Blaine Sparvie Works Hard
by Mariah Johnston

Wendy from Cool Aid’s Labour Pool would like to introduce you to Blaine Sparvie. For the past ten years, Blaine has been finding work using Cool Aid’s Labour Pool, earning income, learning new skills and building confidence.

continued on page 2...

Counsellors Help Clients Make Positive Choices
by Shellen McConnell

Sandra Wallace’s work days are anything but ordinary and are always fulfilling. A counsellor for the Victoria Cool Aid Society for the past two and a half years, Sandra opens her door to those who need her most and works to earn their respect and help them build a pathway to healing. Her room is warm and inviting; a safe haven for those who trust her to walk alongside them on a very personal journey.

“When people come in, they’ve already made a decision to change,” says Sandra. “It is a real act of courage.”

continued on page 2...

Support Services Last Year

1,200 people helped by Cool Aid’s REES drop-in services, and thousands at the Downtown Community Centre.

360 people got jobs through the Labour Pool at over 100 business and home sites.

114 residents benefit from the monthly Mustard Seed Food Hamper delivery organized by the Downtown Community Centre.

80 volunteers from 35 organizations were trained in mental health and addictions by REES Support Services and Umbrella Society.

In This Issue

Sandy Merriman Facelift . . . . 3
200 New Apartments . . . . . 4
Irene Haigh-Gidora retires . . . 5
Short Stories . . . . . . . . . 6
Homecoming Gala . . . . . . 6
Community Centre . . . . . . 7
Beverley Unger Unstoppable. . 8
Labour Pool  …continued from page 1

Blaine has been able to secure near full-time work through the Labour Pool, and jokingly stated that, “I am so busy now… maybe it’s time for a vacation!”

But joking aside, Blaine has worked hand-in-hand with Cool Aid to get off the streets and into safe housing, build a steady stream of employment, and find a community that cares and supports him.

Blaine has gained skills and experience that he would not have otherwise received had it not been for the work he has found through Cool Aid’s Labour Pool these last ten years.

When asked what he would say to those at Cool Aid who have helped him, he replied: “What would I say? Oh gosh – THANK YOU! Thank you for listening, thank you for helping, and thank you for just being there. Cool Aid has helped a lot – hundreds of people – not just me.”

To learn more about the Casual Labour Pool, or to book a worker for your business, garden or home, please call Wendy at 250-388-9296. CoolAid.org/labour

Counselling  …continued from page 1

Some of the issues clients of the Cool Aid Community Health Centre are working through include trauma, anxiety, depression, addiction, interpersonal relations and crisis situations. All are compounded by the fact that most are dealing with less than ideal housing conditions, making them much more vulnerable.

“I am in awe of our clients’ capacities to look after themselves and to persevere,” says Sandra.

Counselling is just one of the services offered at the Community Health Centre at 713 Johnson Street downtown. Sandra and her colleague Eric collaborate with physicians, nurses, nutritionists, dentists, pharmacists and alternative care providers to offer clients what they need, when they need it.

Sandra stresses that they just provide the tools, and it is the clients themselves who are putting in the effort to make positive changes happen in their lives. “To see someone go from shelters, addictions and working in the sex trade, to being employed and housed… that’s just so rewarding.”

CoolAid.org/health
Sandy Merriman Gets a Facelift
by Christine O'Brien

We have always loved our building, even when it meant we had to tape down sections of the floor so it didn’t trip people. Even when we had to prop windows open with wooden spoons or patiently wait for the lights to turn back on in the basement after they decided to turn off. We were charmed by “Sandy’s quirks.”

It was a surprise when we received word from BC Housing that we were to undergo an extensive renovation. It would mean we would have to let go of our taped floors and ad hoc kitchen implements for the windows. It would also mean we would have lights that didn’t have a mind of their own and would stay on unless we manually turned them off. Would we be able to embrace that sort of radical change? Yes!

We were fortunate to find temporary locations to run the shelter services, while work commenced on Sandy Merriman House.

We knew on paper what the vision for our house was: increased accessibility, increased storage, and increased safety in terms of upgrades to electrical. We hoped that despite all the changes, the soul of the house would remain intact. This house has a history, built by vulnerable women, of whom we are extremely proud. It was important to many that it still held traces of the past along with the improvements of the present.

When the renovations were over, we were thrilled to see that while there had been slight changes, Sandy Merriman House still looked the same – only now a cleaner, fresher version.

One of the major differences is the slight increase to the size of the kitchen, enabling more people to sit down together for meals. There was a chair lift installed to assist people with mobility issues to get upstairs. Bathroom floors are slip resistant making it safer, electrical and plumbing updated, and all of our windows can be opened or closed without the aid of a kitchen tool. But most importantly, the heart and soul of Sandy Merriman remain and can still be felt under the freshly painted, semi-gloss walls.

Having the renovations happen was a dream; and we thought things could not possibly get better. But when we were contacted by Red Door/Heritage Masonry asking us if they could do a landscaping project for free. Their goal is to make our front yard a show garden, a spot for people to find peace and joy. It will be a source of pride, not just for the people at Sandy Merriman but also for people living close by. Our yard will be a space that people will be proud to have in the neighbourhood. Lastly it will be a visual representation of the beauty, strength and fragility that is life.

The planners, Gavin Chamberlain and Logan Thomas, are actively raising the money and supplies needed to do this project. By the time you read this story, the yard may have already been transformed! It is heartwarming to know there are people who care about our space and about the people here as much as we do at Cool Aid.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

CoolAid.org/shelters
Over 200 New Apartments and Counting

by Alan Rycroft

Thanks to the generous support of our donors, and funding from the Provincial Government, municipalities and the CRD, Cool Aid is pleased to report tremendous progress towards housing 360 more people, as our most recent contribution to help end homelessness in Greater Victoria.

• 38 people are now housed and supported at Mount Edwards Court, 1002 Vancouver Street. A rezoning this year could allow 76 or more residents to be permanently housed in the heritage building.

• Early in 2017, 45 apartments will open at the new Cottage Grove in Saanich, for seniors who have been homeless.

• The Provincial Government has committed to fund a new building with 75 apartments on Queens Avenue in Victoria. Subject to a community consultation and a successful rezoning, construction will begin in 2017, with a mix of affordable and supportive housing.

• Cool Aid is preparing plans to redevelop our Cedar Grove property at 210 Gorge Road East, to accommodate an additional 39 tenants who need affordable and supportive housing.

• We continue to seek a suitable property to house the Dr. Joe Haegert Centre, with health services on site for the residents.

Along the way, we have been able to use your donations two times! That’s because we agreed to let the Province buy Cool Aid out of both the Cottage Grove property, into which we had invested about $1.4 million, and to take over our offer to purchase Mount Edwards Court and reimburse us for all expenses. In both cases, Cool Aid will provide support to the new residents and manage the properties, and will re-use the donations for our next apartment building.

The end result is that Cool Aid has $2.5 million available or pledged to our housing capital campaign, and over 200 apartments under or ready for development. These funds will allow us to continue to search for and purchase other properties suitable to house and support those in our community with no homes.
Irene Haigh-Gidora’s Community Health Centre
by Grey Showler, RN BA BSN

In the fall of 2015, Irene Haigh-Gidora, Director of Health and Support Services, called me into her office for a chat. Over my past ten years as a nurse at the Cool Aid Community Health Centre, I had sat in her office numerous times before, discussing the many and varied issues that crop up in the day-to-day running of the Clinic, which serves about 4,600 of Victoria’s most vulnerable residents. That chat was different though; Irene had decided to retire in the next year, and wondered if I might be interested in filling her position. The decision to leave front-line nursing was not an easy one for me — I love my work with clients, being there with them through rough times, sharing in their joy during the good times.

After some soul searching, I decided to accept the position. I did so because over the past decade I have witnessed the impact that Irene has had on the lives of clients, staff and Cool Aid as a whole. I have seen how her compassion, integrity and commitment to social justice and equity have guided Cool Aid’s Health and Support Services from modest beginnings, to its current status as a leader in providing low-barrier, quality health services to people living with chronic mental health issues, substance use disorders, chronic diseases, poverty, brain injuries and homelessness.

Irene came to Cool Aid in the early 2000s after a remarkable career in community health in Winnipeg where she oversaw the development of several successful community health centres which, to this day, provide care to that city’s residents. Irene brought her experience to Cool Aid and began developing health and support services for Victoria residents who were chronically underserved by existing health services that could not meet the needs of people living in poverty with histories of trauma, mental illness and substance use.

Starting with a few committed physicians, Irene and Dr. Chris Fraser secured funding for the Cool Aid Community Health Centre to develop its current integrated, primary health care team, consisting of physicians, nurses, pharmacy, nutritionist, counselling, psychiatry and acupuncture. Soon after, Irene oversaw the development of Cool Aid’s Dental Clinic, one of a few clinics in the province that provides dental care to those living in poverty who cannot afford to pay for care at other dental offices.

Irene was not done though – helping clients to achieve health requires more than nurses, doctors and dentists. Clients need support to access determinants of health like income assistance and disability benefits, housing and employment. That’s where Cool Aid’s REES (Resources, Education, Employment & Support) comes in – support services that help clients navigate the health and social assistance systems and to find housing through their client outreach support, to find employment through the Casual Labour Pool, and to build community capacity through the Community Volunteer Training Program.

Never one to rest on her laurels, in 2015 Irene oversaw the integration of the Cool Aid Downtown Community Centre into Health and Support Services. The Community

continued on page 6...
Homecoming Gala, Saturday, May 13, 2017

The Homecoming Gala is designed as a reception and mingling fundraiser with a variety of areas to explore and hang out at “Cool Aid House” under the big, see-through tent. Wander down the red carpet, grab a drink and nibbles in the kitchen, relax in the living room and enjoy the fresh air on the patio.

As well as stand-up spaces, plenty of seating and tables will be available for eating and relaxing with friends old and new. Heaters and see-through walls will be ready in case of any nippiness in the air. Enjoy:

- **Truffles catering** and a full beverage service
- **Live Music** by Eryn Sharpe Trio (jazz) and Vinyl Wave (cover tunes)
- **Beautiful harbour views** in our clear, heated BIG tent
- **Auction** items include LA Limo Brewery Tour, WestJet round trip anywhere, Port Hardy & Tofino Packages, and much more.

A special thanks to media sponsors: Times Colonist, CHEK News, Ocean 98.5 FM and Citified Media; and supporting sponsor Canpro Construction.

Cool Aid Benefits from RRSP Designation

Caite Meagher, one of the nurses at the Community Health Centre, recently surprised us when she told us she has designated Victoria Cool Aid Society as the beneficiary of her RRSPs. Interestingly, she had been inspired after taking Cool Aid training on handling hazardous materials, as well as witnessing excellent client care while out in the field at various Cool Aid apartment buildings. As she said, “I was so impressed with how Cool Aid cares about its staff and clients that I wanted to give back.” Although it was the first RRSP designation we were informed about, Cool Aid also received $50,000 in 2016 from another supporter’s RRSP, which is being used to build new housing.

Victoria Cool Aid Society can be a beneficiary of many investments including your RRSP, RRIF, TFSA, life insurance, RDSP and more, or by leaving a bequest in your will.

Irene Retires  ...continued from page 5

Centre offers a wide array of services including food security programming, free recreation and sports, daily drop in, emergency shelter, and serves as a meeting place for a number of local organizations like Narcotics Anonymous and Downtown Residents Association. Thanks in large part to the efforts of Irene and the dedicated Cool Aid team, Cool Aid clients and downtown residents are now able to access a robust array of low barrier, no-cost services that help the vulnerable to overcome significant challenges to achieve and maintain their health. Good luck in retirement, Irene! We will miss you.
Camaraderie at the Downtown Community Centre
by Shellene McConnell

“Nice try, pal.”
“Good effort there, buddy.”

On every Tuesday afternoon, a group of eager floor hockey players meet at Cool Aid’s Downtown Community Centre for a good dose of exercise, some healthy camaraderie, and a whole lot of friendly competition. The program has been running for over 12 years as a way to build friendships and to blow off some steam.

Bryan Morrey has been taking part since the beginning. “It’s excellent; I get to see my buddies. We all look forward to Tuesdays. Most of the guys are regulars, but anyone is welcome. It’s drop-in, open to all.”

Cool Aid supplies the venue, refreshments and most of the equipment. It’s a way for those who otherwise would not be able to afford it, to add some recreational activities to their lives.

“We can leave our aggression on the floor,” says Bryan. “It’s just a bunch of fun. These guys will go out of their way to make it here.”

Roxanne is there each week as well, cheering her husband on. “It’s great to see the guys all together. On top of the exercise, it gives them a chance to sit and talk.”

Roxanne is not the only regular guest. “Packer” the dog sits faithfully waiting for his owner in between games and lavishes in the attention from the other players.

When their hour is up, the sweaty, satisfied players congratulate one another, patting each other on the back as they help put equipment away. Drop-in hockey is just one of many healthy, free programs available at the Downtown Community Centre.

Community Centre Brings Food Security Home

In partnership with the Mustard Seed and the Food Share Network, the Downtown Community Centre is now arranging monthly food hamper delivery to the doors of 114 Cool Aid residents who need the nutritious food but are unable to visit the Mustard Seed. Additionally, this year a community garden is opening up on Pandora Avenue, just north of Quadra Street, which will provide an earthy and delicious opportunity for Downtown Community Centre participants.

Provincial Employees Are Charity Winners

Provincial employees, through their Community Services Fund, have been supporting Cool Aid and over 100 other local organizations, since 1965! For the past five years, the Provincial Employees Community Services Fund has stepped up to become one of the key partners of the Downtown Community Centre, which focuses on healthy living, health promotion and social diversity.

In November, following a nomination from Cool Aid, the Community Services Fund was awarded “Outstanding Philanthropic Service Club Award” by National Philanthropy Day. A well-deserved congratulations and thanks to the many caring public servants throughout Greater Victoria and PECSF staff!
The Unstoppable Beverly Unger
by Alan Rycroft

Beverly Unger had read about Cool Aid in the Times Colonist and wanted to learn more. She called up and asked some excellent questions and I invited her for a housing tour of Mount Edwards Court.

I learned that Beverly was deeply and personally impacted by the Great Depression (1930s). She was also inspired by the racial and economic diversity in Fall River, Massachusetts, where she grew up knowing that every person was important and worthy of dignity.

As a young woman, Beverly followed her heart and in 1947 completed a Masters in Social Work from Columbia University in New York City. Over the years, she held many positions in which she was able to make a difference, working in a child guidance centre and as a social worker in private practice of psychotherapy.

At a young age, she married her lifelong husband Robert Unger, a dentist – and went on to nurture four children, whom they “raised to be concerned about others”: artistic director Jane, Martha a podiatrist, Tom who worked with non-profits and later in public relations, and Sally, now a sitting judge in New York City.

Looking for change during the Vietnam War years, they moved from Westbury, Long Island to Salt Spring Island, where her husband set up a dental practice and Beverly her own psychotherapeutic practice. They lived on Salt Spring for 27 years before moving to Victoria.

While touring Cool Aid’s Community Health Centre, Beverly learned that most Cool Aid patients have experienced trauma in their lives and many live with mental health, addiction and/or head injuries, and other chronic conditions, making their ability to both find and maintain housing a challenge.

When she asked what was needed, Health Centre Manager Grey Showler shared a long-term dream of the Clinic to have an Outreach Worker, which government would not fund.

Today, Cool Aid has its first Health Outreach Worker thanks to Beverly. This new staff person provides supports to patients outside the Health Centre, such as accompaniment on external medical appointments, home care visits, assistance and advocacy in navigating housing, financial assistance and other health and social service systems, and more.

Why does she give? As Beverly says: “I’m not interested in leaving a bequest in my will. I want to see my money making a difference in the community today.” Beverly also supports Amnesty International, the Victoria Symphony’s children’s programs and Doctors Without Borders.

Thank you Beverly – for making a positive difference every day in Victoria and around the world.

CoolAid.org/health

Photo: Alan Rycroft

Beverly Unger at home