NEWSLETTER
Spring 2015

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Dear Friends & Supporters,

We are now well into 2015 and good things continue to happen for the youth and mothers at Aunt Leah’s Place. Many young people are being encouraged to continue their education, finish their training and find their first job.

As many of you know, I am the parent of four adult children and it is my privilege to hear about their struggles and successes, their parenting stories and their life experiences. At Aunt Leah’s Place, we have the parallel privilege of what I have as a parent in a mainstream home. Below are a few of the achievements that Aunt Leah’s Youth have shared with us over the last few months:

A young woman who had been a trainee at the Christmas Tree Lot in Burnaby during the 2012 & 2013 seasons was hired as an assistant manager this past Christmas. This was her first paid employment experience.

Another talented young man who had offered his writing skills and provided a significant contribution to our social media communications shared his success story. Over the Christmas holidays he successfully participated in and won his way through three levels of interviews and was hired in a full time position in early January.

Yesterday, I returned from a four day snow vacation at Manning Park with family & friends. While there I was greeted in the main lodge by one of our past residents. She was part of the “Kinder-Care” Staff at Manning and as part of her responsibilities looked after five of our lively grandchildren during our stay. During our conversation she told me that she will finish her contract at Manning in April and then begin a six month course at the Vancouver Hairdressing Academy.

And today a young woman visited us in her “scrubs” ready for a new position after graduating from a Medical Assistant Program.

All of these young people have benefited from our new SEFFY (Support Education for Foster Youth) program and they all have a new successful experience to share. I hope that you, as reader, will appreciate the importance of their stories and share my enthusiasm and gratitude for this new program.

These are very exciting times for Aunt Leah’s Place and I would like to thank you for continuing the conversation about the plight of foster youth and for spreading the word that the youth leaving the foster care system deserve the same equitable opportunities as young people receive in parented homes.

The homelessness issue in Metro Vancouver can be addressed in a significant way by ensuring that Foster youth are cared for and supported past their 19th birthdays. In this newsletter you can read Andii’s story, learn about Aunt Leah’s new Housing First program and discover more about our weekly programming.

Best wishes for 2015.
In the spirit of Leah,

Gale Stewart
Executive Director
HOUSING FIRST

Aunt Leah’s Place has been preventing homelessness within the foster care system for over 25 years. We help glue together families by assisting young mothers in need and youth on their journey to self-sufficiency. It can be a long, rough road so we provide support wherever we can, through job training, life-skills coaching and safe housing.

We are the most proactive at the ‘entry’ and ‘exit’ points of the foster care system, focusing on low-income families in their battles to maintain custody of their children, and on foster youth who are preparing to ‘age out’ of the system.

For millions of parented children, extended support past age 19 is the de facto ‘policy’, deferring and subsidizing housing and education costs until young people have the resources to become economically self-sufficient. Foster youth do not have this option – they lose their supports at age 19.

Our newest program, The Link, is targeted at individuals older than 19. It gives young, low-income families the skills and resources necessary to maintain custody of their children. It also offers life skills workshops, drop-in, outreach, and one-on-one support tailored to the individual youth. In addition there is no cap on age limit. Any former Aunt Leah’s resident or program participant can qualify for the program, and will never “age out” of our care. This is the program’s greatest strength and source of innovation. The familiar faces are another benefit of the program, as transitioning youth continue to be supported by the same, trusted role-models that they came to know through Aunt Leah’s Place.

The Link program is a modern and efficient model based on the ‘best practice’ of how Canadian families help their own children who are approaching adulthood and independence.
Andii’s Story

Andii turned 19 a couple months ago, which means he has “aged out” of governmental foster care. With the support of Aunt Leah’s staff and programs, like The Link and SEFFY, Andii can continue down the healthy track that he has started. He’ll have financial backup when he needs it, personal support and counselling from people that he has grown to know and trust.

Almost a year ago - in November of 2013 -- Andii came to Aunt Leah’s Place through a referral of his social workers. He was placed in the Support Link program, which provides semi-independent living for foster youth between the ages of 15-18. He lives in his own basement suite, with a friendly landlord living upstairs. Other support includes pre-employment and Essential Skills training. The goal of the program is preparation for Andii’s 19th birthday and when he will need to live on his own.

“It’s hard,” he says, speaking of his living situation. He’s not the only one to find that there’s a big learning curve when it comes to cooking, cleaning and managing time, for yourself! Many kids become “adults” at 19 and haven’t mastered these and other foundational skills, so in some ways, he is ahead of the game.

The upstairs landlords are chosen carefully by Aunt Leah’s Place, and are there for emergencies but also to enforce rules, such as not having visitors over before 11am or after 11pm. They also keep an eye out for illegal activities, drugs, drinking and partying.

Andii has been compliant and thankful for this guidance throughout his stay, and is leaving with a renewed sense of confidence in his independence. He is reassured, knowing that he can contact his supporters at Aunt Leah’s Place whenever he needs help.

Today, Andii is on track to graduate from secondary school this spring. Andii plans on continuing his education and becoming a sign language interpreter. His goal is to work in a hospital, assisting those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

GIVE TODAY AND SUPPORT YOUTH JUST LIKE ANDII

By giving to Aunt Leah’s Place, you are helping to care for young adults just like Andii. You can provide a fresh start and the necessary support so that a young person can make a successful transition to adulthood and independent living.

GIVE online at auntleahs.org
It’s been over 10 years since Eva, along with her friend Bella, started volunteering with Aunt Leah’s Place. She and Bella used to work more hours, but now work a regular shift on Wednesdays at the thrift store, from 10am-3pm. They sort everything that gets donated to the store, deciding what will be sold at Urban Thrift, what will be given to mothers in Aunt Leah’s Thresholds program and what will be donated to other non-profits in the Downtown Eastside.

Not only is Eva helping a good cause, but she gets to meet and socialize with interesting people from all kinds of backgrounds. She even works alongside some young adults who have successfully come up through Aunt Leah’s programs and want to give back. “It’s been really interesting to watch Aunt Leah’s Place grow and change over the years,” she says.

Understandably, she doesn’t want to donate to just any organization. “I like that Aunt Leah’s Place is a non-profit,” she says. “And, being involved, I know that donated money is not wasted.”

**URBAN DONOR: CLOTHING DRIVE**

Donate your lightly used clothing to Urban Thrift and help us create meaningful change for homeless mothers, and keep families united. You can also turn it into a team effort at your office or the place where you gather — invite your friends and colleagues to bring an outfit on a hanger!

_Urban Thrift: 177 East Broadway (at Main Street), Vancouver, BC V5T 1W1_
_Tel: (604) 709-3254 Email: cdunn@auntleahs.org_
Among the array of programs offered at Aunt Leah’s Place is Essential Skills, a weekly program crammed with crucial workshops. The assortment of interactive workshops are led by community members who are leaders in their fields. Some workshops cover money and the tricks to dealing with budgeting and banks. Others introduce young people to the ins and outs of renting: how to find a trustworthy landlord, and how to be a reliable and responsible tenant. The topic of homeliness is also covered, with workshop goers learning how to create a sense of home and take care of their apartments. Young people attending the workshops are educated in food management and safety, drug and alcohol awareness, and given tools to maintain personal health and wellbeing.

The workshops also encourage youth to look toward their futures. They present an ever-growing number of educational and career options, teach basic time management, job searching, resume writing and interview skills, and introduce concepts of cultural awareness and diversity.

The Essential Skills program is designed to increase levels of safety, knowledge and self-confidence as youth transition into adulthood and independence. Each workshop is also accompanied by a healthy and nutritious meal.

Our Essential Skills week of workshops is designed for teens under 19, but older current and past participants are also welcome to attend.

DO YOU HAVE AN APARTMENT, SUITE OR HOUSE TO RENT?

Aunt Leah’s Place helps foster youth as they transition from foster care to adulthood. Statistically, we know this group is one of the major drivers of homelessness. The Link Housing First program is currently looking for homeowners, landlords and property managers interested in renting their apartments or suites to former foster youth.

Through this program, landlords receive:

1. Guaranteed rent.
2. Support staff who check in weekly with the tenant.
3. 24/7 responsiveness regarding any landlord-tenancy issues.
4. A partnership with an organization that has over 25 years’ of experience in housing foster youth.
5. Recognition for being part of the solution to end homelessness in Metro Vancouver.

Aunt Leah’s acts as a caring family for these young people as they often struggle toward adulthood. Please help us do this important work.

If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact:

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Aunt Leah’s Place
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(604)525-1204 x 225
In a 2014 University of Victoria 2-year study entitled “Avoiding the Precipice,” participants in The Link program at Aunt Leah’s Place were compared with a control group of similar former youth in care. The study showed that the control group or non-Link participants experienced a rate of homelessness three times that of The Link youth after “aging out.”

The Link is the only program in the Lower Mainland that guarantees support services for foster youth after they age out of care. There is no age cap, so Aunt Leah’s assistance is more similar to regular parenting, with continued relationships and support.

The “continuum of care and trust” past age 19 is very important and follows the “best practices” of many modern Canadian families who extend support for their children into early adulthood. The UVic evaluation also showed that even though the majority of youth were living in some form of market housing, sometimes shared, the situation was often precarious, resulting in a turn to the Link to access or maintain adequate housing. The program may not always be front and center for every young person, but like parents, is ready to catch them when they fall.

For further information on this study or The Link program, please visit auntleahs.org.

Please join us on June 28, 2015, or donate online to sponsor an Aunt Leah’s Team member as we take part in the Scotiabank Charity Challenge: Half-Marathon & 5k Walk.

For more information or to join our team, please contact Chloe Dunn at cdunn@auntleahs.org

Give it your way. Donate today.

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