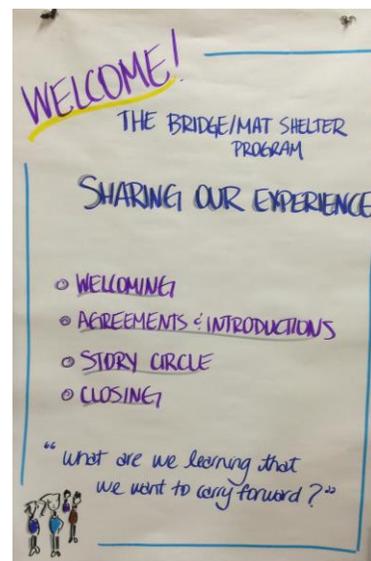


## The Bridge / Mat Shelter: Sharing Our Experience

Harvest from the circle hosted on Thursday February 12<sup>th</sup> 2015  
St. Andrew's United Church, Port Moody [www.sauc.ca](http://www.sauc.ca)

After 8 years of hosting the Mat Shelter Program at St. Andrew's, it was time to come together to hear some of the amazing stories of our experience. So that through our stories we could both celebrate our contributions as well as discover what we have learned about ourselves and our community

Thirty two people; volunteers, shelter guests, and community organizers, came together for a one-of-a-kind evening. We gathered in circle and began with a short check-in to meet who had accepted the invitation to join the evening, and one word on how people were feeling. We heard words like excited, grateful, hopeful, curious, fulfilled, happy and thankful.



After our check-in we shifted to the stories. To think about a moment from the Mat Shelter Program where you were impacted. Many people around the circle shared stories of how they were touched, changed, moved or were different as a result of the Mat Shelter Program. We agreed to hold the specific stories in confidence, but release the collective wisdom from what we heard.



To close our circle, we invited people to share something they heard tonight that they want to carry forward – for themselves personally or for their community. Here is a harvest from those closing words:

- Completion of 3030 Gordon; approved, passed, construction underway – so grateful for success of project.
- Bushel of thanks for all the people who live in this community; opportunity to have worked in this program, hope for future.
- Society has normalized poverty and homelessness, much more can be done.
- Lot of hope for the community.
- Very blessed to be here – see all the support when
- Caring compassionate presence here, hopeful it will carry on.
- Thank you for this opportunity to be here; grateful for things we have, and what we don't have to worry about.
- So thankful that I had the opportunity to become more aware and compassionate and appreciative; been fabulous.
- Enjoyable 7 years, helping people, working... reminding us that still need help over there –

3030 Gordon does open – will be amazing – hope to see you all working at shelter in some way.

- Thanks for allowing me to be here and listen.
- Thank you for the invitation; takes many people to build village; keep building.
- Continuation of more volunteerism; 3030 Gordon - together with the new homeless shelter and transition house.
- Renewed determination – keep on working, in whatever way we can to help.
- Greater awareness, empathy, compassion.
- Awe struck sense of gratitude.
- Appreciation and insight.
- Carry on, open mindedness.
- Gratitude, in listening to people, passion for dealing with issue of – normalization of poverty and homelessness... take energy put into mat program to address systemic issues, so when people go into 3030 Gordon then come out they have somewhere to live.
- 7 years of wonderful warm peers, fantastic guests; a great time.
- An awareness and hopeful for the future of 3030 Gordon; thank everyone for sharing most heartfelt thoughts and feelings, and letting me share with you.
- Sense of pride in my community, wonder that we did it, connections that we made in the community, all broadened from friendships – owe it to ourselves to keep building on this – time and efforts for everyone.
- Teaching to fish, eat forever.... If we work beyond providing mats, our work has begun.

somewhere we can all help in one way or another.

- Regret that I didn't get involved earlier...every time I came encouraged to do a little more.... Found myself trying to encourage others! They became a little more aware... my job is to get out there and push it a bit more.
- Deep gratitude – to have participated in program over past number of years, look forward to participating in some way in program like mat program in the future.
- Grateful to hear Gordon house will be running – helping out there and long term solutions so there is housing for everyone.
- Gratitude, blessed to be a part of.
- Grateful for all the volunteers we have, especially the young people, like the few young women who worked at Starbucks, came down to help – see their commitment and how willing they were to help out... If you show people something that needs to be done, most are willing to step up and help – something that we need to do, show where the need is, how they can help – a simple way – sign up here! And we'll get somewhere.
- Strong sense of unity, real feeling of a little thing goes a long way, can make a difference... prayer... than you God for letting me feel and see what I need to see.
- Grateful for mat program - who knows where we would have ended up...optimistic for future.
- Concept of pay it forward.... What I can do with what I've learned - who knows! Run for MLA? Mayor? Will be praying and will not squander this. Forever grateful.
- Gratitude for having the opportunity to be involved, gratitude that or clients will be served 365/24/7.

**Thank you to everyone who came out to this special evening; for offering the gift of your listening, your witnessing, your stories and your reflections. We are excited for what may come next for our community!**

For more information on the Mat Shelter Program, please see: [www.youtube.com/user/uccjusticestories](http://www.youtube.com/user/uccjusticestories)

- [Beyond Soup and Socks](#) – video about St. Andrew's United's involvement in the Mat Shelter Program.
- [Interview with Doreen Carter](#) – video with Doreen Carter, who was a guest at the Shelter Program in the Tri-Cities and speaks about the challenges she faced, the assistance she received and how her life has changed.
- [Why Justice](#) – video on the question of what motivates people to be engaged in loving their neighbours and trying to change the world.
- [More videos](#) from the United Church of Canada Justice Stories