

Helping to Heal

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“It’s always been my dream to help the less fortunate,” says Norm Detillieux, a chiropractor in Nanaimo, B.C. “Now, with The Salvation Army’s help, I am putting my dream into practice, helping people help themselves. It’s a wonderful feeling.”

Something to Offer

Norm was born just outside of Prince Albert, Sask.

“I’m a farm boy,” he smiles, “and growing up on a farm was instrumental in my decision to become a healer. I was connected at a young age and in a tangible way to the rhythms of life, death and nature.”

When Norm was young, his father suffered a back injury that left him housebound for a significant period of time. When traditional care did not suffice, he sought the services of a chiropractor, who helped alleviate his pain and increase his mobility. Watching the chiropractor work on his father and seeing the effect was enormously influential for Norm.

“As I looked at what I wanted to do with my life,” he recalls, “I was less attracted to the diagnostic side of the medical equation—ORs and ERs, traumas and dramas—than I was to helping reconnect people to their own bodies, as my father had been helped. Becoming a chiropractor seemed to be a natural fit.”

While pursuing his studies at Toronto’s prestigious Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, Norm realized that he wanted to do more for the people in his community.

“When I was approached by people asking for a handout,” recalls Norm, “my initial reflex would be to reach into my wallet, but I soon realized I might have something more valuable to offer them eventually: my skills and my time.”



Open Arms, Helping Hands

Norm held on to that dream after graduation, and after a move to Nanaimo and establishing his practice, he felt ready to act.

“Once I had that solid foundation under me,” says Norm, “I started to look outside my practice at ways I could benefit the community. My first thought was, I need to talk to The Salvation Army. I’d seen how the Army was involved in so many facets of the community. Everywhere I looked, at any time of the year, I saw the wonderful work they were doing, how well-established and well-organized they were.”

Norm approached Rob Anderson, the Army’s community services director, with a proposal to start a chiropractic service for his clients.

“I was greeted with respect and trust, which is essential in establishing any new program. It was almost like turning the switch to the ignition of a well-tuned engine,” Norm marvels. “Room was made, a receptionist provided and within that first month, we’d established a booming practice.”

Lives Changed

“Dr. Norm,” as he is called, volunteers once a week for two hours and looks after as many as 20 people in that time. Many of Norm’s clients already use the Army’s facilities, such as the hostel and the soup kitchen, and range in age from as young as three to as old as 88.

“We’re busy,” Norm laughs. “It’s a nice flow. We have a lot of regulars, and they know the routine. I have two tables set up and there’s no waiting.”

Many of the regulars have become friends. “We’ve become a little support group all of our own,” Norm smiles. “I’m constantly running into them downtown and I’m always thrilled with how well they are doing.”

Because of the Army’s support and Norm’s ministrations, many of his clients have kicked addictions, made life transitions, left abusive relationships, and found the inner courage to rebuild their lives now that they have been freed of years and sometimes decades of debilitating pain.

“One fellow had polio as a child and was in a full body cast right up to his hip,” says Norm. “Despite the best efforts of his doctors, the polio had gone through his hip, affecting the leg’s growth and development to the extent that his right leg was almost a foot shorter than his left. I’d never seen such a severe spinal misalignment. It’s a wonder that this man was still alive.”

The hip itself was completely fused, Norm goes on to say. He was locked in place and his life mirrored what had happened to his body. He’d become a recluse.

“I’ll never forget that first adjustment,” Norm continues. “I was the first person in decades that he’d allowed to work with him. I was able to literally ‘walk’ his spine back into place

and transform a six to seven inch gap between the length of his legs into less than an inch in one visit. It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen."

Norm has continued to work with him. Not only has his mobility improved but his life has blossomed as well. He has made friends with fellow clients and is looking at becoming a more productive part of society again.

"People's spines very often mirror their lives," observes Norm. "When we can change their spines, their lives start to change, too."

"Miracles Truly Happen"

Norm hopes that other Salvation Army churches will set up similar operations to Nanaimo. But to do that, people need to step up and volunteer.

"There's a lot of good in our communities," he says. "What I see in theory and in practice, both with The Salvation Army and in my professional duties here, is that once people get connected to the potential that lies within them, miracles truly happen."