

Spring 2018

# Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



## Island County Opens Office on South End

OC staff recently opened an office in the South Whidbey Community Center to expand services to Whidbey Island residents.

“The move to the center is increasing our capacity to serve all residents of Whidbey Island and reach those who need our services,” said Lisa Clark, Island County Opportunity Council director.

The new South Whidbey office opened in February and provides space for people to participate in the Supportive Employment program, apply for energy assistance, access the Homeless Student Stability program and other services.

“We are grateful for our new location and have enjoyed developing collaborative partnership and relationships with our neighbors at the Community Center,” Clark said.

The OC office at the Center, 723 Camano Avenue, Langley (former Langley Middle School) is open Tuesday and Thursday.



## ‘22 North’ Housing Project Underway in Bellingham



*Our new 22 North Supportive Housing project really started to take shape in March, with the fifth and final story going up. Next up: topping off the building with a roof and drying it out! Watch for updates on Facebook on the 22nd day of each month. We look forward to celebrating the opening of these 40 units of service-enriched housing next fall with our partners at NW Youth Services, donors, funders and supporters.*

# Message from the Director

## Thrive, Not Just Survive *By Greg Winter, Executive Director*

Opportunity Council's goals and priorities line up well with those of the families we serve. That alignment is, by design, built into our governance structure. Parents participating in early learning programs, such as Head Start, volunteer to serve on our Parent Policy Council and our OC Board of Directors.

At last month's joint meeting of these two governing bodies, I was reminded just how important it is to have parents guiding our policies. Their experiences raising children while trying to afford childcare, housing and other basic needs informs Opportunity Council's programming and strategic direction.

Christianna Clinton, an Island County resident and member of our Board of Directors, generously shared her experience with me. After leaving a violent relationship, she and her child were homeless and without a job. "It's hard to live not knowing where you're going to sleep at night or if you're going to have the money to buy food to put in our bellies." She lived a grinding, day-to-day reality of poverty and sometimes felt that "maybe we are not good enough."

"That is how I felt. But I didn't plan to have someone do what they did. It was not my choice to be poor. When I got a job I worked over 40 hours per week to just barely make it. That is not how life should be," she said.

Christianna is right. That's not how life should be.

Sadly, her story is shared by too many families struggling to provide a bright future for their children. The work of the Opportunity Council is shaped by these common experiences: unaffordable housing, prohibitively expensive childcare, and inability to save for the future.

*"It was not my choice to be poor. When I got a job I worked over 40 hours per week to just barely make it. That is not how life should be"*

"Head Start helped us to be a strong, functional family. The teachers of Head Start helped us find housing. They supported me going back to school by giving me opportunities to earn credit for being active in the program. They gave my daughter the tools she needed to succeed in school. They changed my mindset to know how to thrive and not just survive."

Stories like Christianna's inspire us to continue focusing on solutions that create more opportunities for affordable, high quality childcare and preschool, healthy housing, employment readiness and financial stability.

I feel fortunate to have Christianna and many other parents and grandparents volunteering their precious time to help shape our programs and guide our plans for the future.

And we're fortunate to have supporters and community partners like you.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Opportunity Council and our work to bring resources and professionals together to help families thrive, not just survive.

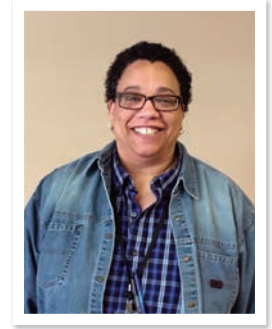


Greg Winter,  
Executive Director Opportunity Council

# Addressing Opioid, Substance Abuse

A national opioid crisis continues to make headlines and impact our communities. According to a Bellingham Herald article, in recent years more Americans have died from drug overdoses than from car accidents – most of these overdoses are associated with opioids.

Opportunity Council has taken one step to help address this issue locally. Lisa Shoemaker joined the OC's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) in Bellingham as an Opioid Substance Use Disorder (OSUD) specialist. Her expertise is providing critical support for this outreach team.



Lisa Shoemaker  
OSUD Specialist

“Lisa has increased our capacity to reduce the amount of harm caused by substance use as well as connect those we serve with services,” said Kate Robertson, HOT coordinator. “We appreciate funding from Whatcom County that made it possible to focus on outreach services to people with opioid and other substance use disorders.”

Robertson said services for substance use disorders include harm reduction, detox, inpatient/outpatient programs as well as Medically Assisted Treatment programs and other non-traditional treatment options.

## OC BRIEFS

### Veteran Navigator Approved in Island County

The OC Island County Service Center received approval from the Veterans Administration to begin a Veteran Navigator Work Study Program. The program will assist veterans in accessing benefits including housing, employment, medical and mental health services.

### Bellingham Vocational Lab Moves to New Location

OC Community Services Employment and Financial Stability classes and vocational computer lab are now up and running at the new site, 625 Cornwall Ave. Bellingham.

### New Early Learning Job Site Available Online

Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington now has a new job board for jobseekers and programs seeking to hire early learning professionals. This is a free service for all child care programs, after-school programs, and early learning programs in Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Island, and San Juan Counties. To view or post jobs, visit [www.ccanorthwest.org/programjobs](http://www.ccanorthwest.org/programjobs).

### Affordable Housing Project in Oak Harbor

A new 51-unit affordable housing project is being developed in Oak Harbor by the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a Seattle-based nonprofit developer. Twenty of the units will be set aside for veterans and OC staff will provide case management services for these veteran tenants.

### ELAFS Programs Help More Kids at Risk

OC's Early Learning and Family Services programs continue to exceed national averages in finding and serving children with acute risk factors. Last school year the Head Start and Early Head Start programs served two to three times the national average in three categories: children who were homeless, children in foster care and children with disabilities.

### Volunteers Prep Community Meals in East Whatcom

The East Whatcom Community Meals Committee is currently recruiting teams of volunteers to lead Community Meals. Teams are responsible for planning the menu, purchasing and preparing food, serving the meal, and cleaning up the kitchen and dining areas.

Each team should have one team leader and about 11-14 additional volunteers. Community meals will be held the first Tuesday of every month at 6:00PM.

*Contact Rebecca ([rebeccaboonstra@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccaboonstra@gmail.com)) for more information. A HUGE thank you to the Whatcom Community Foundation for the Project Neighborly Grant Award to support kitchen equipment and a food seed fund for groups to volunteer and participate in the process!*

## Dorothy Place Celebrates 20th Anniversary



Supporters (l-r) Nancy & Jim Bjerke, Mike Smith and Donita Reams hold the art pieces they purchased at this year's Dorothy Place event.

Friends enjoyed art and wine March 28 during the 20th anniversary celebration of Dorothy Place, an Opportunity Council housing program in Bellingham for survivors of domestic violence.

Over \$40,000 was raised that night to fund case management, vocational classes and children's programs to help women and families who have experienced domestic violence move on to live safer, more secure lives.

Thanks to major sponsors IMCO, SPIE, Eleanor and Henry Jansen Foundation, U.S. Bank and Rofmann Inc., and you, our many donors.

## San Juan VISTA Working on Housing Issues

The San Juan Islands present unique housing issues for individuals living on low incomes or facing homelessness. As a tourist destination and retirement community, the islands are faced with seasonal shifts in population that result in lack of housing resources, high housing costs, and unreliable employment.

VISTA Abby Anderson is helping address these housing issues. "Abby is working on assessing housing needs, developing procedures to build capacity and working with the island's Resource Centers to leverage resources and support coordination between the islands," said Mark Tompkins, SJ Co. Health Dept. Director.



Abby Anderson (left) is a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) working on housing needs and inventory in San Juan County. Abby and Ryan Page (right), SJ Affordable Housing Coordinator, presented information to the San Juan county council in March.

## SEAS Offers First Step

A growing number of families with children who have special needs are finding resources through OC's Single Entry Access to Services (SEAS) program.

Last year SEAS referred more than a thousand children to support services.

"Parents constantly tell us what a difference this has made for them and their child," said Maureen Cleary Hodge, Opportunity Council program manager.

"Families are truly grateful for the help this program gives them to get an evaluation for their child and connections to resources in our community."

SEAS is the first step for Early Intervention, a program that serves children with special needs, birth to age 21, in Whatcom County. SEAS navigators are able to refer, answer questions, and offer resources and connections to other agencies, businesses and organizations in all of Whatcom County.

SEAS is staffed by the Opportunity Council and made possible through a local partnership, Whatcom Taking Action. SEAS brings parents, health care providers, and support services together to create a network of support services for children, youth and families who are impacted by developmental, behavior or other health care needs.



Jayla Black was referred through our SEAS program and recently graduated from services after two years with our Occupational Therapist, Eileen Squires.

## Chore Program

"...sometimes all they need is a person to help..."

*Jenn Mason recently shared what she's learned as a Chore program volunteer. With her permission, we're reposting her comments here.*

Every Tuesday afternoon, I spend two hours with my 75-year-old friend, Mette, who I met through the Volunteer Chore Program. My job is to do Mette's chores. Doing someone else's chores has turned out to be an unexpectedly fascinating task. You learn about aisles of the grocery store you've never visited. You learn that sriracha ketchup is a thing. You learn that some people like their recycling to be neatly stacked, that scrubbing a floor on your hands and knees really IS superior, and that there are infinite ways to make a bed.

But the chores are such an insignificant piece of our time together. Mostly, we spend leisurely afternoons chatting (i.e. ranting) about politics, sharing life stories, and smugly plotting for women to take over the world. I still do the chores, but she'd probably tell you I'm the worst at that part.

Seventeen months since I first met Mette. I know a lot. She's a refined, Manhattan-bred, second wave feminist. She has Multiple Sclerosis. She's a fabulous storyteller and inquisitive listener. She takes notes all week to remember questions she wants to ask. She has bajillions of files full of pictures she's clipped of Colorado, letters from Norwegian relatives, and every bill she's received over the last couple decades. She watches "Escape to the Country"—a British sort of House Hunters—on a tiny television, sitting in the middle of her kitchen.

We have a shameful tendency to look away and let people with disabilities and seniors deteriorate unnoticed. We slowly remove them from the familiar things that bring them joy. Sometimes people HAVE to leave their homes. But sometimes, all they need is a person to help them snag groceries, change the sheets, and do some laundry. By most measures, I'm a domestic failure; even MY skill level is useful.

Please consider becoming part of the Volunteer Chore Program. The sign-up is easy. You can have an ongoing match (like me) or volunteer for one-time jobs and rides.

I can't promise you'll meet anyone as cool as Mette (seriously impossible). But I'll like you more. And it's the right thing to do.



Jenn Mason has been volunteering for the Chore Program since October 2017. She and her family live in downtown Bellingham and she is proud to serve on the Bellingham School Board.

## Resources to Help Start a Child Care Business

Families scrambling to find child care know too well the stress of being turned away from multiple programs due to lack of capacity. One of our community partners reports a waiting list of more than 300 children. According to the US Chamber of Commerce report, Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Case for High-Quality Childcare (2017), 77% of mothers and 50% of fathers reported passing up an employment opportunity or switching jobs due to the lack of child care.

This huge, unmet need for child care presents an opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs with a passion for early learning.

In partnership with the Imagine Institute, Child Care Aware of Northwest Washington is hosting Q & A information sessions about how to start a child care business. Guests will include a Washington state licenser, a mentor from Imagine Institute, and Early Achiever coaches. Information for both child care centers as well as starting in-home family child care will be available.

Dates and locations to be announced soon. Meanwhile, you can find resources for starting a child care business at [www.ccanorthwest.org/](http://www.ccanorthwest.org/) business and you can reach out at any time to Josh Peck, Child Care Small Business Development VISTA, at [josh\\_peck@oppco.org](mailto:josh_peck@oppco.org) or (360) 739-0257.

# Will you be one of the first to support us through 2Roofs?

Is this you?



Here's how it works:

You are selling or buying real estate. Or know someone who is. And you know of an amazing nonprofit who could use more money to do more good. An organization like... the Opportunity Council.

Do you also know about a program called 2roofs that is turning real estate transactions into a big donations for nonprofit organizations? At no cost to the seller? A sale in any community qualifies.

1. If you are ready to buy or sell, visit OC's sign up page at [www.2roofs.com/oppco](http://www.2roofs.com/oppco)
2. Once you sign up, someone from 2roofs will contact you and you can choose to work with them or suggest another Realtor and 2roofs will contact them on your behalf.
3. When your sale closes, Opportunity Council will receive 20% of the commission at NO cost to you.

For more information and to sign up visit:

[www.2roofs.com/oppco](http://www.2roofs.com/oppco)

As the real estate market moves into spring and summer listings, we look forward to announcing a 2roofs generous donation soon, thanks to you or someone you know!

**Thank you for your support** - We salute all donors, volunteers, corporations, small businesses, foundations and others who value and support our work in our community all year long. When you give to our housing programs, early learning opportunities, food resources, or volunteer in any way, you are helping us build stronger communities where everyone can reach their full potential. Watch for a complete list of donors in our 2018 annual report.

## Since 1965, Community Action has been a vital part of life in the Pacific Northwest,

providing local solutions to local needs. Your contributions help us provide shelter, heat and care for people in our community today.

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_

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Check:  Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift for  \$50  \$100  \$200  \$500  \$1,000  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to "The Opportunity Council"

Credit Card:  \$50  \$100  \$200  \$500  \$1,000  Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Friends of the Opportunity Council are appreciated and may be publicly recognized.

Please check here if you prefer to remain anonymous.

Your contribution can be mailed to the  
Opportunity Council administrative offices at  
P.O. Box 2134  
Bellingham, Washington 98227

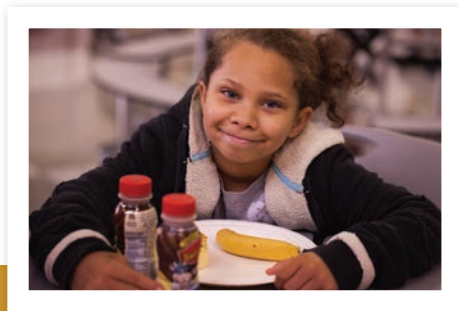


You are invited to participate in the  
18<sup>th</sup> Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn  
Tuesday, May 1<sup>st</sup>

Eat breakfast, lunch and/or dinner at one of your favorite local restaurants around Bellingham during this annual event and know a portion of what you spend will help provide meals for the community. This annual event helps provide hot, nutritious meals for anyone who is hungry. 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](http://www.dineoutbham.com)



## Thank you for all the ways you support the Opportunity Council:



### Do you shop on Amazon?

Amazon donates to Opportunity Council programs every time you make Amazon purchases through smile.amazon.com. It will take less than a minute to sign up.

Just select Opportunity Council to receive donations whenever you make an eligible purchase.



### Is your Fred Meyer card linked to us?

Last quarter we received over \$200 from Fred Meyer shoppers who simply "linked" their Rewards Card to the Opportunity Council. These links are renewed annually.

To make sure your Fred Meyer Rewards Card is linked to the Opportunity Council, go to fredmeyer.com and click on Community Rewards and re-link your card.

## OC Board of Directors

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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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contact us at (360) 734- 5121, ext. 333.

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## Head Start & ECEAP Registration

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

Families with children ages 3 and 4 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.oppco.org](http://www.oppco.org)

These programs give children the skills and knowledge needed to reach their full potential in school and in life. 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.



## Event Calendar

### May is "community action" month!

April 14

Luau Fundraiser, 2pm, Oak Harbor.  
For more info: 360-670-7971

April 15-21

National Volunteer Week

May 1

Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn  
For more info go to: [www.oppco.org](http://www.oppco.org)

May 3

Eat for Opportunity  
For more info go to: [www.oppco.org](http://www.oppco.org)

May 24

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

May 28

Memorial Day - Offices closed.

June 28

OC board meeting , 4 p.m. East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. 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 and Facebook for details about these summer events:

Golf FORE Good tournament, Aug. 3

School Back Pack Drive in Island and Whatcom counties

