



Annual Report 2009



Opportunity Council

Serving Island, San Juan & Whatcom Counties
Helping people. Changing lives.
Since 1965



Opportunity
Council

Helping people. Changing lives. Since 1965



OC Executive Director, Dave Finet, at the 2009 Annual Meeting.

A message from the Opportunity Council Executive Director and Board President

The year 2009 will be remembered as one of the most economically challenging years in American history. Citizens experienced tough times and many people who had never needed services before waited in line for unemployment benefits, energy assistance, basic food subsidy, food banks or homeless housing programs. The struggling economy strained both service providers and those who needed services to make ends meet. The role of Community Action Agencies like Opportunity Council was more important this year than it has been since President Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

This year will also be remembered for communities rising to the occasion and supporting neighbors, friends and family to help make it through tough times. Nonprofits, businesses and local government banded together and worked tirelessly to meet community needs. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided billions of dollars nationally to help get people back to work through programs like the Weatherization Assistance Program, Head Start preschool, homeless prevention and other emergency services. Opportunity Council received over \$9.5 million in ARRA

funds to use over the next three years to create jobs, help people meet basic needs, provide job training, and create sustainable business models.

One example of an ARRA-funded project is the creation of the Community Energy Challenge (CEC), a project developed by Opportunity Council and Sustainable Connections in partnership with the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, Whatcom County small cities, Washington State University

Extension, Puget Sound Energy and Cascade Natural Gas. The intent of the The CEC is leveraging ARRA funding with this wide-spread support to provide a one-stop shop for homeowners and businesses to access energy use assessments, utility rebates, federal tax incentives, local financing and services by trained qualified contractors. It is helping Whatcom County become one of the most energy efficient and energy independent counties in the nation plus while creating jobs now and for the future

CEC is just one example of how the collective effort of many is making a difference and helping people in need. These projects are helping move our economy forward and making the future look brighter in 2010.

“Be the change that you want to see in the world”

– Mohandas Gandhi

Judi Edwards, OC Board President

Dave Finet, OC Executive Director

We believe that...

everyone should have a safe and affordable place to live, enough nutritious food to eat, access to community information and resources, the education they need to succeed and thrive, and the tools, skills and opportunity they need to work.

Access to resources

Child care resource helps working mom

“Debbie” is the mother of two pre-school children and knows first-hand how OC resources can help families survive. Last year she was adjusting to being a single mother and needed half of her salary to pay her child care bill. She ended up falling behind on that bill, putting her and her children at risk of losing child care.

Because Debbie was employed, she didn't qualify for public assistance and she might have fallen through the cracks, except the OC's Child Care Resource and Referral program was able to provide a one-time child care voucher.



“My family is still on a very tight budget, but that child care voucher made a big difference in our lives and helped my family make it through tough times.”

– “Debbie”, OC Client

Everyone should have access to information, resources

Resource & Referral – responded to over 5,000 inquiries

We provide a place where people can go to access services or referrals to meet basic needs, such as food, shelter, transportation and more.

Community Partners and Outreach – served county areas

We provided information and resources to our rural communities through partners such as Helping Hand in Langley, Stanwood Camano Resource Center and resource centers on Lopez, San Juan and Orcas Island, and the Opal Community Land Trust.

Online Resource Directory

Our Community Resource Directory provides access to agencies and services to meet the needs of families and individuals.

Child Care Resource & Referral– responded to 2,800 inquiries

We provided information about and referrals to licensed child care providers so families could find a safe, age-appropriate place for their children.

Emergency Child Care Vouchers – cared for 56 children

We provided emergency child care vouchers so that families who are homeless or in crisis can access safe, nurturing child care.

NW Training Institute – provided 1,840 hours of training

We provided education and professional development to improve the quality and sustainability of local businesses and organizations.



ARRA-funded 'Community Energy Challenge' creates jobs

Opportunity Council, in partnership with Sustainable Connections, received a \$2.7 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant to develop the "Community Energy Challenge." This two-year pilot program will create jobs, help homeowners and small businesses lower their energy bills, and reduce energy usage throughout Whatcom County.

The "one stop shop" will help customers with energy information and assessments. It is expected to serve 1,800 residences and 150 businesses in addition to creating local jobs.

Everyone should have the tools, skills

Bus and gas vouchers – provided reliable transportation

We provided reliable transportation so that people could get to work, school or other appointments.

WorkFirst Supported Work – helped 198 parents with job skills

We gave parents job training opportunities to increase skills, address barriers to employment and improve their employability.

AmeriCorp VISTA – contributed 21,343 volunteer hours

We coordinated VISTA volunteers who contributed 21,343 volunteer hours to help develop programs that prevent or reduce poverty.

Community Voice Mail – helped 793 people connect

We provided phone numbers and voice mail so that people in poverty or transition can connect to potential employers, as well as housing opportunities, health care providers, family or others.

Building Performance Center – increased job training opportunities

We expanded our weatherization training program to meet the increased statewide demand for weatherization technicians and energy auditors jobs.

Training opportunities

Expanded job training for weatherization technicians

As funding for weatherization services increased in 2009, the Opportunity Council responded by developing a job training facility in Bellingham to provide hands-on instruction and certification programs for weatherization technicians and energy auditors.

Like community action agencies all across the country, the Opportunity Council has been delivering weatherization services in our community since mid-1970's. These services provide a "win-win-win" for communities, including:

1. helping people reduce their home energy costs,
2. reducing our overall energy use and carbon footprint, and
3. providing living wage jobs.

To fund the expanded weatherization job training program, the Opportunity Council secured a \$2.1 million grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce and made available from ARRA (American Reinvestment and Recovery Act). The OC is partnering with Spokane Neighborhood Action Partnership and Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties to increase weatherization job training opportunities in other corners of Washington State.

"Community Action agencies have the experience and expertise to play a lead role in meeting the demand for well-trained employees who are certified in weatherization technology."

– John Davies, Building Performance Center Director

and opportunities they need to work

Chris Clay, technical training and quality assurance manager, instructs a group of students in Lead Safe Work Practices. Training at the BPC involves classroom, hands-on and small group work, all led by trainers who are also practitioners.

This facility will also allow for hands-on weatherization skills to be taught during classes occurring 3 or 4 times per month.





ARRA funding expands early learning programs

An additional 36 children and their families can participate in a Head Start preschool program in Whatcom County, thanks to 2009 funding from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The expanded program also created 10 new jobs.

“This is great news,” said Dee West, Director of OC Early Learning and Family Services. “We’re able to serve 18 children and their families in the northwest area of Bellingham plus 18 in the east county area.”

“The impact of the current economy on families has resulted in a growing need over the past year. As soon as we started registering for these new classes, the openings were quickly filled,” West added.

Everyone should have the education

Studies show health class benefit

One UCLA study showed that when parents are better informed about handling their children’s health needs, it resulted in a **42 percent drop** in the average number of days lost at work and **29 percent drop** in days children lost at school.

Parents who attended our program showed a **77 percent decrease** in the average number of work days missed and **24 percent drop** in days children lost at school.

Head Start, Early Head Start, ECEAP – served over 400 preschoolers

We provide comprehensive school readiness programs for children in low-income households so they can enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed.

Infant Toddlers Early Intervention Program – helped 306 children

We helped families with children who have disabilities or developmental delays so that these children will need fewer special education and other services later in life.

School Supply Drive – raised over \$11,000 for kids

We helped hundreds of low-income and homeless students get the supplies they need to go to school prepared and ready to learn.

Education to succeed

While their children attend preschool, parents learn English

Two mornings each week, parents with limited English skills had an opportunity to attend ESL (English as a Second Language) classes while their children attended Head Start preschool. We offered the classes in partnership with Whatcom Community College.

Parents said they appreciated the comfort and convenience of the classes.

"I love the class in the morning because my child is in Head Start," said one parent.

"It is very convenient when my child's at preschool. I have time to go to ESL class."

Parents also said they appreciated that there were smaller numbers of people in these classes, compared to other ESL classes.

"The class has a comfortable environment that makes me learn and understand more English," one parent said. "It's easier to learn."

Twelve early learning families plus eighteen community members participated in the ESL class, focusing on family goals and personal literacy skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking.

"The class has a comfortable environment that makes me learn and understand more English. There are less people than the other classes. It is easier to learn."

- Parent who is taking ESL classes while her child is in preschool

they need to succeed and thrive

Parents take class to gain health care skill, knowledge

Over 150 parents attended a health care class to learn how to treat common childhood illnesses, such as fevers, coughs, or ear infections.

The goal of the class is to help parents make better, more informed choices.

The class provided information and tools, including a free resource book, *What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick*.

This program was offered through a grant from the UCLA/Johnson & Johnson Health Care Institute and has a proven record of reducing unnecessary visits to the hospital emergency room.



Donors in Island and Whatcom counties contributed generously during our annual school supply drive in August to provide backpacks and supplies for children in need.



'Rapid rehousing' for homeless families

A new "Rapid Re-housing" program focuses on finding permanent housing for homeless families with dependent children. It helps bypass "transitional" housing, which is limited to a two-year maximum stay and the usual route to finding permanent housing.

A US Department of Housing and Urban Development \$700,000 grant was awarded to the Whatcom Homeless Service Center (WHSC) and Clallam counties for a collaborative Rapid Re-housing housing project.

This project was one of 23 selected out of 250 applications from across the nation.

Everyone should have a safe,

OC Homeless Housing programs – sheltered 1,029 families

We helped people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless with shelter services in Island, San Juan and Whatcom counties.

Whatcom Homeless Service Center – housed 527 households

We work with agencies, landlords and clients to help people overcome the challenges of being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Lead Paint Hazard Control – made 10 homes safer for toddlers

We removed lead paint hazards so children don't get sick or suffer long-term health damage.

Home Conservation Education – taught 508 households

We provided energy conservation information to help people reduce their energy burden.

Energy Assistance – helped with 8,330 energy payments

We provided energy assistance grants in Island, San Juan, and Whatcom counties so people did not have to choose between paying for utilities or groceries. Households served by program:

- 4,295 — Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
- 3,071 — Puget Sound Energy Home Energy Lifeline Program
- 462 — Cascade Natural Gas Washington Energy Assistance Fund
- 502 — Island County's Salvation Army Warm Home Fund

A safe, warm place to live

Island County resident grateful for heat, seeing out windows

When our Oak Harbor office received a call from another agency about a woman who said her house was cold, OC staff made a visit to see if any of our programs could help.

“When they got there they found an elderly resident who had placed quilt batting and cardboard on all of her windows to conserve energy and was trying to stay warm with layers of clothes and one very small electric heater,” said Lisa Clark, Island County Opportunity Council director. “In the winter, she was keeping food on the outside porch because she said it was colder than her freezer. It was an unsafe and unfit environment.”

Lisa said staff was able to combine some program services with community donations to make key improvements to her home, including repairing her furnace and purchasing a new refrigerator, which she especially appreciated.

“I continue to be conservative with everything,” she said in a note to OC staff. “Thank you for all that you have done.” She added that she is grateful to be able to stay warm throughout her small home and for being “able to see out my window without the cardboard covering.”

“I continue to be conservative with everything. Thank you for all that you have done,” an OC client wrote in a gracious note to staff, thanking them for helping her stay warm in her home.

warm and affordable place to live

Project Homeless Connect

The first annual Project Homeless Connect event in Whatcom County was held Jan. 29, 2009. Over 500 volunteers and human services professionals provided services to people who were homeless and over 800 people were served.

Services included housing information, education, medical and dental services, hair cuts, bicycles repairs, vision screening, glasses and more.

“I was very proud to volunteer as an OC board member,” said Grochmal. “I talked with a number of people in need of legal advice of all sorts.”





photo by Allen Carbert

Affordable housing

Weatherizing homes provides more than energy efficiency

While our weatherization staff are always looking for ways to make houses more energy efficient, they will also tell you this program means much more than evaluating houses for design, durability or energy consumption.

Allen Carbert, weatherization project coordinator, said this program is really about improving the lives of people, like “Sylvia,” a widow living on \$770 a month and facing monthly electric bills as high as \$450. “She lives in a modest home out in the county on a hill where the winter Northeaster wind from the Fraser Valley come through like a freight train,” Carbert said.

OC provided weatherization measures that will result in 25 percent reduction in heating costs. Carbert said it is also important to consider how this improves someone’s life.

“I look at things like insulation, furnaces, hot water tanks, but there is a far more important element in every home that transcends its structural design and energy efficiency components. And that’s the people who live in them.”

– Allen Carbert

Weatherization project coordinator

Weatherization – improved 151 homes

We improved heating systems, weatherproofing or replaced old appliances so that people could reduce their annual energy bills by 20 to 30 percent.

Home Repair Loan Program – repaired 63 homes, retained affordable housing

We made home repairs for income-eligible homeowners to help keep people in their home, build a healthy community and retain affordable housing.

Freeman Healthy Homes – reduced asthma triggers in 52 homes

We provided home education, green cleaning kits, or ventilation upgrades to help reduce asthma triggers for young children. A family donation helped establish this program in 2008.

Enough good food to eat

Volunteers help provide hot, nutritious meals for people in need

Four years ago Jan Polen read an article in the Bellingham Herald about the Maple Alley Inn that serves hot meals to people in need, twice a week. It prompted her to call the program coordinator, Lillian Palermo.

“Lillian asked me to substitute the following Wednesday morning,” Jan said, who was recently retired after 35 years in education. “I know now that this was to be an interview for both of us.”

It apparently worked out. Jan has been a regular Wednesday morning volunteer at Maple Alley Inn (MAI) ever since. “To me, Maple Alley Inn is a very worthwhile program that has a huge positive benefit on the community,” she said.

Volunteers like Jan are key to this program’s ongoing success. Between 25 and 30 volunteers help at MAI weekly and many have been with the program since it began 20 years ago. Volunteers, staff, and community supporters help provide nutritious, home-cooked meals twice a week to guests who often lack proper nutrition. Our guests include families with young children, elderly, and homeless individuals.

“We’re very fortunate to live in a community where we have this level of support for vital community services.”

– Dave Finet, OC Executive Director

Everyone should have enough nutritious food to eat

Maple Alley Inn – served 13,628 meals

Over 25 volunteers helped us prepare and serve hot, nutritious meals so that people who are hungry have a safe, warm place to get a meal.

Basic Food Assistance – helped 860 people access food

We assisted with food stamp applications so that people could access enough food to eat.

Child Care Nutrition Program – reimbursed 435,600 meals

We reimburse nutritious meals and snacks for children in licensed childcare homes in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties.

Head Start - served 39,420 meals

We prepare breakfast, lunch and snacks for children in our early learning programs to help meet their nutritional needs and development.

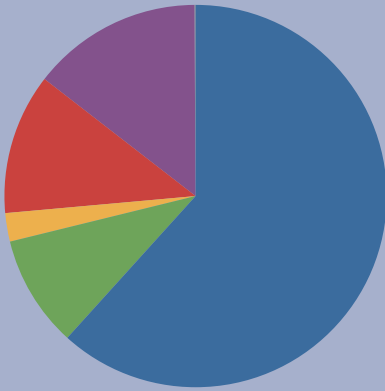
Faith Lutheran provides temporary home for MAI

After nearly 20 years of serving meals out of the kitchen at Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship (BUF), Maple Alley Inn moved across town to Faith Lutheran Church in 2009 when the Unitarian building began a remodeling project.

“Maple Alley Inn has enjoyed a supportive relationship with BUF for over 20 years and we’re pleased to partner with Faith Lutheran who is able to provide a temporary home for Maple Alley Inn,” said Dave Finet, OC Executive Director.

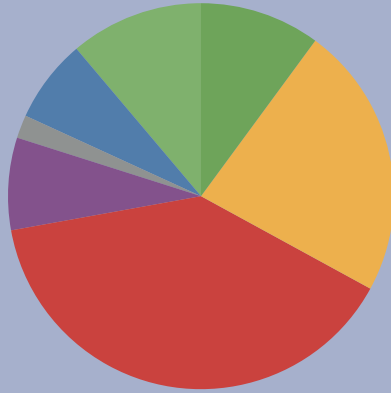
Financial reports

Revenues 2009



- Federal 62%
- State 9%
- Local Government 2%
- Fee for Service 12%
- Donations and Foundation Grants 14%
- Interest and Other Income <1%

Expenditures 2009



- Community Services 10%
- ELAFS 23%
- Energy and Home Repair 39%
- Island County 8%
- The Energy Project 2%
- Administrative & Overhead Expenses 7%
- Agency Services 11%

Opportunity Council 2009 Financial Report

Revenues

	2008	2009
Federal	\$ 8,109,381	\$ 11,479,696
State	\$ 1,510,920	\$ 1,760,257
Local Government	\$ 315,168	\$ 448,185
Fee for Service	\$ 1,499,083	\$ 2,216,127
Donations and Foundation Grants	\$ 1,969,048	\$ 2,681,006
Interest and Other Income	\$ 17,708	\$ 19,111
Total Revenues	\$ 13,421,308	\$ 18,604,382

Expenditures

Community Services	\$ 1,330,936	\$ 1,876,396
Early Learning and Family Services	\$ 3,885,154	\$ 4,254,463
Energy & Home Repair	\$ 5,037,706	\$ 7,294,000
Island County	\$ 793,835	\$ 1,440,007
The Energy Project	\$ 195,485	\$ 360,933
Administrative and Overhead Expenses	\$ 1,073,008	\$ 1,301,022
Agency Services	\$ 1,105,184	\$ 2,077,561
Total Expenditures	\$ 13,421,308	\$ 18,604,382

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County

The Unity Group
Valley Plumbing & Electric
Wagner Architects
Whatcom Educational
Credit Union
Whatcom Volunteer Center
Windermere Oak Harbor Office

Faith-Based Organizations:

Bellingham Covenant Church
Beth Israel Synagogue
Catholic Archdiocese
of Seattle
Christ the Servant
Lutheran Church
Christian Reformed Church
First Congregational Church
First Presbyterian Church
First United
Methodist Church
Garden Street United
Methodist Church
Korean Presbyterian Church
Oak Harbor Church Of Christ
Oak Harbor Lutheran Church
Pilgrim Circle Of
Congregational Church
St. James Presbyterian
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
United Church of Ferndale
United Methodist Women
Whidbey Presbyterian
Church

Foundations:

BP America Inc.
BP Foundation
St. Francis Foundation
Thomas and
Martina Horn Foundation
U.S. Bancorp Foundation
Windermere
Foundation Trust



OC's Homeless Services Center staff presents a 2009 Community Partner award to Chester Shaw from Son Rise Property Management Company, during the annual meeting April 23. These awards are given each year to honor people and organizations who have "demonstrated outstanding collaboration and dedication" to the mission of the Opportunity Council. Lummi Indian Business Council, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Stanwood Camano Resource Center, and Whatcom Educational Credit Union also received awards.

The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

ng people and changing lives!

Whatcom County
1111 Cornwall Ave.
Bellingham, WA
98225
360-734-5121
800-649-5121
fax: 360-671-0541

**Early Learning
and Family
Services**
1111 Cornwall Ave.,
Suite 200
Bellingham, WA
98225
360-734-8396
fax: 360-671-5096

Island County
1791 NE 1st Ave.
Oak Harbor, WA
98277
360-679-6577
800-317-5427
fax: 360-679-2440

**Weatherization
& Home Repair**
1322 State St.
Bellingham, WA
98225
360-733-6559
fax: 360-671-2753

**Building
Performance
Center**
3406 Redwood Ave.
Bellingham, WA
98225
360-734-5121
fax: 360-671-2753



**Opportunity
Council**

Helping people. Changing lives. Since 1965

Our Mission

Opportunity Council is a private nonprofit community action agency that acts as a catalyst for positive change, both in the community and in the lives of the people it serves.



Opportunity
Council

1111 Cornwall Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225-4736
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