



Remarks by Board Chair  
Garth Marquardt  
at the  
2019 Annual General Meeting, 2020 June 18

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of The Grind's Board of Directors, I'm pleased to welcome you to our first Annual General Meeting.

The concept for The Grind Pembroke arose sometime in 2015 with a recognition by some observant and concerned community members that there were significant service gaps in Pembroke, and indeed in Renfrew County, that needed addressing to assist at-risk community members in meeting some of their most basic human needs – that is, respect and not being judged, inclusion, social interaction, safety and relaxation. Out of this awareness arose a drive to create a place where those in the community who were facing deficits in these basic human needs could go to regain a sense of being a valued part of the human race and their community. Such a place became The Grind Coffee House that opened its doors in October of 2015.

Stepping ahead four years into 2019, the community has witnessed an amazing increase in The Grind's footprint in downtown Pembroke with expanded services to meet the needs of larger numbers of people from all over Renfrew County and elsewhere – people who for whatever reason are living in poverty and have been marginalized by society and “the system” because of their circumstances – for many due to situations not of their choice but rather of circumstance – a loss of health, a loss of a job, marriage breakup, lack of childhood mentoring, generational poverty, lack of or little education, mental health or addictions issues – the list goes on.

The creation and subsequent growth of The Grind Pembroke has been a leap of faith that has its origins in Christian values, among them that we all are “our brother's keepers”. This isn't hard to understand as many of the founders of The Grind were active members of area churches who felt compelled to live their faith through positive actions to help others in need. I have to admit that we have frequently responded to needs in the community based on what our hearts were telling us – sometimes forgetting that we also needed to be more practical by using our intellect to balance our actions leading to operational decisions. To be more precise – whenever a need was made known to us, our first inclination was to act and then worry about where the resources would come from. A case in point was the creation of the Coffee House itself, later the Emergency Refuge in 2016, then the Client Services Office in 2017, and more recently Transition House. Lucky for us, and more importantly for those we serve, good people in the community have always stepped forward to provide us with the required resources. But in reality, the path forward needs to be more sustainable. As a



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volunteer-based organization that doesn't receive sustainable funding from government, this is a major challenge we are trying to address.

Our path has been primarily people-focused – responding to the needs of our at-risk population but with less attention on other important considerations, such as obligations incumbent on us as a not-for-profit, charitable organization. Quite frankly, when you are sometimes overwhelmed with program and service needs with no permanent paid staff, it's difficult to ignore the needs coming through the door as opposed to addressing administrative or organizational issues. However, out of necessity, we have had to become increasingly more business-like - focussed on process and legalities related to safety, administrative procedures like policies and procedures, licensing, insurance, financial processes including banking, bookkeeping, receipting, financial systems related to reporting, fund raising etc. because we realize that otherwise we would be out of business and then not able to continue helping those who need us most. We certainly aren't where we should be, but I can attest that we are making progress slowly but surely. A case in point, which will become evident as the meeting progresses, is the presentation of our first audited financial statement. We now have financial processes in place, with room for improvement for sure, to become more financially transparent and accountable to our funders and our regulators.

Our approach to the people we serve has changed over time. In the beginning, maybe due to our naivete and lack of experience in serving people with often complex needs, our drive to succeed in satisfying such needs was based exclusively on a "hand out" approach. Increasingly, however, faced by the challenges of securing enough resources to meet an increasing demand, we've had to temper our enthusiasm to ensure that the donations entrusted to us are distributed as evenly as possible among the many as opposed to focussing on the few who are perhaps a bit more demanding in expressing their needs. This has led us to become more discerning in what we can do and cannot do to help people. Increasingly we are learning to avoid situations where we are enabling individuals rather than helping them. I realize there is a fine line here, but we've got to accept the fact that we cannot help everyone, especially when a few we are trying to help aren't willing to help themselves and resources aren't infinite. While we recognize that there are individuals who will always need a "hand out", we are trying to incorporate into our services a more "hand up" approach by providing opportunities for clients to obtain the tools they will need to become more resilient and self-sustaining.



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As The Grind has matured as an organization, and as we who serve the at-risk population gain more experience, we have realized that we cannot fix everyone – certainly not by ourselves. We needed to be part of a larger team. We don't, for example, provide any clinical services – simply because none of us are professionally qualified and it isn't our core business. Readily available information concerning community resources – yes, but not advice on how people should conduct or change their lives. This realization – due as well to the increasingly complex needs that Grind volunteers were beginning to face from those entering our doors with extreme poverty, mental health and addictions issues – led us to reach out for help to the professional community among the health and social service sector. Jerry, as part of his 2019 operational report, will explain the partnerships that were developed in 2019 as a result and which, we feel, are a step in the right direction in more adequately meeting the needs of those we serve.

What does the future hold for The Grind? That's difficult to say in such a dynamic social and economic reality we face. But I do know one thing and that is, without the continued support of the community in providing volunteers, financial donations and gifts-in-kind, we cannot survive. I would like at this point to extend the Board's sincere appreciation and thanks to the Grind's many volunteers and individual and business/organizational donors large and small who have been instrumental in our success and growth. Without you we would not be.

In these fiscally challenged times, sustainable government funding is probably not an option. So the reality is that the greater community (e.g. Pembroke and communities beyond in Renfrew County) must decide how they want to be defined going forward. We hope the answer is – to be inclusive, non-judgemental, generous and engaged with organizations like The Grind which are trying to make a difference – and not the alternative. For our part, we welcome and celebrate community involvement in our work. For together we can continue to try and make life better and more equitable for those who deserve to be treated as we ourselves would want to be treated.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you and for joining us this evening.