

# IMPACT

M2W2 NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2023



## IN THIS ISSUE

HIDDEN TREASURES UPDATE	2
UPCOMING EVENTS	2
BENEFITS OF SOFTWARE	3
A CHANCE TO WORK	3

## THE NOLA DIFFERENCE: PRACTICAL SUPPORT AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

**A**lexandra (not her real name) had come a long way. Her statutory release was on the horizon. She had recently transferred from Fraser Valley Institution for Women (FVI) to a halfway house to complete the final seven months of her sentence in the community.

She looked forward to freedom but, suffering from a broken foot and in need of eye surgery, she felt much uncertainty. She needed to find a job and a place to live. She didn't want to end up on the street or in a shelter.

"I knew that with my health issues I was going to have challenges finding employment," she said, "and where am I going to find housing?"

She saw a flyer for No One Leaves Alone (NOLA) and reached out.

### A LIFE-CHANGING PAIR OF SHOES

NOLA support is designed to meet needs on a case-by-case basis. Staff

and volunteers work with participants to support and encourage them in the areas they identify.

Allyson Johnson, a Program and Volunteer Leader at M2W2, met with Alexandra and asked, "How can we help?"

It started with practical support, specifically, a pair of shoes. After prison, Alexandra was rebuilding her life with nothing, so Allyson got her clothing, including a pair of shoes that allowed her to move comfortably while her foot healed.

"That pair of shoes changed my life," Alexandra said.

Next was transportation. After six months on a waiting list, Alexandra underwent eye surgery. Allyson and Luminita Dudas, also a Program Leader at M2W2, helped her get to and from follow-up appointments, which were a 45-minute drive from the halfway house.

The pair introduced Alexandra to a volunteer, Sandy, who became her primary NOLA supporter. "When we met, I knew it was going to work," Alexandra said. "We laugh a lot when we're together. She puts things in perspective for me."

The two meet regularly for coffee and when Sandy is out of town, she stays in touch via text message.

Of her NOLA team, Alexandra said, "They share my joy and helped me through difficult times."

### MOTIVATED TO FIND HOUSING

While at FVI, Alexandra began to make changes. She ended an abusive relationship and started thinking about the next chapter of her life.

"I've never felt like I belonged. I kind of wandered through life, led a very nomadic lifestyle," Alexandra said. "Somewhere along the line I had an epiphany. I thought, you know what?





## HIDDEN TREASURES ABBOTSFORD IS CLOSING ITS DOORS

**A**fter 23 years in downtown Abbotsford, Hidden Treasures is closing April 30, 2023. We thank the staff and volunteers who poured their hearts into the business and made the store a popular destination for thrifters from across the Fraser Valley and beyond.

In January 2020 we sold the building with the goal of moving to a larger site. As part of the deal, we remained in the building rent-free for three years. In January of this year, the three years concluded, and the deal closed. As a transition, we signed a 90-day lease that expires April 30, 2023.

For three years we have been looking for a new location. We formed a search committee and viewed potential properties. Despite these efforts, we could not find a suitable site.

We remain committed to finding a new location as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, we are thankful that our Chilliwack store is doing well. Our work experience program there is successful, and the store is at a stable location with room to grow. Also, exciting things are happening through our prison mentorship and NOLA community reintegration programs. In the coming months, we look forward to sharing more stories about how these programs have supported and encouraged people as they rebuild their lives.

Life is about more than this."

"The key is motivation," Allyson said. "From the word 'go,' Alexandra has been motivated and resourceful."

"I was truly afraid I was going to be homeless at the end of seven months," Alexandra said. "So I did everything I needed to do."

She filled out an application for housing through the Elizabeth Fry Society. As time went on her health started to improve. She stayed in touch with staff at Elizabeth Fry and followed through with her application.

In December, Alexandra was offered a studio apartment. It was good news, yet the space was available in January, and she couldn't move until March. After all her perseverance, she was still in limbo. She had found a home that was safe and affordable – but only after her sentence ended and pension kicked in. Still searching for a job, she wondered how she could hold the apartment until March.

Thankfully, M2W2 was able to help Alexandra with one month's rent. She moved into her new place at the end of March.

*They share my joy and helped me through difficult times.*

In addition to the rent subsidy, Alexandra recognized the emotional support and encouragement of her NOLA team: "If these women hadn't been there when things got challenging, I don't know if I would have followed through the way that I was able to. I am so grateful."

Meanwhile Alexandra continued to persevere. She got a part-time job at Woolwerx, a fibre studio in New Westminster, where she is learning to card wool and spin yarn.

## HEALING THROUGH PRACTICAL SUPPORT AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Alexandra sees NOLA as part of a healing process that began at FVI. Her NOLA team walked with her as she transitioned from prison to a halfway house to her own home.

"It's the relationship aspect of NOLA that makes it very, very different," Alexandra said. "For the first time in my entire life, I don't feel alone. I feel like I have a connection. I feel like I have an extended family. And I think that's what NOLA is all about."

### 2023 EVENTS

**APRIL 20: VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT**  
**MAY 27: NOLA & PRISON MENTOR TRAINING**  
**SEPTEMBER 21: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**OCTOBER 21: GALA FUNDRAISER**

# A CHANCE TO WORK AND BE ACCEPTED

*EXPERIENCING A WORK RELEASE TERM AT HIDDEN TREASURES*

**O**n a quiet February afternoon at Hidden Treasures Thrift Store in Chilliwack, BC, two men maneuver a dresser through the aisles. One of them is Mike (not his real name). He wears a black T-shirt and close-cropped, almost white hair. The pair moves the heavy-looking furniture with ease.

Mike has a background as a labourer, and likes to work. But the chance to work is only part of why he enjoys Hidden Treasures. He feels accepted here.

"Working at Hidden Treasures helped me realize there are people out there that care," he says. "That I am somebody."

## MEETING A MENTOR

Years ago, when Mike began attending M2W2 coffee nights, it was his first interaction with people from the community in a long while. He had been incarcerated for over a decade.

"It felt good to connect with people," he says. "I remember a lot of laughter."

After transferring to minimum-security prison (or "Camp Cupcake," as he calls it), Mike met Elder Pascal Adam, who walked with him "through the good times and the bad" and encouraged him to meet regularly with a mentor.

Pascal introduced Mike to Eric, and the two have been friends since. Before COVID, Eric would meet Mike for coffee, and together they'd attend Northview Community Church, where Mike is now a member. Recently they've stayed in contact through phone calls.

"We joke around and talk. We have some stuff in common, like we're both physical labourers," Mike says. The two men also share a faith and would read scripture and pray together. Eric baptized Mike in 2016, with Elder Pascal in attendance.



## HOW SOFTWARE HELPS M2W2 WORK EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY

**W**hen you're a non-profit, even a small one, it helps to stay organized. At M2W2, we use software to stay on top of day-to-day tasks, connect as a team, track the progress of program participants, and even plan and carry out wider objectives. When we created our strategic plan, we recognized the importance of systems and software, and set goals to ensure we are making the most of these tools.

One valuable tool is our case management software. Thanks to donors like First West Foundation and others, we have funds to run a database that helps program staff collaborate efficiently and effectively.

With busy caseloads and meetings throughout Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, our program team uses a secure database to manage cases in our No One Leaves Alone (NOLA) community reintegration program, from application to completion. Each Program Leader records their daily interactions with participants and keeps notes about volunteer involvement, areas of support (i.e., housing, health, employment, education, and relationships), and more.

Glenn Burchart, Program Director, described the value of this system, saying, "Our case management software helps us at every level, giving us quick snapshots of participant interactions and data that we can share with organizational stakeholders."

The software also maintains participant statistics and demographic information. This helps us ensure our programs are reaching those who need them, and that no one is left behind.

The purpose of NOLA is to walk with people after prison and help them successfully reintegrate into the community. As of March 2023, we have 97 active participants in NOLA. Thanks to our case management software, we can stay apprised of everyone's progress and use our time and resources where they are needed most.





(story from previous page)

## HELPING AT HIDDEN TREASURES

Mike volunteered at Hidden Treasures in Abbotsford while on Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) from late 2017 until 2020, when passes were suspended due to COVID.

"It got me back into working," he says of the ETAs, "working with people."

In January 2023, living at Chilliwack Community Correctional Centre (CCCC), Mike began a work release term at the Chilliwack store. He says his experience at Chilliwack has mirrored the one in Abbotsford: "Everybody was very welcoming. Everybody knows I'm from prison and nobody cares. It's been really positive."

For the first few weeks, Mike was escorted to the store, but now he is walking on his own. "For the first time in over 30 years, I walked down the street by myself. I said, 'Wow.'"

*Working at Hidden Treasures helped me realize there are people out there that care...*

He views his work release as a regular job, saying his time at Hidden Treasures has shown him he can function in the community. "It's given me a sense that I am somebody. I'm not just a criminal. It's a part of my past, but I've been accepted."

## 'WHO CAN YOU BE?'

Mike's experiences on work release and ETA at Hidden Treasures have helped him feel a sense of purpose, something he'd like share with others.

"At Hidden Treasures they ask, 'Who are you now?' and 'Who can you be?' They've shown me my potential."

When he completes his work release term, he hopes to do another. And after that, day parole. He says he'd like to volunteer with M2W2 and at Hidden Treasures in the future – to help with furniture and boxes, but also to help other people find acceptance and make changes in their lives.

He knows he can share his experience. "I'd tell them, 'There was a time when I had the max attitude. I was ready to throw down. I was doing dope and I didn't care, but I changed. You can change too.'"



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

At M2W2 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)

## DONATE TO M2W2. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Help us equip volunteers and expand our reach. Your gift will make an incredible impact!