40 Years of Caring

A Brief History of the Victoria Cool Aid Society

by Helen Edwards, Edwards Heritage Consulting

Copyright © 2009, Victoria Cool Aid Society
The 1960s
Cool Aid formally began at a meeting on June 10, 1968 but its roots go farther back – to the Fall of 1965 when a group of students at Victoria High School, members of the Philosopher’s Club, later known as the Monday Club, wanted to operate a peace club. Denied permission to run the club through the school, they organized the Peace Action League as an outside group. In September 1966 the group was reorganized as the Victoria Youth Project of the Company of Young Canadians. One of the prominent members of the Philosophy Club was Charles Barber, later to become one of the co-founders of Cool Aid. 

Cool Aid's early days. Charles Barber on right. Lynn Curtis collection

In order to understand how the young people felt, it is important to consider the times in which they were growing up. The hippie subculture began in the United States in the early 1960s and spread around the world. Hippies renounced corporate nationalism and embraced aspects of Buddhism, Hinduism, and/or North American religious culture, and were at odds with traditional middle class Western values. Young people of the time felt strongly about Civil Rights and opposed the Vietnam War. Many Americans came to Canada to escape the military draft. All over the world, young people were travelling, usually with very little money. In Canada, Pierre Trudeau, favourite of the young, became Prime Minister at a groovy, swinging Liberal convention in 1968. The focus everywhere was on the young because they were so loud, so insolent, so numerous. Newspaper columnists laboured to explain “what the kids are saying.” Students manipulated television news whenever they seized public buildings or campuses. These people were visionaries that pushed for things that we now take for granted, things like women’s rights. 

The time was ripe for an organization like Cool Aid to be founded and to try to help.

The Victoria Youth Council (VYC) was organized with a list of things that needed to be done. The young people felt adults did not understand the problems of youth. They were a group with a sense that they were misunderstood by society and were planning to do something about it. Their goal was to get
somebody elected to City Council. They did better than that: Charles Barber eventually became an MLA. They also believed that everybody has the right to have their dreams met. VYC members helped the seniors at the Silver Threads centre, showing compassion for others. They also helped draft dodgers and deserters. Actually, they helped people do whatever it was they wanted to do. They even helped a young man enlist in the military, as that is what he wanted to do.

![Victoria Youth Council meeting.](image)

The group worked at organizing educational events of which music was a large part. Musicians have been involved with politics since the 1960s social movements, says music historian Alan Cross. “Back in the ‘60s, with the hippie movement and the whole peace and love thing, the Vietnam War was turned into a tremendous galvanizing experience for youth culture,” he says. In Victoria, music was always a part of the VYC scene according to Lynn Curtis. Beacon Hill Park was the site of “big happenings” on Sundays in the afternoon. There were many another groups that sponsored concerts on Sundays as well. The first Love-in in Beacon Hill Park was held on May 1, 1967 and was called “one of the strangest gatherings Victoria had seen since quiet Sunday afternoons in the park for the masses were done away with by the advent of the automobile.” By August, another Love-in was cancelled by acting Mayor Robert Baird. When a group of “sixty hippies invaded City Hall” to get him to change his mind, he said he had “no love to offer” because he thought their conduct was not socially acceptable. The “hippies” had used Centennial Square during the summer and Baird admitted they had broken no laws, so “it was impossible to have police whip them out of the square or firemen flush them out with hoses.”

The first meetings were held on Wark Street, then 1527 Amelia Street. In early August, the VYC began to meet every Sunday at UVic at 2 o’clock. Whoever showed up constituted the current membership of the VYC. All decisions were made by consensus with agenda items written on a blackboard. The meetings lasted until all the agenda items had been discussed and voted on. Items on which no action had been taken by the following week were discarded unless they were added to the current agenda. This
had the effect of focusing the efforts of the group and ensuring that their ideas and projects remained current.

Their first action was the renting of a thirteen-room house at 1054 McGregor Street where the Social Education Centre was founded. Based on the idea of the Free Universities of New York and Seattle, Rochdale College in Toronto and San Francisco, it offered courses such as politics, religion, and education. According to the Centre’s first calendar, “The centre was founded as an experiment in social communication, an alternative to a social pattern established by and in our present education system and an attempt to revise the present concepts of ‘teaching’ and to put these into practice.”

Also in the mid-1960s, the federal government was responding to the needs of youth with the establishment of the Company of Young Canadians with a mandate to encourage social, economic and community development in Canada. Promised in the Speech from the Throne on April 5, 1965 and formally established on June 10, 1966, the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), recruited young Canadians, trained them in “social animation” techniques and sent them out to work for a moderate salary on community programs across the country.

In March 1966, Stewart Goodings spoke to students at the University of Victoria and said The Company of Young Canadians would attempt to use new tactics for solving the old problems within Canada. He noted, “A pilot program with 250 volunteers will start this summer. This initial program would focus its attention on the Canadian Indian, downtown slums, adult education, school dropouts, and delinquency. In the field volunteers would receive living expense only. After serving two years, they would
receive an honorarium. Orientation periods before service in the field and evaluation periods during service would provide the volunteers with ideas and suggestions on the techniques of community development.”

One of the volunteers was Lynn Curtis, the son of a Vancouver elementary school principal, who had been a UVic student that year. After the initial training session in Nova Scotia at which he was elected the chairman of the group,\(^9\) he returned to Victoria to continue working on the development of a youth project in Victoria. According to the October 29, 1966 newsletter of the Victoria Project, the Social Education Centre was not yet an accepted project of the CYC although Lynn Curtis is listed as a CYC volunteer on its administration directory. He was also the author of the “Basic Plan for Organizing a Free School System for Victoria, B. C.” that outlined the concept of alternative schools that would help high school-aged students and adults develop classes outside the mainstream education system. The Social Education Centre also published an alternative magazine, The Winepress that was a “free and honest forum for young people who want to express their idea of what the real is all about. [They provided] an alternative to a society that does not permit in the conventional way this unconventional kind of honesty.”\(^11\)

The publication was under constant threat from adults who felt its material went beyond the borders of decency, but the editors were able to refute all charges. One radio broadcaster said: “Youth doesn’t have the experience or the understanding to take responsibility.” WinePress was a representation of its times in which youth felt alienated from mainstream society and felt powerless to make any meaningful changes. The Social Education Centre eventually self-destructed because it attempted to serve too many interests and too many different groups of youth, including some very destructive ones, using an approach that was too unstructured. By the end of November, it was gone. Cool Aid had a small office in James Bay on Niagara Street, just east of Menzies. That is where the WinePress had been started and was the headquarters of the Victoria Youth Council, conveniently close to Beacon Hill Park.\(^12\)

All work done by the Victoria Youth Council was under the banner of The Victoria Project. The group produced regular newsletters to update people on their activities, including benefit dances, “happenings” at Bastion Square, regular meetings of the Youth
Council, and plans for a Youth Centre. Meetings were also attended by supportive adults who gave the group credibility in dealing with government bodies. In early 1967 the group tried to establish a space for youth to meet in a downtown setting, but were frustrated by the public misconception that all their organizers were “involved in the use of marijuana and LSD.”

The group eventually secured space at 1408 Broad Street for a drop-in centre for youth in 1968. Organized by Alan Elford (19), son of the Mayor of Oak Bay, Frances Elford, and Jack and Pat Menard, it opened on May 2, 1968. There was a $2.00 membership fee, but it was not often paid, the centre had financial troubles and closed on November 30, 1968. At the time Charles Barber noted, “People had no pride in it.”

In October 1967, the Victoria Youth Council developed a “December Plan” to “give youth an effective and potent voice in their public affairs, to give them power to shape the quality and direction of their own lives, and to give them the resources they need to develop their full potential as free individuals.” It was a very ambitious idea, with the end goal of gaining public facilities for youth in Victoria and active participation of youth in all decision-making. Based on the concept of “youth helping youth,” the plan did have some positive impact on Victoria City Council as they were made aware of the struggles of young people in uncertain times and set the tone for later activities by the group. The first drop-in centre was on Quadra Street.

At the end of 1966, Lynn Curtis took a group of students to the Student Union for Peace Action conference in Waterloo, Ontario. They stayed at the University of Waterloo. On the train to the conference, they developed an idea of a youth power base, revolutionary yet positive. The work on the Victoria Project included protesting the War in Vietnam. They organized an international seminar on Vietnam, held on March 18-19, 1968 with speakers as diverse as university...
professors, ministers, American folk-singer Joan Baez. US Senator Henry Jackson and US SDS organizer Tom Hayden. According to the SUPA newsletter, “It was huge, it worked, it was successful, it was solvent, we sold 1000 pieces of literature and made many converts.”

During April and May 1968, members of the VYC had researched, analyzed and discussed the extent and quality of helping facilities available to youth in the Greater Victoria area. For housing, the picture was “dismal” with the Salvation Army housing only men, and the YMCA housing women but charging $2.50 - $3.50 per night. For counseling, the outlook was even worse. Thus was born the idea of a hostel and an emergency-oriented, crisis intervention service, run by youth. Starting these services under the name of Cool Aid in Victoria was one of the agenda items to be discussed at a weekly Victoria Youth Council meeting. Charles Barber was originally opposed as he felt it would not create social change but would divert the political grassroots youth organizing work and consume all the energy of the group. Eventually he agreed and a plan was made where adults would be asked to take transients into their homes on a case-by-case basis. The group contacted homeowners, rented a phone and obtained a phone number – 383-1951 (still the number for Cool Aid today).

John Warren, a welder, and Lynn Curtis went to Vancouver with adult supporter Hugh Wade where there already was a Cool Aid association and asked for permission to use the name. Lawyer Mike Harcourt gave permission for the Victoria group to use the name. Charles Barber and Greg Welsh went to test out the Vancouver hostel. Ironically, the Victoria group is the only one to succeed; the Vancouver Cool Aid disbanded many years ago. Mike Harcourt recently said that the group in Victoria had a sense of humour that he credits with its long term survival.

The group issued a flyer asking for help from the public (see to the right). It should be remembered that the temporary accommodation for transients was only one initiative of
the Victoria Project. In a July 24, 1968 assessment, they listed nine organizations created to carry out certain responsibilities:

1. **Victoria Youth Council**: This was the prime decision-making body of the Project and was then meeting every Sunday at 2:00 pm at 1817 Quadra Street.

2. **Broad Street Centre**: This was begun in January 1968 and opened its doors at 1408 Broad Street on May 2. This was considered one of the most important functions of the Project, as it was a most effective means of exchanging information, ideas, criticism, and life styles.

3. **Cool Aid**: Described as an operation designed to aid young people (mainly transients) who need help, makes arrangements for billeting with private homes.

4. **Youth Week Committee**: Plans for Youth Week August 18-25 from an office at 1164 Kings Road. One of the events was the Robert Baird Whip Memorial Festival, a reference to Alderman Baird’s comments in 1967.

5. **Friends of the Youth Council**: This is a supportive group of adults deeply committed to the goals of the Project and who meet together when asked to do so and who provide ideas information, money and contacts. They were also able to give the youth credibility in their quest for funding for projects. Some members of the group were deemed “outsiders” or “rebels” by the establishment, but the majority was considered to be upstanding citizens. The 1968 President was Architect Peter Cotton.

6. **Social Education Centre**: This was the Project’s publishing house.

7. **Thirty Pieces Productions**: Makes films, harnessing the creative expression of youth.

8. **Group Therapy**: This group meets every Wednesday night and brings together nine people from different components who try to work out their difficulties with each other. [It is noted that this group was led by social worker Gerry Webb and the number of participants varied a great deal from week to week. The actual
text of the report is left intact.]

9. Norman Bethune Club: This group organizes confrontation for changes around issues like Vietnam, civil rights.

---

Work planned for the future included:
2. A “Happening” at Carberry Gardens
3. A Marathon Group Therapy session lasting 20-24 hours
4. A Project Development Weekend with the topic “Where Do We Go from Here?”

Throughout the remainder of 1968, the VYC continued its efforts to help youth. As already noted, the Broad Street Centre was closed on November 30. They raised funds through events such as car washes and musical events that continued to play a large part in the operations. The group sponsored concerts and dances to raise funds for their operations and charities like Oxfam. Cool Aid was still run as a billeting service with constant calls for adults to open their homes. The phone was temporarily disconnected in October, but service was restored after adult supporters paid the bill. In addition to housing transients, the group also helped locate runaways and provided legal aid where it was needed. Another of the early members was Charles Ball who is remembered by Charles Barber as “an important and deeply helpful volunteer.”
of the Victoria Youth Council, Cool Aid, and the Company of Young Canadians was duly incorporated on December 5, 1968. On February 23, 1969, Cool Aid held a special meeting to deal with the “inevitable rush in Cool Aid business this spring.” They noted that they were very short of housing and were thinking of applying for provincial funding to help meet their goals.

In early 1969, the new PCSDS made application for funding at the inter-municipal level. A grant of $3,060 was approved at the inter-municipal level but City of Victoria Alderman Robert Baird voted against the City of Victoria share, and the request was referred back to the Finance Committee. On April 17, 1969, he was the sole member of the committee to vote against the City paying its share of the grant. He claimed “we shall be the laughing-stock of the nation, if we associate with them.” Other committee members did not agree. Support also came from Garth Homer, executive secretary of the Greater Victoria Community Welfare Council who noted the proposed program was “worth a try.” Alderman Ove Witt, chair of the City’s Youth Committee, added: “I don’t give a damn what anyone says – these kids are doing a great job, and they do it in a way no other agency could hope to do it. They have proven themselves worthwhile, and any tax dollars given to Cool Aid couldn’t serve a better purpose. There is no red tape like you find it in official welfare agencies; Cool Aid knows what the kids want and I think they are very idealistic to have taken abuse in the past two years.”

On May 1, 1969, Cool Aid opened their first hostel at 953 Balmoral Road. This meant they could continue the work started in their first year with the billeting in which they had provided 854 units of housing, counselling for 121 kids, and 29 found jobs (of part-time and limited duration). By the end of 1969, the new hostel had housed 2,107, served 3,196 meals, and counselled 444 kids – a remarkable increase in only one year. When Cool Aid started on Balmoral Road, they felt the police would raid the place. It was Hugh Wade’s idea to have a
front door key made and delivered to the Police Chief. They said the police could visit at any time but shouldn’t kick down the door, as Cool Aid couldn’t afford to pay for the repairs. They always sent flower to the Police Chief on Monday.26

In November 1969, federal senators toured the Vancouver Cool Aid operations. In contrast to Victoria’s one property at that time, Vancouver owned two buildings and served about 1,600 teen-agers every month. Vancouver Cool Aid had also been given municipal funding in 1969.27

At the end of 1969, the Greater Victoria Inter-municipal Committee received a report on the activities of Cool Aid. Dr. R. J. Flanagan said that the probe was “one of the most interesting and enjoyable pieces of work in which I have ever been involved.” Committee members Miss Helen Ruckle and Mrs. Genevieve Ali spoke highly of the work of the fledgling association. They urged the 1970 committee to continue to financially support the work of Cool Aid. Speaking of traditional service delivery agents, Dr. Flanagan said, “These institutions are handicapped by their high degree of organization and red tape. Cool Aid’s strength lies in being unstructured and its willingness to try to cope with any, and I do mean any, problem presented.” Mayor Hugh Stephen added: “If there was not an organization such as Cool Aid... there would be no refuge at all for certain types of young people.”28

Freeze the Cool Aid group that sought to have funding overturned. BC Archives

However, not everyone was supportive of the young people’s efforts. Once Victoria City Council began to support their projects, a group of adults started a “Freeze the Cool Aid” campaign. Their information sheet was full of half-truths and inflammatory statements that actually reinforced young people’s belief that they had no power in the decision-making protest. Charles Barber was classified as “an admitted Marxist whose main ambition is to destroy the society in which he lives and one can find him at any demonstration concerning peace, war, or brotherly love.”29 Citizens were urged to write to their mayors and aldermen in area municipalities in order to ensure that this “group of hippies” did not get
further funding. Obviously the campaign was unsuccessful as the inter-municipal committee continued to provide grants, and the provincial government provided matching funds in subsequent years.

In mid-1969 Laurie Smith arrived at Cool Aid as a client. He started working as a volunteer doing whatever needed to be done. When funding increased, he was offered a job at $100 per month. No task was too grand for him; he worked cheerfully and competently and was known to deal with the most difficult cases – drunks, youth out of control – with grace and humour. Over the next years, every time Cool Aid needed something done, Laurie was there. He secured sleeping materials for free and sourced food from wholesalers. Together with Greg Welsh and Dale Brand (with some assistance from adult Board members), he organized the donated medical services and set the stage for Cool Aid’s medical services today. The Free Medical clinic opened at First United Church on August 18, 1970, co-sponsored by the YMCA.
The 1970s
By early 1970, Cool Aid and its work was becoming part of the local new scene. In a full-page article written at the time the organization was requesting a grant of $7,980 from the Inter-municipal committee, *Victoria Daily Times* reporter Don Vipond penned a very supportive piece. Drawing his material from the 1979 annual report, he wrote “this project works toward young people having a voice in the decisions that affect them.” He noted the support of the adult members of the Pacific Community Self-Development Society including Hugh Wade, Peter Cotton, Dr. Harvey Richardson, and Frances Mahon, and advised of the support of the Victoria Medical Society where twelve doctors were available for services, and the three psychiatrists, four lawyers and three ministers that Cool Aid could call on when necessary. He noted that the rule of the hostel - No Drugs, No Sex, No Booze - ensured that there was no trouble with the authorities.  

St. John’s the Divine Anglican Church’s involvement with Cool Aid began in March 1970. The assistant priest of St. John’s, the Rev. Leonard Jenner, had a particular talent for dealing with young people and had built an active youth group. He lived close by the church, and his door was open at all hours to youngsters who needed his company. The Cool Aid hostel at 953 Balmoral Road was just down the street from the St. John’s Church Memorial Hall and Jenner knew they needed additional space. The basement of the church was ideal for a temporary extra hostel as there was no rent or utilities to pay (the church paid the utility bill), there was a good kitchen, and it was close to the main shelter. Cool Aid budgeted for 3 staff at $150 and agreed to occupy the space from April 1 – September 30. The cost was not to exceed $5,280. The second location meant that sexes could be separated: girls slept at the church hall while the boys were at 953 Balmoral. Cool Aid was given autonomous control of the basement hostel with only one of three Cool Aid staff chosen from St. John’s Church Group. At this time there were six permanent staff at the two centres: Charles Barber, Dale Brand, Don Bridgman, Janice Garay, David Landles and Laurie Smith. In addition, there were 28 families who were prepared to billet the overflow from the two locations. Among the several supporter of the Summer of Service were volunteers, plus Marnie Davis, CYC volunteers Barrie Taylor and Ted Whittaker and Ruth Davis, driver of a Ford Falcon / Pake Zane / Kate Barlow / Colin Constant / Peter Murdoch / Leslie Marrion / Terry Humby / Harry Creech / Jim McBurney from Cabbagetown /
Steve Lee / Graham Dickinson aka Christopher Robin / Liz Kenney / numerous bands / Earl Dean / Ray and Carol Rayfuse / the Cox family / Dr Marian Sherman.

National recognition came to Victoria’s Cool Aid in April 1970. At a conference of the Canadian Welfare Council in Sainte Adele, Quebec, word of the Victoria operation’s success spread. According to Bernard Kenney who helped organize the Victoria youth Council “ours was held up as being quite sophisticated…. Our Cool Aid is being held up as a model in that it tackles problems from a total approach at a community level.”

However, it became apparent that the current facilities would be stretched past capacity during the summer of 1970 and it was time to look for a larger home. In May 1970, the Pacific Community Self-Development Society Board of Directors “passed the hat” at a meeting, and came up with a $1,000 deposit on the purchase of the former Emmanuel Baptist Church at 1900 Fernwood Road. The church was willing to accept the deposit, and understood that Cool Aid needed time to raise sufficient funds to complete the purchase.

In November, Cool Aid hosted an “Open House” at the Balmoral hostel so neighbours could see exactly what the organization did. This was meant to allay fears that the operation was less than legal and to gain support for the move to a larger facility. This was followed by an Open House at the Fernwood Road site at which 300 friends and neighbours attended.

Some of those in attendance had signed a petition against the hostel before they really understand what...
Cool Aid did. They had visions of hooligans invading their neighbourhood, devaluing their properties.

At a three-hour public hearing on December 17, 1970, citizens against the proposal said they were concerned about the proximity of the proposed hostel to Victoria High School, although, ironically, Principal Duncan Lorimer and his teaching staff of 64 were supportive. Reverend Leonard Jenner from St. John the Divine Anglican Church, a long time supporter of Cool Aid, was accused of wearing a symbol of the devil. When some members of the public argued that Cool Aid clients used drugs, John Shields, representing the Family and Children’s Service said “there are probably more drugs being used inside of the [Victoria] high school than there are being used on Cool Aid premises.”

It was the first meeting of the new council that once again included Alderman Robert Baird who had lost his seat in the previous election when he had failed in his attempt to win the Mayor’s chair. Baird, who topped the aldermanic poll, says he was re-elected because voters “looked what I was attempting to run for.”

Baird said his “very determined viewpoint” on long-haired youth and Cool Aid still stands. He will continue his opposition to the very existence of the youth hostel “all the way through. These people call themselves kids - these kids are 21, 22, 23. ‘They are making a job for themselves ... and the time has come for them to go home and grow up.” He said the “city owes them nothing - and they owe the city everything.”

Once again Alderman Ove Witt spoke in support of Cool Aid when he noted, "kindness solves more problems than bitterness and hate." He then moved that Council table the bylaw while awaiting approval from Rehabilitation Minister Phil Gaglardi for Cool Aid’s purchase of the building for $60,000. The province would provide the money.

In early 1971, Cool Aid received federal funds through the Opportunity for Youth program to operate a farm on Markham Street in Saanich. The Job and Food Farm Project was initiated to aid in combating two problems: short term jobs for travelling youth and a lack of sufficient food in the youth hostel during the summer. Organizers
noted that many of the travellers were penniless, and that it cost money to leave. Using a combination of local volunteers, young people paid $8.00 per day and a paid staff of three; the farm produced an impressive list of crops. There had also been a shortage of good food at the hostel the previous summer. In August 1970 with a budget of $200, the hostel fed 2,033 meals of questionable quality. In 1971, with the opening of a new facility, they expected to feed twice as many meals on a budget of $300 per month, using fresh produce from the farm operation. Cool Aid practiced organic farming long before the term gained public awareness.  

On March 25, 1971, the Pacific Community Self-Development Society and Cool Aid again made a presentation to Victoria City Council who voted to hold a public hearing on April 8, 1971. A second “Open House” at 1900 Fernwood Road gave visitors more concrete plans of how the hostel and other services would be located in the building. The group also put out a call for volunteers who might be willing to donate their services to help with the conversion of the space from a church to a hostel. By June, the work was almost complete, needing only skilled carpenters, plumbers and electricians to bring the project to fruition. Lest the public worry about the quality of the work, it was noted that long-time supporter Architect Peter Cotton was supervising the project and had volunteered his time.

The project was financed by a $64,000 mortgage through CMHC ($59,000 for the cost of the property and the balance for rehabilitation costs), repayable over a 50-year period at 7 ¼%. Cool Aid also received $7,500 in donations from the public. Each month Cool Aid received a grant of $1,600 from the Youth Hostels program of the Department of the Secretary of State to cover both operating and purchasing costs.
The first meal was served in the new Fernwood Road hostel – The Youth Resources Centre - on July 24, although the lack of fire alarms and a fire exit sign meant that overnight accommodation had to be delayed until July 29. The counselling and crisis intervention work continued at 953 Balmoral rather than at Fernwood Road as it was felt that hostels were by their nature hectic places and that these specialized services required a relaxed atmosphere.

The success of the Victoria Cool Aid was featured in a television documentary on the CBC program Hourglass in August. Cool Aid was offered as “a successful example of what happens when a whole community supports the efforts of young people to solve their own problems.” The operations received further positive publicity when columnist Denny Boyd wrote a comparison of the Victoria and Vancouver Cool Aid programs in the Vancouver Sun in November 1971. His opening sentences tell the tale: “In Vancouver, the with-it, hip frontier town, Cool Aid clings to a precarious life, succeeding marginally in spite of The Establishment. In Victoria, the tweedy, ultra-square retirement city, Cool Aid flourishes, backed solidly and enthusiastically by The Establishment.” He went on to contrast other areas between the two cities: In Vancouver, Cool Aid was convicted of running a health clinic with a public nurse, in violation of a city zoning bylaw whereas in Victoria, 18 physicians, 5 psychiatrists, 5 lawyers, 13 dentists, one dental mechanic and two optometrists provide their services for free in addition to free emergency treatment at a local hospital and free prescriptions from a pharmacy. The relationship with the police was also quite different in Vancouver where the Cool Aid premises had been raided 200 times looking for drugs; in Victoria the only time the police visit the hostel is to drop off a homeless transient rather than charge him with vagrancy. The article concluded with a quote from Laurie Smith “People here are proud that we have a clean hostel. …They hustle their butts to keep the place attractive. If they treat their environment with that much respect, maybe it’s only natural that they treat people with respect, too.”
In 1972, the first dental clinic was established at the Fernwood Road hostel. Funded by the Department of the Secretary of State’s Youth Resources branch, it offered free dental work to low income patients and was used as a “demonstration model” for other communities across Canada. In its first year, it handled 4,000 visits. The weekly medical clinic continued to operate with Dr. Joe Haegert as its supervisor and dealt with a myriad of clients, offering “sympathetic advice, no moralizing or sermons, just medical treatment.” The medical staff saw 900 patients. Legal Aid services continued to be offered by the Bar Society with a client load of about 20 per week.

In May 1971, the focus of the Cool Aid House was changed from one of the crisis/referral centre to a group home facility for youth referred by the Children’s Service. In its new location at 1133 Fort Street, it offered relatively unstructured atmosphere combined with counselling by adults, many who had been through the system themselves. Crisis and counselling services were moved to the hostel building and additional staff was hired to handle the workload. But the main focus of Cool Aid remained the hostel. In 1973, 21,236 meals were served while 13,117 overnight stays were provided. The numbers were up from the previous year and the staff expected the demand to increase even more in the upcoming summer.

In order to better serve the
young working mothers in its immediate neighbourhood, Cool Aid began operation of a Day Care. It was originally intended to be housed in the main hostel building, but there were concerns about the suitability of young children being exposed to hostel clients. In June 1973, the Day Care opened at 1340 Balmoral Road. Students from Victoria High School and the Boy’s Club made toys, and local people donated many needed items. It was the only Day Care operation in Fernwood. Cool Aid was officially registered as a charity with the federal government in May 1973, opening the way to tax-deductible donations.

In January 1975 Cool Aid received a surprise. They had won the first Commonwealth youth award granted by the Commonwealth secretariat. A Malaysian group running a farming operation was also selected. According to worker Laurie Smith, “The federal secretary of state’s department contacted Cool Aid about 10 months seeking information so they could apply for the award on behalf of the group. Then we heard nothing for a long period of time, until three weeks ago.” Cool Aid won a plaque and medals to mark the award and were granted up to five travel fellowships to “study similar projects in other Commonwealth countries, and to demonstrate and discuss the work they have undertaken.” The media coverage included details on the services offered at that time: a men’s hostel, women’s hostel, dental clinic and medical clinic at 1900 Fernwood Road, a group home for problem teenagers, and a day care centre. The former church sanctuary was renamed the Springridge Theatre and was available for community groups that wanted to hold a meeting or put on a play.47

Although the summer of 1975 was not as busy as the previous year, Cool Aid was quite happy. At
one time in 1974 they had 200 visitors in one night – far too many for a hostel with 100 beds. The overflow would sleep on the floor in sleeping bags as no one was turned away. For the modest cost of $1.50 per night, visitors received supper and a breakfast of fruit, granola, and tea. The Board of Directors of the Pacific Community Self-Development Society continued to monitor Cool Aid’s activities, noting in the minutes of a regular meeting “Laurie Smith gave a fine verbal report on the progress of Cool Aid. Rents received this month total $300, and are expected to increase to $500. The monthly mortgage payments are now $550 a month, and the rents will, it is expected, nearly cover this.”

In February 1976, five Cool Aid workers departed on a month-long all-expenses paid trip to the Far East – the fellowships won as part of the Commonwealth Youth Award the year before. The five taking the trip were Dale Brand, Cathie Sharkey, Terry Humby, Harvey Kelly and Director Laurie Smith.

The group visited Australia, Hong Kong and Tokyo, Japan to see what other youth groups were doing, and to explain what Cool Aid had done here in Canada. Absent from the tour was Cool Aid founder Charles Barber who had been elected MLA for Victoria the previous December and was, therefore, unable to travel.

Financial statements for Cool Aid’s operations in early 1976 showed just how far the operation had come since its beginning. For the three-month period ended March 31, 1976 hostel grants included $21,276.00 from the Province of BC, $855.36 from the Association of BC Hostels, $8,800 for the Dental Clinic and $13,930.00 for the Medical Clinic.

April 25, 1976 was a very important day for Cool Aid. At its Annual General Meeting, the Pacific Community Self-Development Society passed the following motions:

1. That the Pacific Self-Development society hereby agrees to transfer the properties at 1900 Fernwood Road (Lot A, Section SR, Plan 25139) in the City of Victoria, Province of British Columbia and the Day Care Center at 1340 Balmoral Road (Lot 2, Section 75, Plan 317A) in the City of Victoria, Province of British Columbia, to the Victoria Cool Aid
Society which is in the process of being incorporated within the Province of British Columbia;

2. That the Pacific Self-Development Society hereby agrees to transfer all the chattels, equipments and supplies found at the Building at 1900 Fernwood Road in the City of Victoria, Province of British Columbia, and at Day Care Center at 1340 Balmoral Road in the City of Victoria, Province of British Columbia, and at the Group Home at 1133 Fort Street in the City of Victoria. Province of British Columbia, to the Victoria Cool Aid Society upon its incorporation within the Province of British Columbia;

4. And that the said transfers shall be effected immediately upon the incorporation of the Victoria Cool Aid Society.\textsuperscript{51}

Cool Aid had come of age and was no longer a group of youth with no credentials and financial savvy. It was to become a full-fledged society under the law of British Columbia. On October 28, 1976, the new society was officially created as Society 12,684 with its first board of directors:

Patrick Downey – President
Joyce Heynsbroek - Vice President
(President July 1977-May 1978)
Clare Yarwood - Treasurer
Joseph Haegert, Sr. - Secretary
Sibylla Artz
Denys Beames
Beverley Timmons
Michael O’Connor
Ronald Spence
As passed by the PCSDS, all assets were transferred to the new society and it began its adult life, owning its own property and assuming its own liabilities. It was at this time that the name of the society began to be spelled “Cool Aid” without the hyphen. Also in 1976, the main stage space was rented to the newly formed Belfry Theatre Company who would continue to share the space with the hostel until Cool Aid moved downtown and the Belfry Theatre purchased the old church. Former board member Frances Mahon Chapman fondly recalls the early days of Cool Aid. “I think the spirit of Cool Aid, this spirit of creativity and giving, has been maintained over the time. ... The young people often generated the ideas, and then the board vetted these ideas. The young people were very creative and were always trying to convince us that what they wanted to do was realistic.”

Phil Ward moved to Victoria in 1976 and was looking for a part-time job while going to school. His sister was a nurse at the Cool Aid Clinic and told him about a position available as a worker/maintenance. He was very much involved as a “do what you need to get it running and offer support to the people” type of guy. He notes that it wasn’t until the new Streetlink Shelter was set up that there was a more organized approach.

For the next three years, Cool Aid continued its work with the hostel, day care, and group home. By November 1979, there were an increasing number of clients who were more or less homeless or ill, and had nowhere else to go. While the summer clientele continued for the large part to be travelling youth, in the fall and winter, the picture was quite different. Hostel Director Laurie Smith noted “In many cases there is no other resource in BC able or willing to give a bed and help to the people who eventually doss down at the hostel. We are dealing with people who just aren’t able to fit into other resources in the province. We try to act as a go-between while other workers in the system try to find an appropriate place for them.”

In late 1979, the group applied to extend the hostel services as the facilities were overcrowded. Slowly the focus of Cool Aid was shifting. The sale of a property at 1325 Pembroke Street, which the City acquired for $75,000, was endorsed by the Land Management Committee of the City of Victoria. Unfortunately, Cool Aid did not have sufficient funds.
for the purchase and their request for rent-free tenancy was turned down by City Council. Cool Aid President Joe Haegert Sr. expressed his anger and disgust with the decision noting Council had an “opportunity to do a very fine and good thing.”

Eventually Cool Aid secured funding from the Health Ministry and the Human Resources Ministry and was able to acquire a house across the street from the hostel – at 1921 Fernwood Road. Operated as the Cool Aid Psychiatric Boarding Home, the facility had a capacity of eight boarders who lived together in a family setting. They also learned how to take care of themselves – how to cook good meals, how to clean up, how to do laundry and how to get along with other residents. Dr. Ron Anderson, administrator of the Eric Martin Institute said it was far less expensive to pay for a person to live in a boarding home than in a psychiatric hospital. “Psychiatric boarding home programs are ideal, but unfortunately they are in short supply... The programs need expansion.”

At the same time, Cool Aid realized that the clientele of the hostel had changed drastically. Most of the people being served were homeless or destitute, and about 70% had drug or alcohol-related problems. Cool Aid was in the process of searching for a downtown location that could also include low-cost housing to complement its downtown outreach program. In July 1981, the Capital Regional Hospital District approved a request for $428,000 to be cost-shared with the Health Ministry on a 60-40 basis with the province paying the larger share. These funds would allow the provision of a medical clinic and administration services in its proposed new 42-bed facility. The Society was also negotiating with the Ministry of Social Services and housing for the shelter portion of the
40 Years of Caring: Brief History of Cool Aid

new facility.  

By Judith Levole
Times-Colonist Staff

The Cool Aid Society wants to move from its 100-year-old building on Fernwood Road and into a more suitable building in the downtown core.

Executive director Jane Dewing said Cool Aid, which operates programs such as the Streetlink bistro for the city’s homeless and a downtown outreach program for adults, needs to be closer to the downtown.

The society, founded 20 years ago in a house on Balmoral Street, has been at the Fernwood address since 1987.

“We are going to be relocating by September of next year for sure,” Dewing said.

In addition to providing existing services, in better conditions there may also be a residential component of low-cost housing, she said.

A Community Council housing needs assessment will be completed next month and will serve as the basis for a proposal, she said.

Streetlink’s move would put an end to the much-hated opium dormitories.

“We are looking at private or semi-private rooms,” Dewing said.

Currently one person with night

mures or hallucinations can keep the whole dormitory awake.

“We intend to still keep beds for women and make them more self-contained and separate from the men. We also hope to have a couple of family rooms for husbands and wives. Some couples would rather sleep under a bush than be separated,” she said.

Daytime and life skills programs are likely to be expanded.

“But our philosophy will stay the same — accepting individuals as they present themselves at the door and helping them as much as they want us to help them. If they don’t want help they are just given basic support,” she said.

The current building cannot be renovated to meet Cool Aid’s needs, she said.

Space requirements, cost and other details will be worked out during the next few months, she said.

“We’ll be looking at building from scratch or renovating,” she said.

Funding is likely to be from small foundations such as the regional hospital and planning committee, Cool Aid Society funds, surplus from the Fernwood building and Victoria’s street prostitution and lottery grants.

Dewing is an active member of the Downtown Detox Committee, which has submitted a proposal to the province for a street-level detox centre.

She would like to see Cool Aid work closely with a detox centre, if it is approved.

“Once a person using the detox centre has dried out I would hope to bring them to the shelter,” she said.

The client group is likely to be the same, she said.

Currently the police sometimes bring squatters to Cool Aid rather than throwing them in the drunk tank, but the hostel cannot take the noisy and belligerent ones during the night.

“If we know them and they can put a lid on it and sleep down and sleep off we let them in,” she said.

In conjunction with a detox centre Cool Aid could offer counselling, life skills and special needs housing to those who choose not to return to the streets, Dewing said.

But a detox centre would not be a cure-all for Victoria’s street problems, she cautioned.

“You’re not going to have miraculous quick rehabilitation where they’re going to suddenly turn their lives around. But we can treat them with dignity and provide food and shelter and try and point them in the right direction.”
Outside Cool Aid shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Lynn Curtis collection

Biker outside Cool Aid shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Lynn Curtis collection
Registration at Cool Aid shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Laurie Smith on right.
Lynn Curtis collection

The lounge area, Cool Aid Shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Lynn Curtis collection
The dormitory, Cool Aid Shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Lynn Curtis collection

The breakfast place, Cool Aid Shelter, 1900 Fernwood Road. Lynn Curtis collection
The 1980s
In 1982, Cool Aid hired Jane Dewing as Executive Director. In her first few years, she spent time doing anything that needed to be done including cleaning the hostel, ordering supplies, etc. She was always involved at some level with the clients, and she enjoyed that interaction. She recognized that Cool Aid had a solid foundation for service, providing hostel service and food, but as an organization it needed to be able to grow and react to societal change. They housed 70 people per night. She preferred to use words that represent the solution (to find a home, not “homeless”). It was part of her job to ensure that City Council and key organizations were aware of the need to house people. Pacifica Housing housed families, and the Salvation Army was seen as a downtown agency, but Cool Aid was seen as the most comprehensive in town. At this time they had no brochures or written material. Cool Aid used the services of the Community Council who did reports on various aspects of the social problems. For example, the Community Council interviewed everyone who came in for meals for 30 days, to determine where they came from, what their needs were, etc. The hostel at that time was still funded by the Human Resources department who offered a *per diem* for each bed occupied at night.

With the increasing number of clients with mental health problems, Cool Aid had to start discussions with local mental health groups. The problem was that Cool Aid had no accreditation as a service provider. They had received one grant, but did not fit the funding formulas. Jane Dewing explored partnerships with other agencies on the basis of “what part could you help and who could pick up the other part?” She talked to officials about Day Care and the Group Home. She used her knowledge of people to get funds. The RISE project funded the Employment Services.

The diversity of services meant Cool Aid could tap into many funding needs and funders. Jane Dewing shared information with others in the community and got onto provincial boards. She felt it was very important to retain the “grassroots” connection between the board and the operations so that the history was not lost. Jane found that the most instrumental board members came to Cool Aid because of the Day Care Centre. It had been the first Day Care in Fernwood, and later added a special needs component. As a result, Cool Aid was able to influence policy on Day Cares in the city and province.
Between 1983 and 1987, the hostel clientele changed from the travelling youth to the “hard to house” and “homeless.” When the provincial government closed the large psychiatric facilities as they felt large institutions were not the way to handle the problems, this had the result of an influx of mentally ill persons living on the streets. Many of these ended up at the Cool Aid hostel. This, coupled with decreases in the welfare system, produced a large street population in need of help. The effects are still being felt in 2008. In 1985, the name of the shelter was changed to Streetlink Emergency Shelter to better reflect the type of users.

The Kiwanis Youth Shelter was set up in Spring 1986 because the staff felt they were unable to guarantee the safety of youth in the hostel situation. Mike Ellis from Kiwanis was instrumental in the process. Three people started looking for a downtown site. They used a new program called Reconnect for funding. The purpose of the shelter was to collect youth and then help them reconnect with home. Mike Ellis was on the board of Cool Aid for a long time. Kiwanis made alterations to the building behind the Crystal Pool. It was difficult to get rezoning but later surveys of neighbours were favourable. The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society eventually took over the shelter.

Cool Aid used federal programs to hire three people to do a brochure. Trudy Norman was hired in 1986 as a researcher/outreach worker and did the first homeless count. She prepared a report about the 350 people on the street including information on what addiction problems there were. Her report outlined the continuing needs of the street population including continued outreach, a shelter open 24 hours, a mental health worker, and consistent ongoing funding for additions and mental health problems.

Her report served as the proposal for the Streetlink Shelter. She continued to work as an outreach worker and support figure for the housing project until 2005. Streetlink got its first manager through application of United Way outreach money in fall 1986 and by
fall 1987 a downtown outreach position was established. Streetlink was also opened for daytime use. The motto was then – and still is – “Put the path where the people walk”. This is why the Cool Aid buildings and facilities are located where they are now.

Programs underwent a change with the offering of outreach and mental health issues at Fernwood. It was difficult to get funding for health issues as most of the money went to publicly owned facilities. The Board then made health care a case for better shelter, and met with BC Housing. It was determined that conversion of the hostel on Fernwood to meet the new needs was not practical. By August 1988, it was obvious that the Fernwood Road facility was too small, and was unsuitable for the additional service that were required. The open dormitories were not popular with clients and could lead to one person with nightmares or hallucinations keeping the whole dormitory awake at night. As well, there was a desire to provide low cost housing on a permanent basis, not possible at the small site. Funding was expected to come from a variety of sources.

On September 21, 1988, Labour and Consumer Minister Lyall Hanson announced a $78,000 annual grant to Cool Aid that helped to employ at least two extra people - an additional life skills person to work during the day and an extra person at night at Streetlink. Executive Director Jane Dewing noted, “It recognizes the support care we give with severe drug and alcohol problems.” Further support was announced on November 24, 1988. The Capital Regional District’s hospital and health planning commission unanimously supported Cool Aid’s proposal for a new building. The estimated cost of the new facility was $2.8 million, and it was intended to house the Streetlink shelter, lifeskills programs, a medical clinic and the downtown outreach program for adults. A new innovation would be 20 units of low-cost housing.

In January 1989, the expenditure of $520,000 for site acquisition and planning for a new Cool Aid building was approved by the Capital Regional Hospital District Board, subject to cost-sharing by the provincial government. Board Chair Murray Coell said “the expenditure roughly breaks down to $413,000 for land acquisition, $80,000 for architect’s fees, and $17,000 for other administrative costs.” He said the Cool Aid Society helps people who fall through the cracks in existing health and social care system.
In April 1989 the Province of BC approved in principle its 60% share of the cost of the new facility. Cool Aid was now able to look for an appropriate site in the downtown area as they had been reluctant to do so before confirmation of funding. In June Gwyn Simmons was hired as project manager to find a suitable site for the new shelter. Cool Aid acquired a six-months option on land on Swift Street and profiled 50 clients in a bid for funding for completion of the project. Funding came from BC Housing and other agencies. On December 15, 1989 Social Services Minister Peter Dueck announced that a former meatpacking plant on Store Street would be the new home of Streetlink and other Cool Aid services. He said, “Cool Aid provides food and shelter – the most basic of human needs – but it also offers opportunities to grow in other areas of their lives once the basic needs are satisfied. It helps people make positive changes in their lives.”

In addition to the contribution for the new structure, the province agreed to provide $1 million in annual operating funds through the Social Services, Housing, Health and Labour and Consumer Services ministries. Cool Aid Society chair David Poje noted that the expanded services offered in the new building would make the organization unique in Canada. He added, “the centre will have 55 emergency shelter beds in two- and three-bed rooms, instead of the current warehouse-style dormitories in the current shelter”. The medical on the main floor and large “interior street” prevented the indignity of clients having to line up on the street for food and beds. On the top two floors were 25 one-bedroom apartments and one bachelor apartment, available for people ready for independent living. The units were to rent for 30% of a tenant’s income. The CRD was initially going to pay for part of the building, but it was discovered that funding could come through BC Housing Management Commission from the provincial and federal governments, so the CRD paid for furniture and fixtures instead.

The three-level Gainer’s building, designed in Chicago and built in 1925, was seen by project manager Gwyn Simmons as “a good example of recycling an existing building. It’s a good model for other buildings like this in the city.” On February 15, 1991, the new Streetlink building opened its doors, followed by a night-long community celebration and a celebrity “sleep-over” to help raise funds. Invitations were sent to people in all levels of government and those who had been involved with the new building.
It cost $60 to attend the celebration or $100 if the invitee wanted to stay the night. The new facility also had a kitchen facility capable of serving three meals a day to 100 people, and a professional chef was hired to manage this new kitchen. The new residents of the apartments renamed their home “Swift House”. For some clients, it would be the first real homes they had known in years. The apartments all had new kitchens and bathrooms, brand-new carpets and a variety of designs. Outreach worker Trudy Norman noted, “I have worked with these guys for almost five years and now I have a sense of giving them something wonderful.” Of course, these apartments would not bring an end to homelessness, as the numbers continued to rise, but it was a positive start. According to former Executive Director Jane Dewing, “The Streetlink Building was a benchmark in Cool Aid’s evolution as it was a purpose-built shelter. From there Cool Aid moved from one housing project to another. They were able to tap into an increase in alternative funding.”
The 1990s
John Crean, current Manager of Housing, had joined Cool Aid in 1990. He had had an on again, off again relationship with Cool Aid from the Vancouver days. He was then, like many youth of the time, travelling to broaden his horizons. Unlike many, he had a vehicle and perhaps a bit more funds, so would pick up hitchhikers and drop them off at the Vancouver Cool Aid. His travels led him to San Francisco during the earthquake where he experienced first hand the homelessness in the Bay Area. He had seen homelessness all over the world in third-world countries, but this was his first brush with homelessness in North America. On his return to Victoria, he reconnected with a friend who was doing a practicum with Cool Aid. The friend told John that Cool Aid was making a transition to the downtown core and wondered if he would be interested in coming to Cool Aid to contribute in any way he could. He was hired at that point and helped during the transition to downtown and has been with Cool Aid ever since. John’s major task in the early days was to develop the housing model that is still being used. All tenants are involved in the operation of their buildings in a system where the hierarchical structure is broken down as much as possible. There are several benefits to this system: tenants take pride in their surroundings because they are involved in the decision-making process, security in the building is as tenants watch out for each other, and you need fewer staff resources as the tenants are your eyes and ears. According to John Crean, “not to involve tenants would be a very expensive way to run a housing program.”

Also in 1991, Cool Aid began its housing research project and developed a critical incident stress team. By September, they took on the Blenkinsop residential program. In early 1992, merchants in the
vicinity of the Streetlink facility complained about the effect of unruly people on their businesses. Manager Phil Ward advised that many of those congregating in that location had nothing to do with Cool Aid where there are strict rules. A series of meetings with merchants and Cool Aid staff diffused the difficult situation. A May 1992 article in *Focus on Women* told the stories of homeless women and the unique problems they face. At Streetlink, there were 4 men to every woman who used the shelter. Of the women, 40% were mentally ill or disabled, 40% were battered and 20% were drug or alcohol dependent or prostitutes.”

There was nothing for the women with children. Outreach worker Trudy Norman commented, “Many of the women have a hard time dealing with men, never mind subjecting their children. They’ve been harassed or battered.” Streetlink had a separate 10-bed facility for women but it was not enough. Increased Health funding meant that the lifskills position at Swift House doubled to 20 hours per week. However, the shelters were filled to overflowing by September. Streetlink Manager Phil Ward reported a sudden 21% increase early in the month; 39 people were turned away to seek other accommodation. He added, “Streetlink provided 24,063 bed nights in the last year to more than 1,500 people, and 670 people have been turned away because of lack of space. About one-third of each month we are full and having to turn people away. And that’s fairly serious because we are supposed to be an emergency shelter, and when we are full we don’t function as an emergency shelter.”

He noted that the lack of affordable housing in the city is contributing to the problem and that more housing like Swift House was desperately needed.

In early 1993, Cool Aid began administration of a six-month pilot project funded by the Social Services Ministry. The Cool Aid Employment Services provided the only casual labour pool in Victoria. The services which aimed to help people who were finding it difficult to re-enter the workforce – the homeless, single parents, ex-offenders and immigrants – also helped find clothes and provided support to new workers as they adjusted to the workplace. A
Society Services spokesman said he was encouraged by the apparent success of the project. “It was a bit of an experiment and we had no certainty at all how successful it would be,” he said. By July it was established as a full time program.

Cool Aid celebrated its 25th Anniversary on June 25, 1993 with a Gala Evening at the Belfry Theatre, its former home. Following a short history of the society and short speeches by politicians, guests enjoyed a comedy act and dancing to Doc and the Doo-Wops. The printed program outlined the many services offered by the Society along with a starting date for each that illustrated the diversity of the programs and the continuous years of service.

In February 1994, Cool Aid was the subject of a Cover Story in the local *Pennysaver* publication. This 4-page spread with many photographs offered the public a change to “Get to know us!” Cool Aid was noted as the “bottom line in the social safety net.” There was a brief history of the organization and an outline of the eight programs that made up Cool Aid:

- Streetlink: For many, the last refuge
- Outreach: A human bridge for the homeless
- Cool Aid Employment Services: Putting workers and employers together
- Daycare: A safe and nurturing place for children to go
- Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter: A safe place for young people to go
- Swift House: Safe, supported and affordable housing
- Fernwood Group Home: Helping mentally ill people make a home for themselves
This media coverage meant that the work of Cool Aid was presented to a much wider audience and illustrated just how far the organization had come in their first quarter century. Members of the public were offered opportunities to volunteer or donate much-needed money.

Sandy Merriman House started as an emergency shelter program of the Women’s Shelter Society in 1995. Sandy Merriman was a young woman in her 20s, fighting addictions and living on welfare, when she took up a hammer along with 14 other ex-street women in 1995 to help reconstruct the home that now bears her name. During the construction process, she accidentally died of an overdose just when it appeared she was turning her life around. Until the project was launched through a government-funded program, training women in construction work, there was no safe place for homeless women to go. Men had typically dominated Victoria’s emergency shelters, and many women felt neither comfortable nor safe there.

In 1997, through a community development process, it was decided that the facility should be managed by Cool Aid, which now contracts with the Ministry of Human Resources to operate the shelter and drop-in. The site is owned by the Provincial Rental Housing Corporation and was built and is maintained by BC Housing. The program provides fifteen shelter beds for women, meals, basic needs, crisis intervention, counseling, referrals, medication and general support. It is open throughout the day for drop-in services and for shelter stays of up to seven days.
process of building a new Citadel at Christmas Hill owned the land. Once an agreement in principle was reached, the Salvation Army was willing to wait while funding was secured. The cornerstone was removed in a public ceremony and saved for reinstallation in the Salvation Army’s new facility.

_Salvation Army Citadel, Pandora Avenue, before sale to Cool Aid._
_Hallmark Society Archives_

The building was to contain 32 affordable housing units for adults, eight short-term units for youth and an activity centre. The youth project was originally to be a collaboration between the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society and Cool Aid to purchase and co-locate their services. In the end, it was not a fit with VYES but Cool Aid built the youth units anyway. They worked with the City of Victoria to fund a paid position for Nina Cox to coordinate downtown community activities. Cool Aid tendered the youth units and as a result, the YM/YWCA assumed responsibility for them. Also in 1995, the Cool Aid Group Home moved to Garden Street and changed its name to Garden Gate Residence.

By March 1996, Cool Aid needed more funds to complete the Pandora Project and issued a public appeal for help. $3.8 million in funding had come from the BC Housing Management Commission, with the City of Victoria providing $50,000 toward the gymnasium, and $75,000 from the Vancouver Foundation. Money was still needed for furnish the apartments and to equip the community centre which was expected to be used by more than 200 people a day. Construction was due to begin in August with completion by April 1997. The project was modeled on Swift House where there was a waiting list of more than 60 people. Swift House Manager John Crean noted that many Swift House residents had gone on to “stabilize their lives.”

The BC Real Estate Foundation donated $300,000 and provided a one-year $136,000 interest-free loan, pending approval of an application for a BC 21 grant. Further good news was received in April 1996.
The components of the Pandora Project - top: the housing units, middle: the Downtown Community Activity Centre, bottom: the interior of the Activity Centre. Cool Aid archives

when Cool Aid did receive a grant of $134,000 from the BC 21 Community Projects to help cover the costs of the activity centre. The ground-breaking ceremony took place on November 12, 1996 with the facility expected to open before winter 1997. In March 1997, it was reported that the City of Victoria had asked Cool Aid to consider putting in some computer terminals in the new centre to provide internet access for its users. The Oak Bay/Greater Victoria 1988 Summer Games legacy donated $3,988 to go toward buying team sports equipment. The facility opened in late 1997.

On November 17, 1998 the Pandora Project won an award from the Victoria Real Estate Board under the Investment Category, multi-family.

One of the projects of 1997 was the Victoria Cool Aid Community Tapestry. Completed in the fall, it was the vision of a group of Vancouver Island weavers called TAPIS. The design was influenced by the contributions of residents and staff of Swift House. The weaving itself was a community effort with a
total of 93 individuals actually working on the tapestry during the over 1,300 hours of its creation. The finished tapestry now hangs in the Administration Office.

Social issues were receiving more coverage in the mainstream media. In January 1999, Tom Kent released a federal report entitled “Social Policy 2000, An Agenda” that called for an overhaul in social programs. Kent, who played a key role in shaping the policies of the Liberal party during its 1957-63 opposition years and, as Policy Secretary to the Prime Minister and a Deputy Minister, was equally active in the implementation of those policies - including Medicare - by the Pearson government, presented his suggestions for improvement. Among the ideas were:

- A new funding formula for Medicare that would increase Ottawa’s cost to 25%
- Broad-based income tax cuts by increasing the personal exemption and raising tax brackets to help the poor
- replacement of the present child care expense deduction by a refundable tax credit, on a sliding scale related to income, to a maximum of $7,000 a year per child; same rates as earnings, initially using the proceeds chiefly for quick reduction of debt and subsequently to increase revenues available to finance public services
- with this significant scale of financing, the federal government would negotiate with the provinces for the operation of child centres providing early childhood care and development, accessible for all children irrespective of parental income

This was followed by a call by Cool Aid Executive Director Jane Dewing for the need to address the major cause of poor health – poverty. For every dollar spent on feeding the poor, there was a significant reduction in medical costs. Canada’s first in-depth study correlating income status and medical treatment undertaken by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy showed that for every 100 deaths in the highest socio-economic layer, there were 140 deaths in the lowest layer and 160 in the second lower layer. In other words, poorer Canadians were dying at a much higher rate than wealthy Canadians. She went on to add that social agencies like Cool Aid need adequate funding to prevent the most vulnerable people from early death. In particular, she stressed the need to adequately feed children so they could be expected to live a full
life. Slowly, social programs were focusing on younger people and the needs for earlier intervention in problem cases.

The Resource Education, Evaluation and Support Network was established in 1999. Started by people living with mental illness, and based near the Eric Martin Pavilion on Lee Avenue, REES’s approach was based on the idea that people with mental illness and addictions can make important contributions to the system that supports them. Cool Aid used a co-operative, recovery-based approach to help reduce the isolation from community, friends and family that is often a result of mental illness and addictions. They work in partnership with families and professionals to enhance the lives of people with mental illnesses or addictions. Services and programs include: the Resource Centre, Conferences and Workshops, Outreach, Peer Linking, and Mentor Programs, and the Community Casual Labour Pool.

Cool Aid was saddened by the death of their Manager of Finances and Administration Mike Gidora on June 6, 1999. In four short years with Cool Aid, Mike had become a valuable cog in the wheel. Described as “warm, very compassionate, and very passionate,” he felt very strongly about peace, poverty and social justice. Cool Aid established the Mike Gidora Vision Fund in his memory to help finance leading-edge social projects. One Cool Aid Board member wrote a touching tribute that read, in part:

“Every now and then someone comes into your life who changes you. Sometimes you don’t even know that it is happening…. He worked for the poorest of the poor. He leaves all who knew him richer for the experience. I haven’t begun to miss him yet as I am sure that I can still pick up the phone and “just call Mike” From so many people, such a big THANK YOU.”

On October 12, 1999, it was announced the Cool Aid’s new 45-unit affordable housing project at 749 Pandora Avenue would be named Mike Gidora Place to honour his memory. At an official ground-breaking ceremony, Cool Aid Director Tom Moore welcomed guest speakers including major funders and representatives from the provincial and municipal government. Mike’s widow, Irene Haigh-Gidora spoke of her husband and his passion for social causes, noting “This particular project encompasses many of the things that Mike believed in.” It was also announced that a Time Capsule would be placed in the new building. This project involved fifteen...
subsidized units with the remainder at market for low-income clients.

Several partners worked together to finance the project: Canada Mortgage and Housing gave an $18,000 grant, Pacific Coast Credit Union provided a $2-million first mortgage and a $3000,000 line of credit while the Real Estate Foundation provided a second mortgage of $3000,000 and a grant. The City of Victoria transferred adjacent land to permit project size and BC Housing gave 15-year operating grant totaling $375,000. Though the suites are small, available space and light are maximized very effectively and the building contains several amenities. MLA Moe Sihota, Minister of Social Development and Economic Security said the province decided to cover the housing project mortgage payment after looking at how much of a need there is for affordable housing in the downtown. The project was officially opened in August 2000. Cool Aid’s Administration Services moved from Swift Street to Mike Gidora Place when it opened, freeing space for the medical clinic. In addition, subsequent funding from VIHA and BC Housing has since allowed for 24-hour staffing and rent subsidies for each of the tenants.

In a December 20, 1999 article, the programs of Cool Aid were detailed. The article begins with “Every day hundreds of needy Victorians from toddlers to octogenarians, rely on the Cool Aid Society to help them with services ranging from the essentials of life to recreation.” Executive Director Jane Dewing noted “The Cool Aid vision is a just, healthy quality of life for all – a tall order for an organization doping with some of those to whom life has dealt a lousy hand.” The article then listed the various services available and acknowledged the difficulty of fund-raising, while acknowledging the contribution of the United Way to the Downtown Activity Centre which provided much needed recreation programs for those who could not afford to pay.
The New Century
A new project providing low-cost accommodation with supports for those with persistent mental illnesses and addictions was announced in October 2000. Sod was turned at 1149 Johnson Street for a three-storey apartment building in the form of a large manor house. Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission (funded through the Attorney General’s Department) had exposure to Cool Aid’s services through the outreach project. Cool Aid formed a working group to look for a property close to downtown. They found a site with three dilapidated buildings with needles strewn around. Their idea was to build a structure that fit into the neighbourhood to help those with mental health and addiction issues to get healthy and move on.

Groundbreaking for Johnson Manor, MLA Jeff Bray on right. Cool Aid archives

BC Housing committed $2.58 million in construction money, the Ministry of Health provided $109,000 for amenities and committed to annual funding of $409,000 and the Real Estate Foundation of BC provided a $40,000 grant. MLA Gretchen Mann Brewin said the province was committed to providing money for social housing even when most other provinces had stopped. John Crean, Cool Aid Manager of Housing, committed to working with the neighbours and ensuring that the surrounding neighbourhood would not be negatively impacted by any of the tenants’ behaviour. In addition, the building would be staffed 24 hours a day with professional Resident Support Workers. Johnson Manor opened on December 1, 2001.

New funding from the provincial government’s health action plan expanded the Swift Street Medical Clinic into a multi-services Community Health Centre in December 2000. Premier Ujjal Dosanijh made the announcement of the additional $900,000 to allow the clinic to expand its staff, services, and hours of operation. The funding allowed the clinic to add to the health care team with new medical, nursing, dental, nutrition, acupuncture, and pharmacy services. The hours of service were expanded to include three evenings a week and Saturdays. Irene Haigh-Gidora was hired on contract to do the project managing of the transition of the medical services at the clinic into
the Downtown Community Health Centre. She has overseen the development of the health services ever since, as Manager of Cool Aid Health Services. She notes that Cool Aid has kept in touch with the changing needs and the changing focus of the downtown population and, as such, has been able to meet those needs in their programming.\textsuperscript{86}

Of interest to Cool Aid in 2000 was the presentation of the Denise LeBlond Memorial Award to Executive Director Jane Dewing. The award was given because “Jane has made a major contribution to the provision of affordable housing in Victoria. She demonstrates outstanding leadership, which has translated into both new buildings and services, making a difference in households in housing needs in the community.”\textsuperscript{87} The award honoured Denise LeBlond who was a strong supporter of the BC Non-profit Housing Association and worked tirelessly to keep non-profit housing on the national agenda, to develop new housing programs for BC, and to advocate for affordable housing issues on a community level.

Additions to the Outreach programs in 2000 included Alcohol and Drug Services, Forensic Outreach, Supportive Recovery, Housing Outreach, and Seniors Outreach. The Seniors Outreach which offers support services to those aged 55 and up was established as an interim service while a seniors housing project was being built, but Outreach staff planned to continue the program as it focused on older clients who generally “fall through the cracks.”\textsuperscript{88}

Cool Aid Employment Services had a very busy year in 2000-01. With an average of 74 clients a month and hundreds of jobs filed annually, they were full of success stories. The Downtown Community Activity Centre was being fully used with a dramatic increase in use from the prior year. Open seven days a week, it was used by close to 3,000 people a month. Among the programs offered were dance, drop-in sports, kindergym, kid’s birthday parties, music lessons and jam sessions, drop-in socialization, theater groups, language classes, and the Pandora Patio Café. The Centre worked with the community to develop, provide, and support the programs the community wants, not what they think they want. The Cool Aid Daycare was now seeing the second generation of children. Low enrolment was a problem, caused by the cost of daycare, a lower birth rate, and too many daycares in the area.

Recognizing the phenomenal
growth of Cool Aid and the challenges that growth presents, the Cool Aid Board of Directors formed the Cool Aid Foundation to respond to the increasing need to raise money from sources other than governments. The Foundation's primary purpose is so assist the Victoria Cool Aid Society through the development of long term, sustainable, alternative revenue. Among the events being considered were: an annual campaign, fundraising events, a planned giving program and a golf tournament.\textsuperscript{89}

Further provincial cuts to the welfare program were felt by all street agencies, including Cool Aid. Demand was up at Streetlink Shelter with 20 to 25 people being turned away every night. An increase in the use of dangerous drugs like crystal methamphetamine exacerbated the problems. Social agencies also had some of their funding cut so, at a time when their services were needed more than ever, they did not have adequate resources.

On the positive side, construction began on the first Cool Aid housing program outside Victoria - in Langford - on land owned by the Health Authority. Fairway Woods was designed to provide housing for adults 55 plus who face the added burden of aging and the problems that brings. During the approval process, Executive Director Jane Dewing and John Crean, Manager of Housing Services went to coffee in Langford and met on a casual basis with Mayor Stew Young. Due to this personal contact, they received approval for a parking variance, which was the final hurdle in the approval process. There was a long list of supporters that made this project possible - the Vancouver Island Health Authority provided funding for staffing, BC Housing funded the construction and ongoing maintenance, the Federal Government assisted with capital funding, and the CRD was instrumental in pulling all the players together. The facility opened August 1, 2003.\textsuperscript{90}

FairWay Woods, the first project outside downtown Victoria and Fernwood.
Cool Aid archives

CMHC commissioned a brief case study on the Fairway Woods project, followed in 2007 with an in-depth study authored by Nancy Gnaedinger, which identified the program as a best practice model for housing seniors.\textsuperscript{91}
2002 was a year of reflection and reassessment of priorities for Cool Aid. Faced with funding cuts and an increased demand for service, the organization had to make very tough decisions. The Board reaffirmed its mandate of providing shelter, housing, and community health services and realized that some of their existing programs did not fit the new definition. As a result, the Cool Aid Daycare was closed and the Kiwanis Emergency Youth Centre was transitioned to the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society. 

Cool Aid Employment Services lost its funding and was closed at the end of November 2002. In January 2003 supportive recovery services was transferred from Victoria Cool Aid Society to Drug Alcohol Recovery Services that became part of VIHA on March 31, 2003. As Coordinator of Community Support Trudy Norman noted in her annual report, “our funder said it was because we did such a good job in highlighting and developing supportive recovery services that VIHA felt the service should sit within the Health Authority.”

The entire management structure was changed at this time as well. Rather than eleven or twelve managers reporting to the Executive Director – making her job almost impossible, the structure was changed to three managers, each with responsibility for one of Cool Aid’s core functions – shelters, housing and health care. Before the changes, staff had to do everything. With the growing size of projects – there were three large construction projects underway – it was impossible to manage them “off the side of your desk.”

According to Andrew Benson, current board member, “the last 6 or 7 years have really been about Cool Aid adjusting to the problems and the size of the problems in the Capital Region and working very closely with a large number of stakeholders to ensure that we are always meeting the needs of the community of the people that we serve that are most disadvantaged, but also understanding our place as well. Things that the current leadership team has put in place and is still in the whole organization is that there is a clear role for Cool Aid and there is a clear role for the partners with which we work and we cannot be all things to all people.” The reorganization was another step in the way to the maturity of the organization. Cool Aid continues to grow – at about four times what it was at the start of the transition – and needs a very sophisticated management strategy. Carol Finney was hired as CEO – and a change agent – during this very tumultuous
time. Once the changes had been made, she would leave to pursue other interests.

In 2003, Cool Aid played a major role in the report “Social Agencies in the Red Zone” presented by the Downtown Service Providers Group. Representatives of several agencies serving the homeless formed the Downtown Service Providers in April 2003. In May 2003 two representatives of the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, Street Issues Liaison Committee joined the group. The purpose was to identify the services provided by the social agencies, agency mandates, gaps, solutions and resources required to address the emerging social issues in the downtown core. Nineteen agencies in the Red Zone were surveyed in May and June. The report identified the following as issues in the downtown core for the homeless and gaps that need to be addressed:

- lack of safe, affordable housing,
- lack of mental health and addictions treatment and support services,
- unemployment, and
- lack of coordination and collaboration among social service providers

The paper ended with a call to action and taking the next steps by developing, as a community, business, special agencies and consumers, strategies to improve safety, livability, and service delivery in the downtown.94

In February 2004, Cool Aid was one of the authors of a comprehensive report on health care entitled “Integrated Health Services for a High-Risk Population,” Irene Haigh-Gidora, Cool Aid’s Manager of Community Health Services worked with Michael Gotto, Project Manager, Community Health Program, Vancouver Island Health Authority, and Alice Taft, Area Director, South Island, Primary & Community Hospital Care and Acting Director, Mental Health and Addictions Services, Vancouver Island Health Authority. As noted in the executive summary, “This article describes an innovative model of primary health care delivery, developed to meet the unique needs of those least likely to access the health care system The Cool Aid Community Health Centre offers comprehensive, integrated health services for an inner-city population struggling with mental illnesses, addictions and dire poverty. The authors describe the multidisciplinary services that comprise a continuum of care and the challenges in establishing performance measurements to demonstrate accountability.”95 Among the topics discussed are the
background to, and the development of, the Cool Aid Community Health Centre noting the specific goals and the multi-disciplinary team that provided the services. The report also noted “the CHC provides an unique opportunity for research of critical population health issues among marginalized, hard-to-access groups.”

2004 was also a year of recognition for excellence for a Cool Aid project. Fairway Woods, the seniors housing complex located in Langford, captured three Gold CARE Awards for Cottage Grove Contracting Ltd. at the 2004 CARE Awards held at the Fairmont Empress Hotel. Fairway Woods, a 32-unit, special needs project, won Project of the Year, Best Multi-Family Development, and Excellence by Public/Private Partnerships Creating Housing Affordability. The project was a joint venture involving the Canada-BC Affordable Housing Program, BC Housing, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Victoria Cool Aid Society, and Cottage Grove Contracting Ltd. “The judges were very impressed by this innovative seniors project undertaken by Cottage Grove Contracting Ltd. and their partners,” said Casey Edge, Executive Officer of the Canadian Home Builders’ Association-Victoria. “The Fairway Woods project demonstrates the solutions required to create housing affordability for seniors and other groups in our region.”

Planning began for a seniors housing program adjacent to the Aberdeen Private Hospital. Hillside Terrace, an Assisted Living project developed in partnership with BC Housing and the Vancouver Island Health Authority, was intended to house seniors who have difficulty fitting into regular housing situations and need a higher level of care. VIHA would provide the personal medical care, while Cool Aid would provide the housing component and would also facilitate community development within the building. This project became a somewhat divisive issue for the board who began to wonder “are we overextended?” Groundbreaking was held in September 2004 with completion scheduled for February 2006.

In November 2004, the REES network program moved from its location adjacent to the Eric Martin Pavilion on Lee Street to Pandora Avenue, locating its office closer to other Cool Aid services. In the new location, from where it could better serve its clients, REES noted a significant increase in the number of people accessing its services on a monthly basis.

During the winter of 2004,
Cool Aid participated in the Cold Wet Weather strategy with other agencies, and increase shelter capacity by 25 beds from September to April. Don McTavish tells how this came about. “It was cold, we had done everything here that we could and when I got home that afternoon Mayor Lowe phoned and said: “Hey we’ve got a lot of people out there on the street and we know the shelters are full. I managed to open this old building that we have that is slated for demolition – The Silver Threads Building – if I provide a commissionaire can you provide some staff and we’ll get some mats and some blankets and we’ll sleep people inside.” We said all right we’ll do what we can. So we came down and the City, the Police, Emergency Services and ourselves got together and opened that up for a few weeks and then moved those mats here to Streetlink. That started the ball rolling with having those additional spaces here in winter and then eventually those spaces became year round. ”

Also, in 2004 the City of Victoria, along with 9 other municipalities in the Greater Victoria area, proclaimed January 15 ‘Homeless Day’. Together, the municipalities agreed to the following:

• It is recognized that the number of homeless is increasing and having a negative effect on the heath of the community and on the health of individuals.
• there remains a civic commitment to increase the quality of life for all citizens by promoting and advocating for supported housing for the homeless.

Cool Aid carried a preliminary survey in 2004 that showed that Cool Aid served 3,400 clients in the first 6 months of 2004, compared to just 1,700 in all of 2003. Staff at the medical clinic treated about 1,200 people every two weeks, about two-thirds of which are either HIV-positive or have Hepatitis C. The problem was exacerbated by cuts to the welfare system by the new Liberal government; those who could no longer afford housing turned to Cool Aid for help, overextending facilities. Cool Aid provided information on the homeless problem to a task force created by Premier Campbell to study the situation. On January 15, 2005, more than 150 community volunteers walked the city’s streets to count Victoria’s homeless. Forty-three routes encompassing three municipalities were surveyed, and geographical maps of homeless districts were created to assist volunteers. On a night when temperatures dropped to -10C, 168 people were found sleeping outside in the freezing temperatures, and another 500,
including more than 100 children and parents, were found in emergency shelters and roadside motels throughout the city.\textsuperscript{99} The results of this survey presented a chilling picture of just how serious the problem of homeless was – with at least 700 absolute homeless people in Victoria on that day; this no doubt shocked many citizens.

The Community Casual Labour Pool, a free service that matches employers with workers looking for short term, casual positions, was established in the downtown core in 2005. It was located in the REES Network centre, which provides access to computers, fax, copier, local phone and newspapers. In the first few months in operation after the move, the number of clients increased significantly.\textsuperscript{100}

Current Executive Director Kathy Stinson was hired in April 2005 as Manager of Operations – a new position. Not long after she was hired, CEO Carol Finney resigned and Kathy was hired as Interim Executive Director, then confirmed in the position in the fall. She notes, “We did not replace the position I had been brought in as. We did not feel it was necessary for the requirements of the organization.”\textsuperscript{101} She works with the three program managers and is their only link to the Board of Directors. Together with the Board and the management team, she develops the strategic plan for the organization. She is involved in all aspects of the organization, human resources, finances, liaising with the communities and is the face of the organization with the media. She works with funders for all of the major programs. She also sits on the Committee to End Homelessness and thinks that Cool Aid, because it has so many fundamental services, is in a unique position to be a leader in this area.

In July 2005, the Cool Aid family was saddened by the untimely death of Laurie Smith. As Dr. Charles Barber wrote in a tribute, “When he died at 64 in early July, the name Laurie Smith was largely forgotten. But those who today benefit from Cool Aid, and in particular its extraordinary medical services, could do worse than pause a moment in his honour.”\textsuperscript{102} Editions of \textit{Cool News}, the Victoria Cool Aid Society Employee Newspaper, continued to remind employees of the history of the organization with different articles and clippings from the archival collection.

In 2005, the focus of Cool Aid turned to leveraging its capabilities and experience to forge strategic partnerships that responded to the
need for change in how social services are delivered. Cool Aid and AIDS Vancouver Island pooled their limited resources to acquire the former Bingo Hall property at 713 Johnson Street for the future home of the ACCESS Health Services Centre. This venture was made possible by a significant donation by the former owner and the support of VanCity Credit Union. The new centre will centralize health care and support services under one roof. It will benefit the community through reduced demands on emergency and acute care services and a reduction in transmitted diseases. In a spirit of cooperation, Cool Aid provided a temporary home for the Our Place drop in centre while construction was being completed on their new facility. They moved in January 2006 and operated their services from 713 Pandora until fall 2007. Without the support of Cool Aid, Our Place would most likely not have had a home and their services could have been lost. Cool Aid continues to work together with all groups who help the disadvantaged.

In January 2006, Hillside Terrace was completed after five years of planning and a year of construction. In a unique partnership arrangement, Cool Aid operates the 45 Assisted Living housing units on the upper floors, with VIHA leasing space to operate the Hillside Seniors Health Centre on the main floor. The housing portion of the building includes terraces on the second and third floors, a common dining area where 2 daily meals are served, a library and a TV room. Tenants benefit from weekly housekeeping services as well as 24/7 access to Home Support and Resident Support staff. The building is located on major bus routes and within a short walk of a large shopping centre. Apartments are all one-bedroom suites with full kitchens and good accessibility and safety features. Four suites are purpose built for wheelchair use. Scooter storage is available in the basement, or they may be stored inside suites. Limited short-term visitor parking is available on site.

An affiliation between the Cool Aid Dental Clinic and the UBC Faculty of Dentistry made possible a resident dentist joining the Cool Aid team from October 2005 to February 2006. He worked with Cool Aid staff and also traveled to Beecher Bay and Port Renfrew with the Mobile Medical Clinic. This relationship will bring new dentists each year, gaining them valuable experience under difficult conditions.

In January 2006, Cool Aid became managers of Cedar Grove, 21 units of safe, affordable housing
for people who are managing chronic addiction and mental health issues. The addition of a functional meeting space has enhanced the sense of community; tenants also help with gardening and maintenance, giving them a sense of accomplishment. By implementing the Cool Aid Housing model, the frontline staff quickly established trust and mutual respect with the tenants and diffused issues that were previously the subject of numerous complaints from neighbours and calls to emergency services.

A major community based project for 2005-2006 was the “Homeless in the Garden City Calendar” project, produced by Leadership Victoria. The Shelter Program encouraged their clients to take photographs that had personal meaning to them. Once all photographs were taken, a panel chose the ones that would be in the 16-month calendar. A launch event was held at the Canoe Club Brew Pub and Restaurant with federal NDP leader Jack Layton, long an advocate for the homeless, giving an impassioned keynote address. This project put a human face to the homeless problem and the media coverage brought the issue to the public consciousness.

Cool Aid shelters were again an integral participant in the Extreme Weather Protocol. Cool Aid took the lead role with the communication and decision making. In August 2006, Victoria Police approached the shelter program to consider a special partnership. The result was the opening of St. John the Divine temporary shelter for the six weeks leading into the Cold/Wet Weather program. Dubbed the “Divine Intervention,” the emergency shelter provided a meaningful link to Cool Aid’s history as St. John’s had provided a similar service in the early years and had been supportive in the intervening time.

Cool Aid sponsored the Victoria Homeless Needs Survey, February 5-9, 2007. Among the objectives of this project were determining what it will take to give those who are homeless the services and housing that they need; providing supportive research for effective research for effective policy development, service planning and fund development for all participating
agencies; raising public and community awareness of homelessness; building upon communication and partnerships between service providers, business and government regarding homelessness’ and producing a current estimate of how many people are homeless in our region.”

The survey found that more than 1,242 people in the Capital Region are homeless or nearly homeless. Homeless was defined as “being without a predictable, clean, safe residence to return to whenever one chooses.”

Desmond House was added to the Cool Aid housing program in March 2007. Purchased by BC Housing in an effort to preserve existing rental housing stock, it provides 27 single room units with shared kitchens, bathrooms, laundry and showers. There are also living room-style meeting areas on each floor. One Cool Aid staff member works full-time to support the tenants to live independently. A strong community spirit is exuded by the tenants, many of whom contribute by performing daily janitorial duties or preparing coffee or food for their neighbours.

As noted in the 2006-2007 annual report, the housing program was not just providing shelter to the people who are often referred to as the “hard to house” but it was also helping many of those people to return to the greater community. “… People who have bounced from institution to institution all their lives have been able to live with us for a long time. These are people who would otherwise be sleeping under a bridge or in emergency shelters. Others have stabilized to the point of being able to move on.”

The latest addition to the Cool Aid shelter system is the Next Steps Transitional Shelter. Located at 2317 Dowler Place in North Park, it provides an opportunity for emergency shelter clients to access the resources and services they need to get their lives back on track. Such services include housing, employment, financial, life skills, and mentorship, as well as physical and mental health services. The intent is for the clients to make a successful transition from homelessness to stable housing. Cool Aid staff work closely with individual participants to develop personal action plans designed to help them move to a better place to live their lives. There is a maximum of fifteen individuals (mixed gender) staying in the house at any time, with the length of stay from 30 to 90 days. Participants must be involved daily in the operation and upkeep of the house and grounds as well as in the
progression of their individual action plans. The Next Steps program is funded by BC Housing and the United Way of Greater Victoria.\(^\text{110}\)

The new co-ordinator of the extreme weather protocol for the City of Victoria was a Cool Aid success story. He grew up in a family that struggled a lot; he lived on the street between the ages of 15 and 20. He was inspired by the Streetlink Shelter that took care of him in 1991. He stayed at Streetlink until he was back on his feet, eventually going to University for a degree in geography and psychology. He has worked with Streetlink and volunteered during the Homeless Needs survey. \(^\text{111}\)
The Current Situation
In 2008, Cool Aid is engaged in fundraising for the ACCESS Health Centre. Plans are being drawn up to convert the former William James Mable Carriage Works to a comprehensive health care facility. Victoria City Council has given permission for the construction of a new shelter on the former Ellice Street Park site. This new facility will replace the overcrowded Streetlink facility as an emergency shelter and will provide 80-beds along with 24 self-contained supported housing units. Once the Ellice Street facility is complete, Streetlink will be converted to much-needed supportive housing.

On the 40th anniversary of the formation of Cool Aid, some of the original members of the Victoria Youth Council met at 1527 Amelia Street for a private celebration of the success of their “little” project. This is one of the few CYC projects that has survived. Lynn Curtis, who was instrumental in the original group, has always believed that “being persistent and working hard makes thing happen.”

A very public celebration of the anniversary was held at Centennial Square on August 16, 2008. The poster advertising the arts festival and reunion was designed by another Cool Aid success. Tony Van Deven was helped at Streetlink and through programs there discovered he had a talent for art. He was also one of the artists featured at the Arts Pavilion. On the main stage, an eclectic mix of musical styles entertained visitors. Cool Aid provided brown bag lunches intended to nourish as well as provide education on nutrition and homelessness. In the kid’s area, young people could have their faces painted or do their own art. A historical display guaranteed to bring back memories was set up beside the volunteers ready to answer questions. The most unusual activity was the “Doggy Idol” hosted by Citizen Canine. Dogs of all sizes and shapes appeared with their owners and were entered in fun categories. Cool Aid staff member
Mike Raymer and his toy poodle Little Buddha were the winners of the “Owner most like dog” category. A short documentary detailing the history of Cool Aid will be screened in 2009.

As Cool Aid turns 40, it is important to look back to see how much progress has been made. Cool Aid has grown from a single program for housing transient youth with a modest operating budget, to become the major service provider for those who are at the lowest socio-economic level. With an operating budget of over $13,000,000, supported housing units, emergency shelters, an extensive health care service, and support services, Cool Aid has formed partnerships with funders, the community, the police, governments, corporations, and private citizens to carry out its mandate “To provide holistic, shelter, housing and community health services to marginalized adults in the Victoria area.”

There are three distinct program areas of Cool Aid, each run by one manager. Cool Aid continues to grow – by about 60% over the last four years. The budget has risen from $7 million to $12 million. Homelessness is now the number one social issue and more attention is being paid because the issue is now out in the open. At the local and provincial level, the issue has been raised; on the federal level, it’s not on the radar Kathy Stinson brings nurturing leadership to the organization; she has a strategic focus but can also keep in tune with the day-to-day operations. Cool Aid has become more responsive to what its partners need and what is needed to be part of a community solution. As Kathy Stinson says, “It’s not about just getting bigger; it’s about doing thing better and making sure that it is always for the betterment of our clients and the community as a whole.”

John Crean, Housing Manager notes that when he started at Cool Aid in 1990, there was one...
building with limited capacity; he now manages eight building sites all over Victoria with more to come. The number of clients placed in affordable housing has risen from 26 at Swift House to 256 in the 8 facilities. Throughout this time, John has avoided the term “transitional housing” for a reason. It is critical that our tenants believe they have a home and that they belong to a community. The staff go to great lengths to help them understand is that when they move into an apartment under Cool Aid’s housing umbrella, that it is indeed a place they can call home. It’s not a facility, it's not a temporary placement, it is their home. Cool Aid does everything possible to respect that with a non-invasive, non-intrusive policy. As John Crean explains: “The people that Cool Aid serves, by the very nature of the issues, are in transition all the time. If you tell them you have come to housing and you’re still going to be in transition, but as soon as you start doing really well, we’re going to have to ask you to move on, there will be no incentive to really do well because they will be afraid to do well. The way we do it is sort of around the back door and they just get on with their own ideas, and it works a lot better. We actually have more people transitioning through than we would if we called it transitional housing. We are giving them confidence in themselves, building self-esteem, building trust, and working relationships.”

BC Housing subsidizes the rents above the basic shelter allowance, leaving clients money left for food, personal items, and a few extras. A return of federal government funding for housing projects would go a long way to help alleviate both the need for housing and the need for employment. Cool Aid staff freely share their experience in the provision of housing and encourage other groups to develop a clear vision at the beginning of the process, find a small group that can agree on that vision, and despite the obstacles that will arise during the process, hold out that vision and walk toward it. With a clear goal in sight, anything is possible. The Cool Aid Housing program is proof of that.

Don McTavish, Manager of Shelters, has seen many changes in both management of temporary accommodation and the increasing need for it. A busy day in the early days at Sandy Merriman House was 12 women; a moderately busy day today is 60 – 65, just for drop-in services. Just to come in for a meal and to say “hello”. Also at that time Streetlink was running about 50 beds, give or take a couple; today, it’s 95, sometimes closer to 100. So during the time of the numbers
increasing at the shelters, there were two trends over the last decade. One was that housing has become harder to find so it’s become less available, and it’s become more expensive and all the things that go with that – utilities, food, damage deposits, etc. have gone up as well. The needs on the street have changed as well in the decade.

When Don first started, you would encounter people who were alcoholic or were doing cocaine or they would be doing a lot of pot smoking. These days crystal meth has come on board; a lot of the more intense effects of that drug have really affected the way we go about providing services. He wishes the level of public awareness and government interest in affordable housing and supports 10 years ago was at least what it is now. He noted, “If we had started building buildings ten years ago, if we had changed the rules to allow developers to build rental housing instead of condos ten years ago – if all this could have been predicted and seen back then it would have been unimaginably cheaper to have actually solved the issue ten years ago. Just building costs alone have gone through the roof. Hopefully that will be a good lesson from history, to do it now instead of waiting another five or ten years because it will be even more difficult then.”

Cool Aid’s shelter services are unique in BC as they offer multi-services. There is a network of shelter providers – 11 large city shelters – that share ideas and work together to help their clientele.

Irene Haigh-Gidora, Manager of Cool Aid Health Services notes that social issues for the population that Cool Aid serves has definitely worsened. The situation on the street, particularly with drug issues brings different needs to the health centre. Among the programs under her supervision are the Community Health Centre, the Dental Clinic, and the REES program. All staff are very dedicated and have an understanding of the medical issues and the health situations that the patients face. They are very skilled at the complexity and diversity of varied health issues of clients in the downtown area. She notes that Cool Aid is very respected in the Health Care field as it has changed in response to different needs and feels that it is important to recognize the contributions that have been made in the past. Without those early volunteers, this system would not exist today. Irene particularly mentions Dr. Joe Haegert who has been there since the beginning and continues to be a very important part of the clinic.
Cool Aid has certainly grown up over the past forty years. It now has a stable management system and can handle growth at high levels. The staff are incredibly dedicated and do not feel what they do is a “job.” The passion for the work shines through each one – and was evident in all interviews - and makes the world a better place for all of us. The future looks bright for Cool Aid with even more projects coming online to help those who need it most.
Endnotes

1. Much of the material in this section was obtained in a personal interview with Lynn Curtis on July 3, 2008.


7. Social Education Centre calendar, 1966.

8. House of Commons debates, Volume 111, Number 95, Friday, June 10, 1966.


12. Information in this section came from an email from Charles Barber, forwarded by Lynn Curtis on April 5, 2009.

13. Andrew Zane, “Note re renting on building space for coffee house,” March 3, 1967, approximately 2:30 p.m.


19. Telephone interview by Alan Rycroft with Charles Barber.

20. Comment made by Lynn Curtis while editing the rough draft of this manuscript.

21. 1968 flyer for Cool Aid services.


29. “Freeze the Cool Aid” publication by the Citizens to Freeze the Cool Aid.


36. Ibid.


45. Letter from Roy E. L Watson, Associate Professor, University of Victoria, to Mr. Hugh Wade, December 1, 1972.


49. Minutes of meeting of the Board of Directors of the Pacific Community Self-Development Society, October 9, 1975.


51. Motions Passed at the Annual General Meeting of the Pacific Community Self-Development Society held at 1900 Fernwood Road April 25, 1976.

52. Documents in Cool Aid archives.

53. Personal interview with Frances Mahon Chapman by Michelle Brady, June 10, 2008.


65. Ibid.


71. Victoria Cool Aid Society’s 25th Anniversary Gala Evening program.


75. Susan Danard, “Province kicks in for homeless shelter,” *Times Colonist*, April 20,
40 Years of Caring: Brief History of Cool Aid

1996.


78. King Lee, “Warm, compassionate Cool Aid official ‘will be such a loss,’” *Times Colonist*, June 12, 1999.

79. Complete text of the tribute can be found as an Appendix to this report.


86. Personal interview with Irene Haigh-Gidora, January 22, 2009.


40 Years of Caring: Brief History of Cool Aid


93. Personal interview with Andrew Benson, Board member and former President, November 28, 2008.


98. Personal interview with Don McTavish, January 5, 2009.


106. “Homeless Needs Survey,”
40 Years of Caring: Brief History of Cool Aid

www.coolaid.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=id=55&Itemid=200


115. Crean interview, March 5, 2009.
People interviewed or contacted for information

Charles Barber  
Andrew Benson  
Gretchen Brewin  
Frances Mahon Chapman  
  John Crean  
  Lynn Curtis  
  Jane Dewing  
Irene Haigh-Gidora  
  Mike Lewis  
  Don McTavish  
  Trudy Norman  
  Jody Patterson  
  Diana Salen  
  Kathy Stinson  
  Phil Ward

Special thanks

Ken Neal, Victoria Cool Aid Society reception desk and archivist  
Alan Rycroft, Community Relations, Victoria Cool Aid Society