



Caring Community

BY SHANNON LINDEN

***if it takes a village to raise a child,
perhaps it takes a city to raise a family***

*For the past 150 years
the Sally Anne has been
saving lives; here's how
you can help today*

Consider sponsoring a family. Visit kelownasalvationarmy.ca and click on the Christmas link or call Jamie Johnstone at (250) 860-2329. You'll be matched with a needy family for whom you will purchase toys and make a financial contribution that will go toward a gift card to a local grocery store. "This provides dignity and allows for different dietary needs," Johnstone explains. "People are empowered when they can shop for themselves." The process also allows families to obtain the freshest produce for their Christmas meals. Check out the website for more ways to help, including the Christmas Kettle campaign.

According to Jamie Johnstone, Case Worker and Program Coordinator with the Kelowna Salvation Army, this community truly comes together to support those in need at Christmas time.

"We have so many different people that come to us for help," she explains. "From moms and dads to moms and moms, dads and dads, single parents, even roommates. If they're pooling resources, we consider them a family."

One of her favorite jobs is taking parents to the toyshop set up in the church gym. Selecting toys sure to be on wish lists helps parents a little down on their luck give their kids a lot of joy. Brimming with everything from little toy drums and dolls that cuddle and coo, to Lego and the latest video games, the new items are donated by everyone from kids who empty their piggy banks to corporations.

"It's a beautiful experience," Johnstone says, eyes glistening. "Seeing all the happy crying that goes on. I tell people, 'this is your community caring. This is people loving on you and your children.'"

For many, a lack of finances is only part of the problem—hunger can be a constant companion,

but loneliness will starve the soul.

"A lot of us go through Christmas and even the rest of the year isolated. We return from work, lock our doors and think, 'I'm alone! Nobody cares for my kids or me. Nobody knows what's happening to us.' Christmas is a time to break that barrier wide open," Johnstone says.

She ought to know. Now a successful administrator with the organization, she was once on the other side of the desk. "Before I needed the Salvation Army, I was a very naïve person, struggling with anxiety. If I'm completely honest, I didn't know how to run my life," Johnstone admits. "Add on a marriage that was awful...I won't be disrespectful to my ex-husband, but it was traumatic."

Left alone with a baby and a toddler, Johnstone found herself wondering what to do for Christmas.

A friend who used the Salvation Army's services encouraged her to come along. "She offered to drive me there. She said it would be fine; we'd do it together."

It was hard, but with that first cry for help, Johnstone set in motion lasting changes in her

Jamie's Story

life. She left with a hamper of healthy food and the perfect toys for her kids. "I cried when I put the turkey in my fridge. I could put food that looked like a real Christmas meal into my kids' mouths. I hadn't failed them."

And that's one of the most important messages the Salvation Army strives to convey: anyone can get down on luck, but they are not failures as human beings. With a little help, we can all learn to love ourselves and to see the possibilities we possess.

With hampers, recipients are given a list of programs designed to teach skills and instill confidence to lift them up and out of poverty.

"Following my divorce, my kids and I were homeless after selling our family home. It was the darkest time of my life. I didn't know how to get back to normal. I didn't know how to mom my kids.

I was crying and praying, 'What do I do next?'" Johnstone recalls. "I got a phone call from my now good friend, Pastor Connie. She asked me if I wanted to be in the Breakthrough program."

A year later Johnstone did indeed break through the darkness, basking in a light she never imagined.

"I learned to trust the people who invested in me. They saw those shiny, beautiful things in me that I'd forgotten were there, that made me capable."

Juggling three jobs, Johnstone got back on her feet and then the caseworker position opened up. Combining that role with programming and guiding Breakthrough, Johnstone created her dream career, but she still had to convince administration it could be done. Through multiple plans and presentations, she proved she had the right stuff.

"I did what I had to do and I was hired. I feel so blessed.

Everyday it doesn't feel like work. I share a past with all the people who come to see me for help. And it all started because someone believed in me."

Angela's Story

At one time Angela Stadnyk was happily married, helping her husband run a Pawn Shop, while raising two small boys. "Things happened quickly and suddenly I found myself alone, at the food bank, standing next to the people we used to lend money to," she says.

The Christmas season wasn't looking too festive until she turned to the Salvation Army. "When I got a hamper I thought, 'you got this Christmas,' she recalls.

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Like Johnstone, she took some parenting courses offered by the organization. "When I got a phone call for the Breakthrough program I thought, 'Oh, no! Not another parenting course!'" Laughing, she jokes, "I wondered, what more can I possibly learn? I'm going to be mom of the year."

In fact, she just might be—now that she's raising a blended family of five. "After I left my husband I got into low-income housing with my boys, now five years later, I got this!" She holds out her bejewelled wedding finger. "We just built a house together," she says, beaming.

"The Breakthrough program taught me how to deal with day-to-day struggles, the sometimes perception out there about being a single mom... how do you breakthrough and move forward?"

"I was told by the ministry I had to go back to work and I was so scared! I hadn't worked in a while but I applied for a job at the Thrift Store and I got it!"

Stadnyk understands how hard it is to negotiate a world where enough is never enough. "Someone at school got \$50 from the tooth fairy! I told my son the tooth fairy had to take a pay cut this year," she jokes. "You want your children to feel valuable and worthy, but on the other hand, I embraced my situation. I had to re-think my life, seek help, and it made me—and my kids—well rounded. We might be considered low-income, but we're okay."

More than okay, as last year Angela became manager of the Thrift Store. "I absolutely love my job and feel so honoured to work for an organization that I've had the opportunity to see from the other side—to know the changes that can be made."

Jamie Johnstone concurs. "I said to my boss (Pastor Darryl Burry) the other day, 'It's such a pleasure to work for you' and he said, 'Let's just call it with me.'

That's what the Salvation Army is all about. ♡

Salvation Army throughout the Okanagan Shuswap

Penticton
2469 Main Street
250.492.6494

Vernon
3303 32nd Avenue
250.549.4111

Kelowna
1480 Sutherland Avenue
250.860.2329

Salmon Arm
191 2nd Avenue NE
250.832.9196



In the North Okanagan, you can adopt a family for Christmas through the North Okanagan Youth & Family Services (NOYFSS).

NOYFSS is a registered, non-profit, charitable organization that has been serving families of the North Okanagan since 1974. Lorel Brown, Program Supervisor, "We've been doing this for over 20 years. This is one of our Heart projects. Because we are a counselling agency, we need to keep the family's information confidential. So when businesses or individuals adopt a family, we get to be the elves and do the delivery! It's really fun and brings that spirit of giving to everyone."

Visit <http://www.noyfss.org>
Click on the "Get involved" link at the top of the page.