

"Providing three pillars of care. Empower. Intervene. Equip."

November 6, 2023

Good day to you friends and supporters of LIFE EXCHANGE FOUNDATION!

Since my last email to you back in June a few things have happened in my life as well as LEF. On a personal note, most of you know that my 97-year-old mother, Ferne Bitterman, passed away on July 23. Linda and I had a lot to work on and deal with in organizing the cleaning out of Mother's apartment at the Cascade Manor, coordinating the Graveside Service on July 31, then the Celebration of Life gathering on September 3, plus the settling of the estate as I am the Executor. Since my car accident back in April I am still dealing with the recovery process with ICBC and the medical requirements to get me back into some sort of shape. In September I got a nasty bout of Vertigo which is still giving me a challenge and very intimidating. I am faithfully doing my exercises to get rid of it, in obedience to my Dr. and Kinesiologist. Add on all the crazy heat, fires and incredibly saturated "smoke pollution" here in Chilliwack for nearly 2.5 months. I must be getting "old" as my tolerance level for issues is definitely getting much lower.

Here's an update and the focus of LEF's previous and emerging developments:

1. I have made some positive contacts in Chilliwack in the youth soccer programs. I will be getting involved with coming alongside children and teens who desire to play in league soccer but can't afford the costs; plus, transportation to and from the games can be challenging for parents who can drive them. Soccer is a great mental health benefit to kids and teens. Our Board is very committed to stepping into this opportunity. There is also starting next Spring, a soccer program for handicapped youth, that can't play with the regular soccer community. I have been asked to consider coming alongside these youth and their families to help make it feasible. This is rather amazing that I have been asked to participate in this new venture. Yes, I am a Soccer Junkie.
2. We have some residual funds from the Fire Fund that we set up in 2021. Our focus was to connect with the Kumsheen School Principal in Lytton to see what we could direct the funds towards that would be valued and beneficial to the children and teens. I contacted the Principal about our interest in directing some funds towards the school. He was very pleased that I contacted him. I will be going to the school to present the cheque for \$1,000 on November 20th. The school has 91 students; of which, 88 are Indigenous. Hopefully, this will open the door for more LEF impact on the children and teens who are still struggling with the losses and damage in their community.
3. Donations have been down this past year so far. It is understandable with the significant rise in inflation and interest rates. Hopefully, there will be a strong recovery in the next month with a need of approximately \$25,000. I will be getting an E-Transfer system for donating directly into the LEF Account with donors' information recorded. Richard, our Treasurer, has set up a QR code for going directly to our online donation page via CanadaHelps. Things are always changing and hopefully for the better and best for our donors.
4. I am connecting with Principals and counsellors in our school system to assess and decide where we can provide for children, teens, and families in very needy and desperate life conditions. I have been giving many gift cards this year to families in medical and food requirement scenarios. Christmas, and into January, is going to be much more demanding than last year. I have been dealing with a growing number of families going through divorce and common law break-ups experiencing very destructive conflict, losses, and pain.

One family that was referred to LEF was a mother of 4 children with two of them suffering from severe autism plus major mental health issues on top of that. As the mother is struggling to cover living expenses, LEF provided funds for groceries. It is going to be a serious ongoing critical case to deal with by our contact person.

Another situation we are supporting is a young single mother of 4 children who had to leave her job to take care of her kids after the children's father left them all. 3 of the 4 young children have severe autistic challenges plus health problems that require ongoing care. With no support from family and personal health challenges, remaining in the Lower Mainland is becoming more difficult due to the rising cost of living.

I have another scenario that is very painful to share. A teen was present in front of his mother last spring when she died. With no family to support him, as his dad is homeless in east Vancouver, our community has stepped in to provide temporary support and care.

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The depth, breadth, and height of what is going on in children, teens and family’s lives is unreal. Families are imploding and exploding exponentially.

5. I have connected with the Executive Directors of Chilliwack’s Youth Health Centres who are working on providing emerging counsellors with 6 months internships working with youth in our Middle and High schools. They have had a significant setback with the Government almost eliminating their financial support to keep this operational. I will be in further discussion with two doctors as to how I can provide leadership and support to help redesign the program to make it more effective with less funding. This will be a bit of a “miracle in the making”. There has been a serious increase in teen attempted suicides and self-injury incidents. The mental health recovery programs are overloaded and understaffed to be a significant influence and interveners in our schools.

6. In 2024 I will be having a couple of Psychologists teaming up with me to train volunteers that will become our Responder Teams to be available to come alongside families in crisis. I am also looking for and engaging with individuals who have a passion for this mental health care program to prepare them for the upcoming training and mentoring team development. This will be a huge asset to LEF engagement with the growing number of critical life cases in our community.

7. My “food resource development” is still in discussion but very, very slow in becoming a reality. Just had a major Avian Flu infestation in the Chicken and Turkey farming here in the valley. The loss in some farms was very high. Farmers who might consider coming alongside are being hit by many impacting issues. Same as pork and beef supplies in our community... many challenges hitting the producers. So, I am just taking one slow step at a time.

Remembrance Day is upon us. Our hearts are deeply touched by the sacrifice of so many of our Canadian army, navy, Air Force and medical personnel over the past 110 years of wars and battles. I had my dad, his two brothers, four uncles, my mother’s brothers and her brother-in-law who all served in WWII. I encourage all to never take for granted our freedom at the price of so many committed of our citizens and families. Our world is being taunted by the threat of WWIII emerging throwing nations into chaos.

My request to you as we move into the Christmas season is that you think about the destruction of families and the impact on children. Your support for these and for charities, churches and not-for-profits like LIFE EXCHANGE and the challenges we are facing in our communities so that we can collectively be “life changers” for these dear people. I am looking forward to telling you of the great success stories in the lives that we touch through your investment and support of our charity’s work of love and kindness.

Your financial support is really appreciated as we come to the end of 2023 and prepare even more for 2024. You can make your generous donations through our website www.life-exchange.ca, with the option to provide one-time donation, or setup regular monthly donations. If possible, I would also appreciate meeting up with you in person to receive your donation and hear what good things are going on in and through your life, or you can also mail cheques directly to our office at the address below.

LEF and I appreciate you so very much in these times of “reaching out in love and compassion to the children and teens” in their hour of stress, mental health issues and pain!

Blessings on you and your families.

Rod L. Bitterman
Executive Director and Chairman, LIFE EXCHANGE FOUNDATION