

City of Refuge

Spring 2003

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 2- Issue 1

Making Work . . . Work

by Wayne Rumsby

A lack of meaningful employment is very common with our friends at Sanctuary. Employment issues while being a critical concern are often not clearly understood either by those afflicted or by those who try to help. The most common advice that our street friends hear is, "get a job" – easier said than done. There is an overwhelming prejudice suggesting that the poor are lazy. This kind of thinking does very little to solve the problem. When I started working with Sanctuary on issues of employment I quickly realized that I also brought my own prejudice. It became clear that any employment initiative undertaken would need to be consistent with Sanctuary's mission statement and the Bible on which it is based.

Employment is when someone receives financial reward for their dedicated, consistent and effectively focused effort toward someone else's needs. The purpose of employment, in most cases, is to earn a living wage. We work so that we can live. This view of work, while not entirely unbiblical, dates way back to Greek philosophy. To the Greeks work and leisure were at opposite ends of life's spectrum and today that is still the underlying value which motivates us. In fact many businesses use incentive programs that include leisure rewards in order to motivate their employees. I would even go one step further and suggest that dedicated Christians often see their work as simply a means to financing their service for God.

Once I discovered how depressing this "work for leisure" rat race was I began to ask myself, "Is this what God had in mind?" I went to the Bible for some answers and there it was right in Genesis, God was working and he saw that the product of his work was good. Then he created man and put him in the garden to work the ground and keep it in order. Work is a God concept. If we truly believe that work is a God concept then it must have some greater value than delivering us from itself. Perhaps it would be better to view both work and leisure as being vital to our health. Furthermore, leisure should not be confused with rest. In our rat race world that

works in order to afford leisure, often the leisure time is really used as a time of rest to recover from the work. In a healthy balanced life work should be a process of discovering all that we have been created to be. Employment that achieves this is truly, "meaningful work".

Why then don't we simply focus on linking our unemployed friends with meaningful work? The answer is two-sided. Many of our folks have other barriers or issues that contribute to their state of unemployment. Having a job would simply mean having a different place to experience their struggles. The other side is that most employers are not equipped to help people overcome a lifetime of problems. While I believe that the answer is in meaningful work I do think that the first steps to unlocking this secret must take place within a supportive environment.

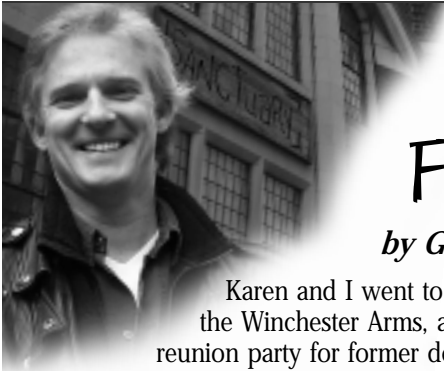
That's where Mustard Tree comes into the picture. Mustard Tree is Sanctuary's new employment training program designed to help folks from our community overcome their barriers to employment. Each participant will enter into a contract with Mustard Tree. The terms of the contract, on one side, will be uniquely geared to the needs of each individual, and on the other side will be commonly geared to the needs of Mustard Tree. Mustard Tree, although an arm of Sanctuary, and therefore a charitable enterprise will be run very much like a business.

It will be set up as a small manufacturing business making furniture accessories. The products produced will be sold and the profits, although limited by the rules of non-profit business, will be used to contribute to the cost of running the operation. Therefore the needs of Mustard Tree that balance each contract will be efficiency, productivity and contribution to overhead. The tricky part is that we must always remember that our primary objective is to help people overcome their barriers but it still must be done in a very businesslike manner.

The friends that I have made at Sanctuary are real people and I think they need real jobs. For many, finding a job would mean leaving the support of our little community. Donald was one who chose to go get a job. Everyday he got up at the crack of



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A View From Here

by Greg Paul, Director

Karen and I went to a party last night at the Winchester Arms, a local pub. It was a reunion party for former denizens of “Tent City” and some of their friends, thrown by a few anti-poverty action groups. Tent City was for several years Canada’s most visible display of poverty and essential homelessness, a squatter town of tents, plywood’n’plastic lean-tos and a handful of prefab “houses” smaller than my bedroom. About a hundred people shared the pie-slice of toxic land wedged between Lakeshore Avenue and a Port of Toronto canal with their dogs, an untold number of rats, and a pretty constant ebb and flow of reporters, church people, anti-poverty activists and well-meaning folks who dropped off loads of firewood, food, blankets, clothing and even the occasional generator.

One friend had a baby while living there, another died several others were burnt out of their places – sometimes through their own carelessness, other times by arson. Some lived amid piles of garbage and others lined little walkways on their “property” with painted rocks. One guy built amazing scrap metal sculptures. Some went out every day looking for work, several got pinched for break and entries, and rumour has it there were a couple of women who would turn tricks in the port-a-potties. Most drank and/or smoked crack at an astonishing rate.

It was the kind of place where an intimate gathering of bosom pals could turn into a fist fight and back again in a matter of minutes. The kind of place where, if you broke the code, a group of very serious guys would explain to you that you needed to leave Tent City now – *right* now – and not come back. And where, if you were laid up for some reason, those same guys would show up every day with food and a couple of cans of strong beer.

One fine June day last year, the police showed up with private security people and some contractors. They came around 11 am, when most people had left for the day. They moved the stragglers out, established a perimeter, and by the time the residents started to return late in the afternoon, there was already high fencing around half the property. They had shut down what claimed to be the longest standing “squat” in modern Canadian history.

The invitation to the party said we’d be celebrating a victory – in the wake of the closure of Tent City, most of the residents were placed in apartments around the city, subsidized to the tune of up to \$800 per month. I’m glad for my friends who now have safer, more dignified places to live, but I wonder about how just this is for other friends who have to try to find a place to live for the regular welfare payment of \$325 per month – a literally impossible task in Toronto.

It was quite a party. There were pans of lasagna and souvlaki, trays of fresh veggies and three free beers each for everyone.

A band played, people danced, and Jack Layton (former city councillor and now leader of the federal NDP) showed up to say a few words. Everybody seemed to be having a good time.

I sat and chatted with a public health nurse for a few minutes. We talked about how crummy it feels losing our friends one after another – at least three of my own friends just from Tent City have died in the past two years. One was hung in his own tent under mysterious circumstances, another had a brain hemorrhage after a drinking bout, yet another died bloated and turning yellow because he wouldn’t go back to the doctor a second time. Earlier in the day, some of our outreach staff discovered that one of our people had been run over by a truck on Yonge Street, just minutes after they’d given him a pair of socks.

As we watched our friends partying, we were both mentally identifying the ones we expected to lose next – I could easily pick out four or five who could go any day. Most of the people there had been placed in apartments, but the destructive lifestyles hadn’t changed. Housing, generally a bachelor apartment with a mattress in one corner, doesn’t seem to have stopped the slide.

There’s no question that Toronto suffers from a severe shortage of affordable housing. \$800 monthly will get you a small bachelor, if you can find a vacant one. It’s a problem for more than just the homeless. Increasingly, lower to middle income families are finding it virtually impossible to find safe, dignified housing they can afford. Unskilled work that pays a living wage are hard to find, too. A growing number of “ordinary folks” are being forced into homelessness by this situation.

As serious as the problem is, though, housing alone is not enough for my friends. The problem is too big to be described, let alone solved, in a 5 second sound bite on the evening news. They need homes, with all that powerful word implies. Interesting, isn’t it, that we talk about *homeless* people needing *housing*? As if, if we can just store them someplace that’s weatherproof, they’ll be okay. They need, as I do, families that hold them and tell them they’re precious, friends who support, encourage and challenge, communities that provide a place to do work that is dignified and valuable. That, in the broadest, deepest sense, is what home is. And many of my friends have never experienced anything but a cruel parody of it.

When we talk about community at Sanctuary, this kind of “home” is really what we mean. That’s why we share meals together instead of serving them to the poor; it’s why we’re trying to buy a house and plant a family made up of street and “normal” folks in it; it’s why we’re starting an employment training program, and someday, we hope, a series of small businesses. We’re trying to find ways to live our lives together.

God’s invitation to all of us through Jesus is to “come on home”. Some of us are lost in a far country; the journey home is long and hard, and full of self-recrimination. Some of us are just out working the field, in sight of the house. The journey home barely merits the word; it’s just a short walk – but resentment and self-righteousness may keep us out there long after the sun has gone down. Either way, the Father is waiting.

Faces of Our Community

Richvale Bible Chapel

The people of Richvale Bible Chapel in Richmond Hill, Ont., were the very first partnering congregation Sanctuary ever had.

In fact, they were involved even before there was a Sanctuary! In March 1992, RBC commended Greg and Karen Paul essentially as missionaries in the city, working out of what was then the old Central Gospel Hall. RBC continues to be very involved with Sanctuary, helping to support the Pauls financially and in a variety of other ways, donating food and clothing (including baking at Christmas time!) regularly.



Mitchell Bentley

The past six months has seen an increase in people interested in volunteering at Sanctuary and for this we are very grateful. Mitchell Bentley is one of these people. Through the Ontario Works program, he was encouraged to find a place to volunteer. A resident in the neighbourhood, Mitchell had heard

about Sanctuary through acquaintances in the Gay Village. Complete with red baseball cap, and an incredible sense of fun, Mitchell shows up each week to help prepare and serve the lunch on Wednesdays. He has the ability to take any task, however menial, and throw in laughter and flair. Everyone enjoys working with him. Mitchell has expressed how welcome he has been made to feel at Sanctuary and as he encounters friends in the neighbourhood he testifies that it is indeed a "safe" place. Thank you Mitchell.

Lisa Kember-Mariano

Lisa Kember-Mariano and her husband Ron Mariano became involved with Sanctuary before their marriage seven years ago. For several years they were members of the worshipping community and active as volunteer late night street outreach workers. Lisa has served on Sanctuary's board for about six years, and is currently the board Chair. She's the President and founder of Hyperactive Communications, a corporate communications and public relations firm.



Bear

He's at Sanctuary most drop-ins: anticipating a shower, change of clothes, a supply of personal hygiene items; anxious to secure a couch, and of course, eager to eat. "Bear" is his street name, although we know otherwise. In his mid-fifties, Bear has seen more than most see in ten lifetimes. A veteran

of Vietnam his stories give glimpses into the whole other side of that war that few know about. Bear is also a veteran of the streets. Alleys, grates and hedges provide sleeping accommodations and patrons of Yorkville provide his income. These experiences have left their scars. Daily, Bear combats health issues and physical discomfort. Daily, he has to make sense of the memories while combating survival issues. At Sanctuary Bear has found friendship and we in turn, have found a friend.

Making Work...Work

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dawn and spent two hours riding the streetcar, subway, and the bus to Concord. When his work day was over he got to do it all over again. He got a job but he lost touch with the community that had rescued him from deep depression. Donald came back and now he works as Sanctuary's kitchen manager. He works in a community that embraces all that God has created him to be. I truly hope that we can do the same for others through the Mustard Tree Program.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Mustard Tree Employment Training Program please contact Wayne Rumsby 416-922-0628 ext 16 or by email wayne@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

What Does Sanctuary Mean to Me?



The first time I walked into Sanctuary I felt like I was home. A staff member and I talked till closing time that first day. On Thursday night I arrived again and felt once more at home. The staff were very friendly and welcoming. In fact, on the way to my nook, I got thinking about the friendships I could make there. One night, after I was attacked, I decided that I better do something about this. I talked to the staff at Sanctuary and they helped me get proper housing. I now live in a proper rooming house; I also receive money from Social Services. In order to keep this going they said that I needed to be involved in volunteer work, which I have found through Sanctuary.

by Steve Grant

Staff Comings & Goings

Sanctuary staff is growing again! We're delighted to welcome two new staff members, **Thea Prescod** and **Sharon Tiessen**, who will join us in May. Thea is a registered nurse and a long-time member of our community who has been hoping to work with us since university days. Sharon is an accomplished artist and musician (violin and cello!) who will serve as our arts co-ordinator. Both will join us on a full time basis, and as with other staff, will seek to develop a group of financial supporters/partners for their ministry here.

And farewell ... to Kathy Church, who left her position as Sanctuary's **Director of Organizational and Program Development** in March. In her two years with us, Kathy helped us diversify our funding base, change our paradigm of leadership and decision making, develop our health care and housing initiatives, and make the building barrier free. The impact of her work with us will be felt for years to come. We offer our prayers that God will richly bless Kathy and her husband Rob as he begins his practice as a physician in Ontario. And we're thankful to Kathy's supporters, who "gifted" us with her presence and abilities!

IMMEDIATE NEEDS:

With the addition of staff this year and the need to constantly **upgrade computers**, etc. we would appreciate donations of PC computers.

Requirements: Pentium 3 or newer, 500mhz, 128mb RAM, 5GB Hard Drive, CD Drive, Floppy Drive

Please contact Linda Rumsby at 416-922-0628 ext. 10 or email at lindar@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

Yes, I want to partner with you.

- My **church/workplace** should hear about Sanctuary.
- I would like to participate in a **volunteer orientation**.
- I commit to **pray** for the Sanctuary community.
- I would like to support Sanctuary on a **monthly basis**.
- I want to **financially support** your ministry:
 - where most needed
 - Staff Name _____
 - Street Outreach
 - Meal Programs
 - Health Care Arts/Music/Drama
 - Mustard Tree Employment Program

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Tel.: _____

Email: _____

Please make donations payable to: **Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto** 05-03

George Brown College Student Placement

*Sanctuary was privileged to offer placement to two George Brown College students studying social work. **Christine and Samantha** were able to gain valuable drop-in and street outreach experience. Christine has submitted her reflections on the time spent with us.*

As a student used to writing 3000 word essays, the 250 I have so graciously been allotted feels limited for what I want to say. Regardless, I will do my best. If I have left anyone out, please know that you have not been forgotten. I do not believe there is one person I could ever forget during my time at Sanctuary.

To my dear, sweet friend Donald: Thank you for teaching me how to cook pancakes and scrambled eggs - in mass quantities. Thank you for sharing your stories, your thoughts, and your beautiful Francis with us. I will fondly remember our Friday afternoon "cleaning" sessions, and I want you to know that it was an honour getting to know you. I will always consider you my friend.

To Lady Miss. Chris: You are one grumbly, cranky old woman! You are also the one lady I know who appreciates being considered as such. You are a beautiful person Chris. I love your wit, sarcasm, and I have the utmost respect for you. Thank you for your wisdom, and for your inspiration.

To Steve: Thank you for sharing your passion for the streets. From you I learned about respect, and putting myself in another man's shoes. I also have a little better understanding of why someone might buy a Honda. Heh heh. You are one cool dude, and I appreciated it all. Love to Crystal as well.

To all of my friends. To Greg, Marty (our 'protector'), Randy and Chaos, Evelyn (you're a doll), Lyf, Paul, Beth, Al, Ron, Wayne, Linda and their beautiful son Mark, Jonathon, Rob (Rocky, AKA G.B.), Mike, David, Billy, Shane, Calvin and Russell. Thank you all. Thank you for sharing your stories, your memories, your friendship and your community. Your generosity will always be remembered.

To Karen, for taking Samantha and I under her wing for our 4-month stay. Thank you for your time and your lessons, and for introducing us to so much. It was a sincere pleasure.

I will see you all again. Until then, my thoughts and my prayers are with you.

Blessings, Christine Choma

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

[SANCTUARY]

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