



*Warm  
Hands,  
Warm  
Hearts*





## About the Warm Hands, Warm Hearts Project

In the summer of 2022, when the brutal cold of a Winnipeg winter was far from most of our minds, local leather artist Sheila Cailleau was thinking ahead. While her usual customers buy her work at least as much for beauty and style as for protection from the cold (her mitts retail at \$300-600), she is passionate about keeping everyone safe and warm, especially those who spend a lot of time outdoors and are experiencing homelessness.

As someone who fell through the cracks and briefly experienced homelessness herself, Sheila can understand the stress and vulnerability of folks living and working on the street. From talking to people asking for spare change at intersections, she discovered that many had very cold hands. In response, she began giving away her handmade mittens, but she wanted to do more. And so her Warm Hands, Warm Hearts project was born.

At its core, Warm Hands, Warm Hearts is about recycling donated leather and fur into cozy and practical mittens using volunteer labour. For the past two years, Sheila has been hosting leather mitten-making workshops through the Manitoba Craft Council. Participants learn how to take apart coats and other items made from leather and fur and repurpose the materials into toasty mittens. Thus far, almost 200 pairs of mittens have been created and donated to those who need them most.

The project came full circle for Sheila when she dropped the first batch of finished mittens off at the Bear Clan Den during their Holiday Open House in December 2022:

“All of the volunteers and everyone who was there, when I put the mittens on the table, they were awestruck by how many and how well-made they were. Not to say it lightly, but when you’re working so hard on all of the details – just sewing all the time, on a bit of an assembly line, trying to get things done – you can get kind of numb or maybe forget for a moment how significant a pair of mitts is. Just the look on the faces of the volunteers, you could see the gratitude and how wowed they were... it was like gravity took hold, and I was brought back down to why we did this project in the first place.”

Over the course of the next few weeks, Bear Clan volunteers began distributing the mittens to those who need them during their regular rounds of their North End neighbourhood, ensuring that the city’s most vulnerable will have warm hands. More than that, project volunteers hope that the love they put into making the mittens, and the care shown by those who donated the materials, will be felt by those who wear them.

Mitten-making workshops continue to this day with members of the public invited to participate. Contact the MCC to find out more about workshop availability at [mcc@c2centreforcrafter.ca](mailto:mcc@c2centreforcrafter.ca) or 204.615.3951.



For a deeper dive, check out some of the local media:  
[Winnipeg Free Press](#) or this [CTV interview](#).