

# First they received and now they give — from the heart

**I**N THE MORNING dark that lingers at 7 in late December, Gail Simpson arrives for work at the Capital Mental Health Association.

Almost invariably someone has been before her.

At the door is a box, or perhaps a plastic bag.

Its contents could be anything.

Last Friday, for instance, Simpson found brand new costume jewelry, still boxed, perfect for the association's Christmas gift program which distributes more than a thousand presents every year to people with mental illnesses in hospitals, group



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homes and shelters.

She also found an unsigned note.

"I got a Christmas present for five years, and now I'm able to give a Christmas present," it read.

Over at Hill House, volunteer co-ordinator Kelly Sprackett is opening the mail.

This particular envelope contains a card from someone who spent Christmas last year at the Victoria shelter for abused women.

And tucked inside is \$250, which will be added to the donations brought by other former residents to a party a few days before.

"It's amazing how much they end up giving back, even when they have very little," Sprackett says.

Here at the *Times-Colonist*, Dorothy Parry encounters the same giving spirit from those who in the past have received.

The amounts vary, although Parry's appreciation is constant, whether the donation is \$2 folded

inside a piece of paper or a cheque for hundreds of dollars.

"Some of our biggest donors say, 'I was there, I had nothing,'" says Parry, who estimates perhaps 50 of the 5,000 people who contribute to the 1000 Fund each year mention in their letters they were once on the receiving end.

Down at the Royal Jubilee Hospital, months of giving back are coming to fruition for Bruce Saunders and a growing audience of film devotees.

A former psychiatric patient at the hospital's Eric Martin Pavilion, Saunders is the moving force behind Movie Monday, a free weekly showing of films in the pavilion's theatre.

His missions: to provide quality entertainment which will draw people from both the hospital and the community, thus fostering understanding of mental illness — and to raise money to replace the hospital's aging video projector, which Movie Monday uses.

He's accomplished both.

Donations from the public for the projector have topped \$2,000, and the Royal Jubilee Hospital Auxiliary has given \$5,000.

That leaves money over for theatre improvements, because Saunders has also persuaded Sony of Canada to give the hospital a \$2,000 break on the price of the projector.

And instead of a handful of people sprinkled throughout the theatre's seats, the movies Saunders runs now plays to as many as 80, laughing and munching popcorn. For the holiday season, he's spliced in two extra performances: in addition to *The Princess Bride* at 6:30 p.m. Monday, there's *Chariots of Fire* at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, and *The Princess Bride* again at 2 p.m. Dec. 31.

Meanwhile, at the Need Crisis and Information Line, volunteers can anticipate a different kind of call than they've been fielding

since October.

That's when people begin looking ahead to the Christmas season, and begin to pit their reality against the myth, trainer-supervisor Philippa Doherty says.

Maybe they're stressed financially, or are grieving a loss — or recognizing their lives have changed little in the past year.

"Often the distress and crisis that people are facing is no different than any other time of year — but Christmas compounds it."

But come Christmas Eve, many have worked through their feelings and made their plans.

So tonight, and tomorrow, callers are likely to be offering support, rather than asking for it.

"I'm phoning to say thank you because you were there for me." "I wanted to let you know things have turned around." "If it wasn't for you people, I might not have made it."

Gifts from the heart.