

From the desk of John Neufeld



Our collective strength as a community and how we have risen to challenges like no other in recent months is what defines us. Your many acts of kindness continue to make me so proud to be a part of the humanity we foster together.

At House of Friendship, I witness the impact of your kindness and compassion towards others every day. A little goes a very long way, especially for those who live on the margins of society.

If you've ever experienced the burn of rejection or the loneliness of being on the outside looking in and feeling like you didn't belong, then you know how deeply painful this can be. It's not a hurt that you easily forget, right?

While you are probably familiar with me for my role at House of Friendship, it's my personal story that fuels my passion for what I do. Like you are, I'm deeply committed to being there for those people in our community who need it the very most. And reflecting on that commitment – on what it means to build people up for the future – led me to a very important decision: to include a gift in my Will to House of Friendship.

To me, this gift is a natural extension of my life. I myself have benefitted deeply from the power of community, of connection. I know the pain of being an outsider – and the importance of feeling like you belong.

You see, my family immigrated to Canada from Russia in the early

1980s, when I was seven years old. At the time, I didn't understand that Russia was one of the most hated countries on earth – which made me the most hated kid on the playground.

I was shunned. Bullied. And I learned very early on that it was best for me to just keep to myself.

This is one of the reasons why I believe in the work of House of Friendship. I know what it's like to hurt, and it motivates me to do everything I can to help others, both now and in the years ahead.

What motivates your desire to help others?

Perhaps you have faced struggles in your own life and experienced the kindness of another soul who reminded you that you mattered. Or you believe in investing in local services that protect the dignity and welfare of your neighbour, so that your community will be strong and vibrant for your children and grandchildren.

Whatever reasons fuel you, thank you so much for your compassionate support of House of Friendship!

When I came to Canada, it was certainly a different life than the one I'd known back in Russia. The first seven years of my life had been all about community. As kids, we all played in the streets together, bouncing between houses, always knowing we'd get a warm welcome and something to eat no matter where we'd turn up.

It is a profound shock to find yourself a world away from everything you knew, friendless and isolated.

Maybe you've experienced something similar. I think all of us, at some point in our lives, have felt like we didn't belong.

Fortunately, I had two lifelines that kept me afloat and helped me grow into the man I am today: my parents and my church community.

My parents were incredibly loving and supportive. They worked hard to build a new life for us here in Canada, and they'd left behind professional jobs, friends and family in order to do so. In Canada, my dad worked day and

night at a factory, while my mom cleaned houses. It was only when I was a bit older that I truly understood the depth of their sacrifice. They gave up so much so I could have a better life.

Their sacrifices didn't end with the move. I remember discovering the game of chess at school, and I really took a shine to it. But there was no one I could play with at home, and I didn't have any friends. Then I saw an ad for a chess computer. It was more than \$100, which was a lot of money back then. I knew my parents could never afford it.

But when my tenth birthday rolled around, there it was, wrapped up and hidden under the couch. To this day, it's still a symbol of that spirit of sacrificial love and generosity my parents passed on to me.

The second lifeline I had as a kid was my church community. Church was such a refuge. One day a week, I fit in. I was valued. Many of the people in our church also came from Russia, or their parents and grandparents did. They understood where I'd come from and how I was feeling.

Today, family and community continue to live at the core of my personal and professional values. Through House of Friendship, we have the ability to make sure that everyone who comes through our doors will also know warmth and acceptance, that they are valued, and they belong.

This is why my wife, Andrea and I, made the decision to make a gift in our Will. It's a wonderful way to make sure the vital work of caring for others, those struggling with poverty or addiction, will continue long after we're gone.

Now, we're not rich, by any means, nor do we come from money. But you don't have to be rich to make a difference.

It's safe to say the adversity I've had in my life has led me to where I am now – which is a place full of gratitude and happiness. This is because somewhere along the line I discovered a secret: when we live for ourselves, running after money and promotions and materials things, everything we gain is fleeting.

But when we live for others, obeying the principle of *love thy neighbour*, we build a legacy that will last far beyond our own lifetimes.

Think about the people who played a key role in your life, sometimes

without even knowing. For me, it was the teacher who stayed after school to teach chess and had no idea she was giving a life-long passion to a lonely, hurting boy.

Each of us has the ability to impact someone else's life in this way, whether it's by showing kindness one-on-one, or by supporting an organization like House of Friendship. A gift in your Will is a way you can ensure that your values continue to exist in your community.

What do you want your legacy to be? How do you want to be remembered? Your gift could ensure that someone reaching for help with an addiction receives the support they need. Or maybe, someone living in poverty is lifted up and can now imagine their future. All of this is possible when you include House of Friendship in your estate plans. Andrea and I hope you'll consider the impact you could have on the lives of so many in our community.

Until we can be together again in person, please be well and take care of yourself and those you hold dear. We will enjoy brighter days ahead.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Neufeld', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

John Neufeld
Executive Director and Legacy Donor