

Spring 2017

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



Expanding access to fresh fruits, vegetables



With one in six Whatcom County residents faced with food insecurity, the Fresh Bucks program is helping people stretch their food budget through a “double your dollars” incentive and directing those dollars toward healthier options.

Fresh Bucks increases access to fresh fruits and vegetables for people using SNAP (also known as food stamps). This is making a difference for families who usually face the difficult choice of food quantity over food quality, resulting in consumption of highly processed, calorie dense foods linked to a variety of health issues like obesity and diabetes.

“I love hearing how more access to fruits and veggies through Fresh Bucks has positively affected people’s health and well-being. I’m excited to be finding new places to provide outreach and education, and I look forward to doing a few Farmers’ Market field trips this season,” said Naomi Siegel, Food Access Coordinator.

In its second year, the Fresh Bucks program expanded to four new farmers markets in Whatcom County, saw a 21% increase in incentives used and a 7% increase in new users. This means more access to healthy nutritious foods and also provides an economic boost for local farmers.

“Fresh Bucks is proving to be a win-win for both families and local fresh food producers,” said Siegle, who added this program is gearing up to launch in June.



Money management skills for kids

“Financial Literacy for Kids” is a new program coming this summer to Oak Harbor.

The Opportunity Council staff in Island County is teaming up with the Boys and Girls Club of Oak Harbor for a pilot program designed to teach kids about a range of financial topics, from long-term savings, budgeting and more.

“We hope these tools will set kids up with good money management skills that will contribute to their long-term well-being and a brighter financial future,” said Lisa Clark, Island County Opportunity Council director. She said a similar program will be coming to Oak Harbor Elementary and Oak Harbor Middle School next fall.

Message from the Director

Defining our mission to serve - and advocate

Greg Winter, Executive Director

Last year the Opportunity Council staff and board of directors spent quite a bit of time thinking about how to succinctly describe the human services work we do. It's very challenging because of the wide variety of services we offer.

Staff shared their suggestions for defining our mission and why they value this work, managers identified common concepts, and board members provided guidance.

What emerged was the following new agency mission statement:

We help people improve their lives through education, support, and direct assistance while advocating for just and equitable communities.

The first part of this statement is probably the most obvious part of our work. The Opportunity Council is widely recognized as an organization that directly supports the well-being of families and individuals.

Some people may be surprised, however, by the amount of effort we invest in the second part of our mission: advocacy.



Greg Winter,
Executive Director Opportunity Council

Advocacy is a key part of this work to address the social determinants of health, such as poverty and inequality, that create the need for direct services.

We are compelled to work closely with elected officials, community leaders and other organizations to create systemic changes that strengthen our communities and help everyone reach their full potential.

Focusing at a community level rather than on the needs of specific individuals helps integrate services and improve outcomes.

Here are just a few examples of how our collective efforts are making a difference:

- **Leading local efforts to bring new affordable housing resources to urban and rural communities in our region**
- **Convening early childhood service providers to create better, and more rapid services for families with children who have special needs**
- **Creating stronger connections between health care providers and housing services**
- **Supporting Head Start parents who travel to Olympia and Washington DC to educate our lawmakers about the importance of investments in early childhood services**

Our new mission statement begins with the word "we." That's because you and all our supporters make it possible to plan, partner, and fight for changes that improve our communities' responses to poverty.

That part of our mission has never been more important.

When we work together to make sure that everyone can reach their potential and fully contribute to our communities, we all benefit.

With your continued support, we will keep advocating for changes that will help more people improve their lives.



Volunteers support neighbors, communities, services



Student volunteers from Girls Explorers Club with Wild Whatcom work on a group project in April with our Chore program staff, helping a local resident with yard work. The Volunteer Chore Program pairs volunteers with aging residents or adults with disabilities so people of all abilities can remain independent in their own homes.

Our communities are strongest when we successfully build them in ways that ensure the well-being of all of our residents. Our volunteers are key to that success by providing tools and resources to help people of all stages in life reach their greatest potential.

Volunteer drivers who get veterans to their doctor's appointment, cooks who prepare hot meals that help families stretch their food budget, and parents who spend time in their child's preschool to build strong minds are all improving the quality of life for local residents and creating vibrant communities.

During Volunteer Appreciation Week in April we celebrated our volunteers and appreciate all they do throughout the year.

For more information about volunteering, visit the Whatcom Volunteer Center www.whatcomvolunteer.org.

What is the favorite part of your job?

O.C. Staff Quotes

"As a support role, I get to assist every position and department in the OC, and I get to see all the amazing things this organization does. It feels good to know that I have at least a small part to play in all of these wonderful programs that are making positive changes in our community"

James DeWine
OC Network Administrator

Working with a group of people who are dedicated to the success of others is the starring benefit of working here that keeps me coming back glad to be here every day.

Melanie Coyne
Child Care Aware Northwest at the Opportunity Council

My favorite part of working at the OC is the collaboration. I love working with the other departments and team members to find new resources and avenues to help a family get their needs met. I get a thrill every time I hear "I can help with that!"

Amy Hickel
Birth to Three programs

Head Start Registration

The Opportunity Council is now accepting applications for our preschool programs.

Families with children ages 3 and 4 in Whatcom County can apply for Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) for the 2017-2018 school year.

To apply call (360) 734-5121,
or visit us at 1111 Cornwall Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225.
You may also apply online
at www.opcco.org



These programs give children the skills and knowledge needed to reach their full potential in school and in life. According to the Prosperity Project, a local community needs assessment, Whatcom County families with young children in the Head Start program reported more frequently (82%) that their children are doing well in school compared to non-Head Start families (58%).

The program provides both children and families with benefits that include health assessments, nutrition education, mental health support and more. This is a learning environment for growth that builds relationships and support systems with families.

Advocacy Day helps inform policy

“For me, Advocacy Day was an opportunity to lend a louder voice for our clients. It was just amazing to be surrounded by so many other passionate people fighting for the same things we are”

Kate Stragis
Housing Assistance Specialist, Opportunity Council



Attending Housing Advocacy Day in Olympia in February are (L to R) April McCabe, Mikel Johnson, Kate Stragis and Roxana Karim.



You are invited to Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn Tuesday, May. 2. Eat breakfast, lunch and/or dinner at one of your favorite local restaurants around Bellingham during this annual event with the knowledge that a portion of what you spend will help provide meals for the community.

This annual event provides vital support for Maple Alley Inn and helps those who are in need. Maple Alley Inn serves hot, nutritious meals three days a week, in a comfortable and safe setting. Their community garden helps keep the meals healthy and nutritious.

In 2016, over 21,000 home cooked meals were served, and the residential kitchen equipment couldn't keep up. Thanks to last year's supporters, Maple Alley Inn was able to install commercial cooking appliances.

For Anne Poulson, Program Coordinator, and her 45 kitchen volunteers, the upgrades mean a safer place to work. New appliances ensure the program meets health and safety standards to meet its goals: volume, safety, and ability to process, prepare, and store food.

We would like to thank Maple Alley's supporters and participating restaurants for making these renovations possible. Last year's Dine Out event kicked off the kitchen remodel campaign. Supporters stepped up to to the plate, and generously donated additional funds for the remodel.

Please join us for another year and Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn!

For a complete list of participating restaurants and locations, please visit www.dineoutbham.com

Thank you for supporting our kitchen remodel. We are almost there! We are just 10 percent away from reaching the fundraising goal to finish the kitchen remodel. Please consider helping us reach our final goal for this project. Making the kitchen safer and more productive could not happen without the community's generous support.

National Service in the San Juans

This summer the Opportunity Council is pleased to be part of a team in San Juan County that will increase resources to address housing and poverty issues.

The San Juan Health Department, in collaboration with the resource centers on Lopez, San Juan and Orcas Islands and the Opportunity Council, will launch a three-year AmeriCorp VISTA project aimed at increasing economic opportunities through housing and financial stability efforts.

The VISTA volunteer will help address some of the unique issues for individuals living on low incomes or facing homelessness in the islands. As both a tourist destination and retirement community, the islands are faced with large seasonal shifts in employment and population that result in housing cost and supply issues, unreliable employment and overall difficulty maintaining household stability.

This VISTA project will provide a service volunteer to work on the Point-in-Time Count, Coordinated Entry, housing inventory development and Asset Building initiatives. This support will help local organizations leverage available resources while facilitating coordination and cohesiveness between islands.

AmeriCorps VISTA programs help agencies build capacity and sustainability within their organizations so they can more efficiently and effectively provide services to those who need them most.

We Appreciate Your Support

- We salute our community's amazing donors, volunteers, corporations, small businesses, foundations and others who value and support our work in our community all year long.

Thank you to these major donors who have* recently supported this work:

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Dorothy Place Fundraiser

Breakfast event gathers supporters to celebrate, support DP families

Over cups of coffee, fresh fruit and hash browns, community members gathered early March 29 at Bellingham Technical College to raise nearly \$30,000 for Dorothy Place, an Opportunity Council supportive housing program in Bellingham for survivors of domestic violence.

Keynote speaker Andrea Owner of Seattle's Plymouth Housing Group shared her knowledge and experiences of trauma caused by domestic violence. She showed courage and resilience in sharing her emotional personal story along with the stories of hope from Dorothy Place residents. Bonnie Southcott was the program emcee.



Thank you for making DP services possible

"I would like to begin this letter by extending my sincerest gratitude... Thank you does not suffice the deep regard in which this organization is held by my family and I. I am 32 years old and the mother of a 5 year old boy and one year old girl. I have lived at Dorothy Place longer than I have lived anywhere since leaving home at 17 years old. Here I have found safety and stability. I've begun to lay the path to self-sufficiency. That has been possible because here I am safe. For someone like me it is the difference between surviving and thriving."

Dorothy Place resident



The generous donations raised during this event will to fund services at Dorothy Place, including case management, vocational classes and children's programs. These important programs help women and families who have experienced or are survivors of domestic violence move on to live safer, more secure lives.

Thanks to our supporters and major event sponsors for helping make this annual event another great success, including IMCO, Pacific Continental Realty, US Bank and SPIE.

Opportunity Council programs include: Community Resource Center • Homeless Housing • Dorothy Place • Marjie's House • Homeless Prevention • Rental Assistance • Child Care Aware • Nutrition • Basic Food Education & Outreach • Maple Alley Inn • Energy Assistance • Weatherization Home Repair Loan Program • Early Support for Infants and Toddlers • Emergency Child Care • Early Achievers • School Backpack Drives • Head Start • Early Head Start • Early Childhood Education Assistance Program • Building Performance Center • The Energy Project • Conservation Education • Community Energy Challenge



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For mailing address changes, newsletter submissions and comments, please contact us at (360) 734-5121, ext. 333.

Printed by Lithtex Northwest.
Layout by Ketchup + Mustard.

Luau Fundraiser May 6th - 5:00pm

You are invited to the Opportunity Council's Luau Fundraiser, benefitting Veteran Support Services, May 6 at the Elks Lodge in Oak Harbor.

Along with entertainment and door prizes, enjoy Kalua pig, fried noodles, and other delicious food while supporting veterans. Tickets are available and can be purchased by calling:
(360) 679-7971

Event Calendar

May is "community action" month!

May 2

Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn

For more info go to: www.opppo.org

May 6

Luau Fundraiser, 2pm, Oak Harbor.

For more info: 360-670-7971

May 25

OC board of directors meeting, 4pm Bellingham. For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 333

May 29

Memorial Day - Offices closed.

June 22

OC board meeting, 4 p.m. Oak Harbor. For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 333

July 21

9th annual Project Homeless Connect. - Whatcom 9am-4pm Bellingham High School. For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 217

Watch our website for details about these summer events:

Golf FORE Good tournament, Aug. 4

School Back Pack Drive in Island and Whatcom counties

