



# The Gift of Community

Dear Friend,

We hope this special season finds you in the warmth of your community of family and friends, neighbours and loved ones. It is in these gatherings that we are reminded of the gifts of community – of knowing that we belong, that we are cared for, that we are not alone, and that we matter. **These gifts can often be even more meaningful for individuals living with mental illness, and it is with your support that Progress Place is able to continue providing a sense of community for men and women as they make their courageous journeys in recovery.**

We invite you to read Mark’s story below. It is a story about how your support is helping Progress Place continue to meet the needs of individuals living with mental illness with innovative and responsive programming, and as you’ll see, to meet these needs by expanding our reach to communities in need, such as The Community Place Hub in Weston. It is a story of transformation, of hope and courage found, and the gift of giving back.

## Mark’s Story: Courage, Community, and the Gift of Giving Back

In 1984 I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, and my life was in a downward spiral. In desperation I attempted to self-medicate, and developed a substance abuse problem that would plague me for years. Mental illness is very debilitating. For years I battled severe and frequent mood swings that led to numerous hospitalizations.



It was with good fortune, though, when I learned about Progress Place. Unemployed and directionless, I had no structure or routine to my daily life. Here was a place I could go to that accepted me as I was, where I could attend when I wanted, with a choice of how I wanted to participate. Others did not see me as an illness, they saw me as a person. Staff were supportive and empathetic. Contrary to the traditional psychiatric approach, the Clubhouse had us focus on our strengths, rather than our symptoms.

*“Hope was once again attainable. I now had purpose again. I felt needed and wanted, and realized I could be productive once again. Respect and dignity created a positive atmosphere, and one did not have to hide or feel ashamed of their illness. We were part of a strong community within the walls of Progress Place. A community that would act as a bridge to the much larger community beyond.”*

Years passed and life became more active and meaningful. I completed a college course in Psychosocial Rehabilitation. Being able to see the principles in action at the Clubhouse was wonderful and refreshing. As members, we began to thrive and fulfill potential that had laid dormant for years. Eventually I met a wonderful lady, got married and had a daughter. Progress Place celebrated this too. A highly supportive mother never left my side. I celebrated a personal rebirth, with the opportunity of recreating what was once a damaged life.

Then tragedy happened. My wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. I visited Progress Place and was told that a new program, The Community Place Hub, was opened in my area. A satellite of Progress Place, it was similar in nature. Always welcome, it became a constant support for our family as we weathered this storm. Amazingly, my wife and daughter were able to participate in many activities at the Hub. Eventually my wife became well, and I found employment as a Peer Support Worker, helping War Veterans. This was a chance for me to give back to others as was given to me.



**As I look back, and reflect upon my experience at both Progress Place and The Community Place Hub I realize that both were integral to my recovery, and also, maintaining that recovery. What the Clubhouse and Hub, and the people that work there offer, is truly rare and unique. As a result of my family also attending the Hub it was a life changing experience for them as well. It provided resources that are still lasting for my family.**

**Yes, recovery can be a slow journey, but I have achieved it and for that I am grateful.**

## **Progress Place and The Community Place Hub**

For more than 30 years, Progress Place has been dedicated to improving the lives of people living with mental illness. We are committed to helping people stay out of hospitals, achieve their goals and contribute to the communities they live in through a comprehensive network of services that includes employment, education, recreation, and housing. We believe recovery from mental illness is possible when it involves the individual in a community that offers hope, respect and opportunities for development.

Drawn from Progress Place's extensive experience in community-building, and in response to a lack of much-needed programming and resources in the neighbourhood of Weston, Progress Place launched The Community Place Hub in 2015. Rooted in community and collaboration, The Community Place Hub is a health access hub providing a comprehensive continuum of programs and services.



**Your support is vital to the continuation of these programs. Please give generously to ensure Progress Place continues to be there for the courageous individuals living with mental illness who are making Progress Place and The Community Place Hub an integral part of their recovery.**

Wishing you a happy holiday season.

*Criss Habal-Brosek*

Criss Habal-Brosek  
Executive Director

*Mark Murphy*

Mark Murphy  
Progress Place Member