COMPASSIONATE RESOURCE WAREHOUSE

Love in a really BIG BOX

by Dayna E. Mazzuca

March was a good month for Compassionate Resource Warehouse in Victoria. The island-based warehouse ministry sent its 350th shipping container overseas, this one bound for the Ukraine. A typical 40-foot container, says President Dell Wergeland is "just jam-packed solid" with donated items such as blankets, children's toys and books, clothing, sewing machines and material, hand tools and first aid kits.

In mid-March the island-based charity also met its goal of raising $350,000 to purchase a 3,000 square foot building in Langford, at the Luxton Fairgrounds. Getting the property means the ministry does not have to relocate, explains Wergeland.

Obtaining charitable status in June 2011 was helpful "for raising money for property," says Wergeland. In addition to the Langford warehouse, which the ministry had been using but did not own, there is a 5,000 square foot warehouse in Esquimalt that Compassionate Resource Warehouse owns, as well as other locations they use as people are willing to provide them space.

Compassionate Resource Warehouse began under the auspices of the Church of the Nazarene in 1999 after Wergeland and her husband returned from a mission to Honduras. "I had never been in that type of situation before…and I got involved with distributing some aid," she says. During the mission, she repeatedly heard people comment: "If we had it (basics such as books, desks, tools or medical supplies), we could do it." The Wergelands wanted to help. So the couple started collecting "bits and pieces" and after 18 months, had enough to fill a 40-foot rented container.

Today, Compassionate Resource Warehouse sends a container full of donated goods out every two weeks. Items come in from all over Canada and are sent all over the world. The containers are loaded and shipped from Victoria to either Vancouver or Eastern Canada, depending on the final destination and the type of goods.

"To see where things come from and where they go is mind boggling," says Wergeland. "The Lord works on all ends."

Requests for goods come from church-based ministries as well as community groups. Some people want to give clothing to refugees in camps; others want Bibles, or to build schools, or set up a first-aid station. Some want to start a business and need a sewing machine, or a farm and need tools or building materials. Children want toys and books. "We're talking the basics," says Wergeland.

If the Victoria-based warehouse ministry can't meet a need, they may contact a similar organization such as Canadian Food for the Hungry warehouse in Saskatchewan which has specialized medical equipment. "They're fabulous," says Wergeland, who often recommends them to countries in need. "Nobody has a corner on this, and the need is great. So you work with whomever you can."

The Okanagan Gleaners, with a medical component to their ministry often helps out, and the Fraser Valley Gleaners "is very good to us with dry soup mixes; we approach them if we have a need for food," says Wergeland. "It's quite a community."

On Vancouver Island, about 125 volunteers do the work of collecting, packing and shipping. Wergeland, who is also unpaid, says, "We are blessed beyond belief with our volunteers. The need is great and the number of volunteer hours people put in is impossible to estimate." She knows of 35,000 hours served last year, not including the bike program that's been in place for seven years. The bike program runs in partnership with police detachments that pass on unclaimed bikes. Bikes are checked over and fixed up before being sent to needy rural areas for pastors and doctors and teachers to get around.

Partnerships are essential. "We're getting bolder," she says, about asking people to drop off their donations, rather than have them picked up by volunteers. Wergeland says they need quality donations, including sewing supplies, hand tools, screws, nuts, bolts, children's books, good reading material and sturdy play pens, toys and school supplies. They cannot accept furniture, perishable food or breakable items.

crwarehouse.ca, 250-381-4483