

PEPPER POD

# SitRep



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## Note from Sandra – Love in Its Many Forms

February at the Pepper Pod was a reminder that love is not confined to one definition. Love could be found in acts of kindness, in the laughter shared with friends, in the dedication of a mentor, or in the care we offered ourselves. Celebrating love in all its forms allowed us to cultivate deeper empathy, generosity, and compassion in our daily lives. Most of all, it nurtured a sense of gratitude which, in turn, enriched our lives with even more of everything that makes our hearts sing.

We intentionally practiced love at the Pepper Pod in February. We cheered on our Invictus Game heroes, hoisted the Estonian flag in tribute to one of our own's generosity, and expressed immense gratitude for the help in digging out from all the snow. We welcomed new visitors from BMO, had multiple follow-ups with tribes, and celebrated the baby of our group, Martine Denis, for her 50th birthday.

*Yes, love comes in many forms and we are so blessed to be surrounded by all of them at The Pepper Pod!*





## The 50<sup>th</sup> Lifeshop™

This February, we held our 50th Lifeshop. That is a very special milestone that marks over 400 graduates of our program. In numbers, that also means:

- 2200+ hours of facilitation
- 19 locations across Canada
- 100s of follow-up gatherings
- 72 boxes of Kleenex (for sneezes, of course)
- Countless hugs...

Tribes have found fun ways to connect after their Lifeshops: Blueberry picking, paint nights, theatre and movies, concerts, road trips, hikes, birthday parties, picnics, and museum visits.

They have leaned on each other in so many other ways, from accompanying one other through break-your-heart moments like divorce court, moving an aging parent into long-term care, celebrations of life for loved ones, the loss of a fur baby or powering through chemotherapy.

They have celebrated sobriety milestones, the reception of medals, and graduations. They have shared countless of photos of grandbabies, new puppies, travel, weddings and gardens. They've exchanged advice on trips, adventures (and misadventures!), recipes, and menopause.

***They have Pepper Podded together.  
Here's to another 50 Lifeshops!***

**“Pepper Podding”**  
is a military manoeuvre  
that allows a fireteam  
to move towards the  
enemy while protecting  
each other.

## Ottawa/Gatineau Tribe = 50<sup>th</sup> Lifeshop™!

Some things were meant for us to let go, and others were meant for us to hold on to... these brave women did both.  
***Congratulations to Lifeshop Tribe #50!***



## Welcome to the new Kingston/Trenton Tribe!

Courage doesn't always roar...sometimes it is in the quiet voice that shows up to sit around a table for a weekend and whispers, “I've got your back, Sister.”

***Welcome to the new  
Kingston/Trenton Tribe!***



## Exciting Connect-HERs Program Update

We are thrilled to share some exciting progress regarding the Connect-HERs Program, a project aimed at bridging the gap between our sisters-in-arms who are experiencing homelessness (or at risk of it) and need resources.

We have expanded our network by building strong partnerships with local service providers. We've had the privilege of visiting organizations like Ottawa Innercity Ministries, The Ottawa Mission, Cornerstone Housing for Women, the Royal Canadian Legion and Veterans House to witness firsthand their incredible work in offering services to those in need.

The Veterans Homelessness Program Community of Practice has also been instrumental. This network allows us to discover what organizations have to offer, share best practices, and collaborate to ensure coordinated access to services and housing for those who have served our country.

There are women veterans experiencing homelessness in the National Capital Region and we named the program "Connect-HERs" because of the special bond felt among women veterans and the outreach services to which we will be connecting them.. Connect-HERs will be members of the Pepper Pod community who reach out and facilitate the provision of support services to women veterans in need.

In early spring, we will extend invitations to attend an information session on volunteering as a Connect-HER. ***Together, we are building a stronger, more connected community for women veterans, and we're just getting started!***

## Flying the Flag - Estonia National Day

***It was the perfect day to celebrate a beautiful and generous gift!***

Gloria Heinmaa is a Lifeshop grad, a proud member of the Pepper Pod forest and she often talks about her Lifeshop as a significant point in her life. For a long time, Gloria wanted to find a way to give back to Sandra and the organization for gifting her with a tribe of amazing souls.

Gloria's ailing mother recently went into long-term care, and Gloria was tasked with selling her mother's house. With a heart the size of a nation, Gloria shared some of the proceeds from selling her mother's house and made a generous financial gift to the Pepper Pod in her mother's name. Her family is Estonian, so on February 24<sup>th</sup>, Estonia's Independence Day, the Pepper Pod proudly flew the flag in honour of Gloria's mother and family.

It was a touching moment, and we surprised Gloria by inviting her tribe too! The women who formed a part of that tight-knit group over five years ago came together again to support Gloria on this special day.



**SAVE  
THE DATE!**  
June 7 & 8<sup>th</sup>

Jam-packed  
Pepper Pod  
Weekend!



# The Pepper Pod Out & About!

Let's see photos of your  
tribes Out & About!

Email your pictures to  
Cathy@PepperPod.ca



Louise Mercier received the King Charles III coronation medal for her extensive and generous service to several organizations and charities.



Happy Gagetown Gals tribe getting together for a weekend.



The Jazz Queens – flash those smiles!



BMO visited the Pepper Pod and we're looking forward to welcoming them back soon!



Bibi and Manon shining bright as volunteers at the Invictus Games.



A few of the "Cheeky Peppers!"



Tessa, one of the Peppernettes, hits the slopes in competition.



The snowy Pepper Pod driveway proved too much for one car, but a few strong women quickly rectified the situation.



## Same Team, New Titles

It's hard to believe that the Pepper Pod is already in its fourth year of operation! As our programs, services and events have grown, so too has our team and with that comes the need for enhanced governance, policies and procedures.

*(Although we take this very seriously, and we embrace the need for such rigour, you can only imagine how much we've enjoyed the documentation process. We'd much rather spend time with our community, chop wood, build relationships, or even get a root canal!)*

**The refreshed governance model means that we've made a few title changes within the organization.**

**Sandra Perron** – Executive Director

**Cathy Priestman** – Director of Operations

**Linda Dumouchel** – Director of Finance and Data Management

**Joanne Bilodeau** – Director of Connect-HERs Program

**Martine Denis** – Logistics Coordinator

**Amber Comiso** – Lifeshop Facilitator-in-Training

**Gunther the Wonder Dog** – Director of Morale and Welfare

*It's like new packaging but the same great taste!*

## HIGHLIGHTING OUR PARTNERS



### CORNERSTONE HOUSING FOR WOMEN

Did you know that Cornerstone Housing for Women is the largest women-only shelter and housing provider for women experiencing homelessness in Ottawa? Through their four housing residences, emergency shelter, and outreach program, they strive every day to fill the gap by offering women-centered, women-only programs and services to all women and gender-diverse individuals.

Cornerstone delivers its programs and services through a gender-based lens to fully address the unique needs of women and they have been helpful in the development of the Pepper Pod Connect-HERs Program. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Cornerstone.



### VETERANS HOUSE CANADA

Veterans' House Canada helps veterans experiencing homelessness build a better future by providing permanent, affordable and supportive housing. Members of the Pepper Pod team recently enjoyed a tour of the housing unit in Ottawa, the Andy Carswell Building, and met with frontline workers.

Our synergies and commitment to veterans will very likely see us enthusiastically plan several future events together.

# Become Part of Our Forest

Here are a few ways you can get involved...

## 1. Become a voice for women veterans!

**2. Tell your friends** – We love it when people chat about the Pepper Pod. Sharing your personal experiences and reaching out to friends will help connect more members of the women veteran community. Also, it's fun!

**3. Organize an event** - Consider organizing an event in partnership with us: an outdoor activity, a social gathering, a learning opportunity. Get creative - roller skating, art gallery, cooking class, ax throwing? If you have an idea, reach out to [cathy@pepperpod.ca](mailto:cathy@pepperpod.ca)

## 4. Follow us on social media:

- **Pepper Pod Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/pepperpod.ca>
- **Pepper Pod Instagram:** [https://www.instagram.com/le\\_thepepperpod/](https://www.instagram.com/le_thepepperpod/)
- **Pepper Pod LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/pepper-pod/>

## UPCOMING AT THE PEPPER POD AND BEYOND

5 Mar	VAC Women's Advisory Council Tour & Upstream Conversations at the Pepper Pod
6 Mar	WiDS (Women in Defence and Security) Breakfast <a href="https://www.wids.ca/">https://www.wids.ca/</a>
6-7 Mar	VAC Women's Veteran Forum (Ottawa)
8 Mar	International Women's Day
10 Mar	Defence Team International Women's Day 2024 Event at Carling Campus, Ottawa
21-23 Mar	Lifeshop (Montreal/Quebec – French) at the Pepper Pod
25-27 April	Lifeshop (Gagetown - English) in Fredericton
28 April	Beyond Trauma (English) in Fredericton
7 May	Beyond Trauma (English) at the Pepper Pod
16-18 May	Lifeshop II (Ottawa/Gatineau - English) at the Pepper Pod
24 May	The Pepper Pod hosts spouses of the RCAF Association
June 7 & 8	<b>Pepper Pod Mega-Weekend! SAVE THE DATE!</b>

*Long live strong women!*



**Yes, it's snowy now  
but we are already  
planning for June!**

Paddleboarding, Dragon  
Boating, Picnicking,  
and more.

## Can't join us?

Why not donate to support our mission?

### [DONATE HERE](#)

We need your help to maintain this centre and to keep developing our programs. We want to grow intelligently, diversify our services, and keep the retreat centre beautiful.