/W2 Association, our vision is to end imprisonment, one person at a time. We pursue this vision by providing prison mentorship, community reintegration support, and opportunities for work experience. Learn more at [m2w2.com](https://m2w2.com)

### GIVE MONTHLY. INSPIRE CHANGE.

Help us equip volunteers and expand our reach! Your recurring gift will make an incredible impact for people like Neil, Holly, and Ian. Plus it's affordable, effective, and easy to set up. Thank you!

SCAN HERE TO START GIVING MONTHLY ►

