1965 - 2015
Five Decades of Community Action

CHANGING LIVES. HELPING PEOPLE. SINCE 1965.
A Community Action Agency Serving Island, San Juan & Whatcom Counties.
Message to our partners

Despite some remarkable indicators of a recovery, overwhelming structural challenges in our economy continue to make life difficult for many families and individuals in the communities we serve. Still, strong partnerships with you – our donors, community leaders, and allied organizations – made it possible to guide many people in need toward pathways to stability and prosperity in 2015. This report summarizes the many ways we accomplished this important work.

Here are some example highlights of important events and achievements made possible by many teams of talented Opportunity Council professionals and volunteers in 2015:

- **50th Anniversary Celebration**: Throughout 2015, we proudly celebrated 50 years of service to our communities, culminating with an end of year event at Mount Baker Theatre where we were joined by 600 supporters and guests of honor (see the historic timeline at the bottom of pages 6 through 15).
- **Island, San Juan, Whatcom Prosperity Project community needs assessment**: People from 900 low-income households shared their experiences living at or near the poverty level. We used this information to develop our new three-year strategic plan (see the Prosperity Project report at www.oppco.org).
- **Completed a total of 101 low-income weatherization and Community Energy Challenge projects** at homes and business in Island and San Juan counties.
- **Early Learning and Family Services (ELAFS) programs honored**: Bellingham Public Schools awards Opportunity Council as Community Partner of the Year.
- **Fresh Bucks program launched**: This new program allows food stamp participants to purchase fresh, local fruits and vegetables.

We are grateful for your support as we work to attain these goals for the communities we serve.

Greg Winter
Celebrating 50 Years of Community Action

Our History

In 1965, the Opportunity Council began as a grassroots group of volunteers and staff, working with a borrowed typewriter and furniture out of a small corner in the Whatcom County Courthouse. This Community Action model was a product of the “war on poverty” and the Economic Opportunity Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 to help low income people.

For the past 50 years, Opportunity Council has provided resources and services for people in the Pacific Northwest. Our success, and the success of all community action agencies, is due to community involvement, people caring and individuals willing to take action.

“Our fight against poverty will be an investment in the most valuable of our resources - the skills and strength of our people…”

President Lyndon B. Johnson
March 16, 1964

“Our Future

Today, the Opportunity Council is one of 1,000 Community Action Agencies nationwide. Our 225 full and part-time employees serve over 20,000 people a year.

We were proud to celebrate our 50th anniversary throughout 2015, with community promotions, editorials, anniversary t-shirts — and a celebration event at the Mt. Baker Theatre in Bellingham Thursday, November 12. The celebration was attended by over 600 people and featured speakers and videos celebrating the beginning of “community action” and its accomplishments and partners over the last 50 years.

Guest speakers included Bellingham Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Greg Baker, Director of Washington State Dept. of Commerce Brian Bonlender, City of Bellingham Mayor Kelli Linville, and a keynote address by Ron Sims, former King Co. Executive and former deputy secretary of HUD. Emcees for the event were Bonnie Southcott, a Senior Digital Producer and Content Strategist at Toolhouse, Inc., together with Whatcom County Executive Jack Louws.

“Each community and neighborhood has its own challenges. We’re up for the challenge. With 50 years in the rear view mirror, we’d like to take this opportunity to thank you — our community partners — who help do this work.”

Dave Finet
Opportunity Council Executive Director, 2006-2015
Our Services Make a Difference for Families

32% Warm, Safe Homes
7% Preschool & Childcare
3% Health Care Access
13% Healthy Food
34% Information & Referral
11% Income & Job Skills

Healthy Food Resources - 4,546 Services
- Basic Food Assistance, Maple Alley Inn, Child Nutrition program, Fresh Bucks

Information & Referral - 11,467 Services
- Community Resource Centers in Bellingham, Oak Harbor, Kendall, Lopez Island, Orcas Island and San Juan Island

Income & Job Skills - 3,720 Services

Health Care Access - 992 Services
- Single Entry Access to Services, Health Care navigator support in Island County and East Whatcom

Preschool and Child Care - 2,547 Services
- Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, Early Head Start, Child Care referrals and resources

Warm, Safe Homes - 10,937 Services
- Homeless housing, energy assistance, Weatherization, home improvement, Conservation Education, Healthy Homes, Community Energy Challenge.

San Juan’s “Journeys” program helps young adults succeed

Making the transition to living independently is challenging for many teens and young adults. With high schools increasingly focused on academics and college readiness, basic life skills are often overlooked.

San Juan Island Family Resource Center’s new “Journeys” program is a free eight-week class for young people ages 17 – 28 who want to develop practical skills for successful independent living. The course leads participants through the Opportunity Council’s Financial Literacy and Renter Education curriculum and also provides weekly hands-on learning activities ranging from meal planning and grocery shopping to obtaining health insurance and setting up a household filing system for keeping track of important personal documents.

OC staff in our Vocational Lab help people with job searches, resumes, job applications and related tasks.

Increased Budget & Job Skills

Families and individuals achieve long-term financial stability.

- 2,314 People received free tax prep
- 270 People gained job skills and work experience
- 31 Individuals graduated from financial classes
- 641 People improved energy and tech job skills at BPC
- 169 People could apply for jobs or do homework with computer from Computers 4 Kids
- 295 Number of early child care providers enrolled in Early Achievers Program - serving 8,237 children

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Healthy Food and Meals

All individual, families and communities will be supported to attain comprehensive well being within healthy environments.

Ways we provide healthy, local food

Fresh Bucks helps SNAP-eligible (food stamp) households purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Through a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant, we expanded this program that helps families purchase produce at the Bellingham Farmers Market and Community Food Co-op stores in Bellingham. Over 2,000 SNAP users accessed this program, averaging $20 in incentives.

Maple Alley Inn, Opportunity Council’s hot meal program, partners with local growers and maintains a large garden at Faith Lutheran Church. The garden and the donations from local growers allow MAI to serve thousands of pounds of local produce during the growing season and beyond.

Food Lifeline Mobile Food Pantry visits the East Whatcom Regional Resource center on the second Saturday of every month to provide fresh vegetables, meat, and non-perishable items in this geographically remote area. Community volunteers have been instrumental in helping organize and distribute this food monthly.

Access to Health Care

Family’s son gets health care — for first time

By helping people access health care, our staff have been involved in the nation’s largest effort so far to improve quality of care and contain costs through the Affordable Care Act. While people continue to debate the success of this program, we see first hand how this program is making a difference for families like John, Grace and their son.

As parents, it was both frustrating and heartbreaking for John and Grace to have health insurance for themselves and not for their son who has autism. As a last resort, they went to the Island County Opportunity Council seeking help. Staff helped them navigate the Health Plan Finder and they were able to enroll their son in a plan that covered therapy for their son’s autism — for the first time ever.

Opportunity Council staff are involved in making these stories happen in Oak Harbor and at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in Kendall where they help people access health care.

“Awesome is a badly overworked word; but in this case, I am tempted to use it to describe the produce we delivered this week. We sent 259.5 lbs to the kitchen. The haul consisted of beans, beets, cabbage, chard, cucumbers, summer squash and tomatoes.”

August email from Volunteer Ed Wood, Maple Alley Inn Garden Director

210 Households signed up for Basic Food Assistance
1,400 People enjoyed hot, nutritious meals at Maple Ally Inn (19,622 meals)
936 Children received healthy meal and snacks at child care each month (20,420 total)
2,000 People used Fresh Bucks to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables

573 Children with special needs served by Single Entry Access to Services (SEAS)
419 Individuals enrolled in health care programs (Island Co., EWRRC)
A Warm, Safe Home

Everyone in our communities has access to safe, healthy and affordable housing.

Marjie’s House celebrates 10 years.

Marjie’s House, a 16-unit housing complex in Oak Harbor, celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2015.

Through community support and a joint effort of the Housing Authority of Island County, Citizens Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse and the Opportunity Council, this program has provided shelter and support services to help women and children. Families also have access to advocates and counselors who help them through difficult times.

OC programs help families secure housing, employment.

by Amy Meredith, Employment Case Manager

When I first met “Tina,” she and her three children were living in a farmhouse with no running water. She had recently separated from her husband and had not worked outside of the home for several years.

Tina enrolled in our Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program which gave her access to employment case management support, help creating a resume and conducting job searches, as well as classes to help her in the process.

After one month in the program, Tina was hired for an agricultural position—a great fit for her passion for farming. Through the BFET program, we were also able to purchase a pair of work boots, which were a requirement for the position. Tina and her children moved into an apartment the following week!

Ribbon cutting at Marjie’s House 2006

A Bellingham outreach program started in January as part of an intensive effort to reduce local street homelessness, thanks to funding from the city of Bellingham and support from private organizations. The “Homeless Outreach Team” members build relationships with people to help them access housing and health services. Two members of the team are Kate Robertson (l) and Theresa Meurs.
Volunteers in the classroom

AmeriCorps volunteer Keegan Cobb was asked to spend time with a student who needed help with letter and number recognition skills.

“It was tough!” Keegan said. “He wanted to play with dinosaurs and talk about the Flash and Batman and didn’t want to learn about numbers or letters. Counting rubber animals wasn’t fun...it was frustrating.”

Then Keegan “hatched a plan.”

“Instead of trying to get him to look at numbers, I got him to look at superheroes, at dinosaurs, at things he wanted to learn about. How many Batmans are there? What letter does Flash start with?”

Over the next two weeks, Keegan said the child began to look at letters and identify which ones meant Spiderman, Batman, Flash, Catwoman, and more. He was soon very “kindergarten ready.”

“That’s why I’m here,” Keegan said. “I’m here to promote this exact kind of thing in every classroom, with every child that needs it.”

“Helping Kids Thrive
All children and adults are ready to succeed in school and life.”

| 471 | Kids participated in Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program preschool |
| 57  | Kids participated in Early Head Start |
| 1,985 | Families found child care |
| 34  | Kids in a safe place thanks to emergency child care vouchers |

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“Email to Early Support for Infants and Toddlers
From parent of highly impacted twins

It has been quite a year for my family... I wanted both of you to know how much I appreciate everything that your organization has done for my family. It all means more to me than I will ever begin to be able to thank you for...”

Email to Early Support for Infants and Toddlers
From parent of highly impacted twins
Information and Referral

Our communities provide equity of opportunity and treat all persons with compassion, dignity and respect.

Working in Partnership

Our partners and advocates support a safe and healthy community for all our families.

Bellingham School District honors OC partnership

Bellingham Public Schools honored the Opportunity Council’s early learning programs in 2015 with a district wide Community Partner of the Year award.

OC staff were surprised with the award presentation at Birchwood elementary school in Bellingham on March 18.

“They are an amazing partner. They take a real leadership role in our community and are tremendous advocates for our school district. They are very supportive and they think outside the box.” said Dr. Micheline Holley, Superintendent of Bellingham Public Schools.

“Every part of this department has deep connections with Bellingham and all of our school districts. To be honored as the Partner of the Year is a huge compliment,” said David Webster, director of Early Learning and Family Services at the Opportunity Council.

Presenting the award, Superintendent Dr. Greg Baker said, “The Opportunity Council is known for providing high quality programming at both the state and national level. It is their dedication to children and families in the Bellingham community and their commitment to excellence that allows them to stand out.”

Number of people who accessed information, referrals, or resources:

- **4,978** Bellingham office
- **3,793** Oak Harbor office
- **2,211** Resource center in Kendall, East Whatcom
- **485** Resource centers on Lopez, Orcas and San Juan islands

Helping people connect with resources

*East Whatcom sees growth*

Attendance nearly doubled this year for the annual Community Connections Fair at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center in Kendall. The center hosted service organizations and provided information, crafts for kids, free gifts, snacks and a raffle for attendees.

Other services growing in popularity at the center include employment support to help people gain both confidence in looking for work and specific skills.
Financials

2015 Expenditures

- Early Learning & Family Services: $7,249,963
- Community Services: $7,402,267
- Home Improvement: $2,129,295
- Economic Development: $1,287,132
- Island County: $1,314,464
- The Energy Project: $361,250
- Whatcom Homeless Service Center: $2,397,794
- Agency Services: $1,285,064
- Administrative & Overhead: $1,830,672

Total Expenditures: $25,257,901

Revenue in Excess of Expenditures: $451,725

Total: $25,709,626

2015 Revenue

- Federal: $11,744,643
- State: $2,355,884
- Local Government: $3,959,324
- Fee for Service: $2,795,448
- Donations & Foundation Grants: $4,719,983
- Interest & Other Income: $134,344

Total Revenues: $25,709,626

2015-16 Board of Directors

Citizen participation is essential. The Opportunity Council, like all Community Action Agencies, is locally managed by a volunteer board of directors which includes equal representation of public officials, the private sector and people who represent low-income communities.

Executive committee:

- President: Mamie Lackie
- Vice President: Rick Hughes
- Secretary: Ramona Menish
- Treasurer: Steve Jones
- Past President: Stan Snapp
- At Large: Sandy John
- April Barker
- Rebecca Boonstra
- Dan Hammill (2015)
- Jill Johnson
- Ken Mann (2015)
- Lisa McShane
- Frank Parker
- Paul Stermer
- Mark Tompkins
- Carl Weimer
- Faith Whaley – ELAFS Policy Council Chair

2015-16 Staff

Approximately 225 employees work at the Opportunity Council to bring services to people in Whatcom, Island and San Juan Counties. Some programs have expanded to include Skagit and Snohomish counties.

Executive Director: Greg Winter
Associate Director: Sheri Burgler Emerson
Community Services and Energy Services: Debbie Paton, Director
Early Learning and Family Services: David Webster, Director
Island County Opportunity Council: Lisa Clark, Director
Home Improvement: John Davies, Director
Whatcom Homeless Service Center: Mike Parker, Director
The Energy Project: Shawn Collins, Director
Fiscal: David Foreman, Chief Financial Officer
Human Resources: Kathy Washatka, Organizational Development Director
Our Donors

All efforts are made accurately compile our list of supporters who made a financial contribution of more than $50 in 2015. If you feel an error has been made, please contact our office.
Whatcom County
1111 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham, WA 98225
360-734-5121 | 800-649-5121

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

Building Performance Center, Home Improvement Department
3406 Redwood Ave. Bellingham, WA 98225
360-734-5121

www.oppco.org