

Fall 2018

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



www.oppco.org

Exploring New Career Options Leads to “Happily Employed”

A new program at the OC, Foundational Community Supports (FCS,) offers Supportive Housing and Supported Employment benefits for eligible Medicaid enrollees. FCS Supported Employment helps people with career exploration, job search, benefits counseling, and job retention. To understand how this program works, Employment Specialist Roxana Karim shared “Bob’s” story.

By Roxana Karim, Employment Specialist

“Bob,” a disabled Veteran, first came to us for housing services but also wanted to get back to work after a long period of unemployment. He was feeling hopeless about what a new career would look like for him because he was a former tradesman who could no longer do that work due to physical limitations. I helped him explore some options.

Part of my role involves meeting with employers in the community to find job leads. I visited a local hardware store and learned they had a retail opening in a department Bob specialized in during his former trade. When I told him about the opportunity, he was initially hesitant, (he had never worked in retail before), but then applied. Soon after submitting his application and acing his product knowledge test, he received a call from the store offering him an interview the

“He told me he is ‘starting to feel like a real person again’ ”

next day. He informed me after the interview that he had been offered the job.

He now signs off his emails to me with statements such as “Happily Employed,” and told me he is “starting to feel like a real person again.” I could not be more proud of his willingness to step outside his comfort zone and feel fortunate that we were able to help him achieve success.

Expanding preschool opportunities for kids, with your help



More children get to go to preschool this year thanks to an added classroom in Lynden. We also expanded half-day preschools to full-day services in Bellingham’s Birchwood Elementary and Blaine’s Primary School.

In addition to your support and volunteers, these preschool opportunities are supported with local, state, and federal grants. This year a grant from Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families (CDYF) expanded the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).

With this expansion, 417 children can attend preschool, including 174 ECEAP preschool seats, 220 federally funded Head Start preschool seats and 23 locally funded seats.

Message from the Director

Your donations and volunteer hours help people chart a path toward prosperity... and a more hopeful future

By Greg Winter, Executive Director

On a final walk-through of our newest supportive housing facility, 22 North, the day before our new tenants began moving in, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the many ways people like you have reached out in support of this new community. This grand opening solidifies Opportunity Council's commitment to our vision: Everyone has access to safe, healthy and affordable housing.

As I stood at the window of one of 22 North's fifth floor studio apartments, admiring the view to Bellingham Bay, I wondered who would be living in this modest space. After they settle in, following a chaotic and desperate life on the streets of our city, what's next? How will they make their life fulfilling? What do they dream of accomplishing? How will they get there?

Housing is a necessary condition, a foundation for a healthy and productive life. And for people who have experienced homelessness, housing, by itself, is a new beginning of a much more complex recovery. Everyone has what it takes become successful. Some just need a little help getting headed in the right direction.

The wide variety of programs we offer at Opportunity Council is a reflection of the complex needs of the people we serve.

Bob's story on the cover of this newsletter is one example of how Opportunity Council walks alongside people as they attempt to improve their lives. Many of the people we serve hope for a better future, and they are willing to work for it. It is a privilege to help them do that, and we can do that successfully only with your help. Your donations and volunteer hours provide the community and our clients comprehensive services to address very complex challenges.



Central to Bob's success was gaining and retaining a job. But, as many of our clients know, getting and keeping a job is so much harder when you are homeless; when you are constantly hungry; when you have unmet healthcare needs; when you cannot afford to fix your car.

Opportunity Council's comprehensive approach focuses on housing security, financial stability, school and work readiness, and whole person health.

Bob didn't just need a job. In fact, he first came to Opportunity Council for help with housing. Our professional case managers are adept at integrating and customizing the services that will have the most lasting impact based on their clients' goals.

You will also note when you read Bob's story that, at first, he felt hopeless, believing he lacked the skills and knowledge needed by any prospective employer. Our skilled case managers use strengths-based strategies to help their clients gain the confidence to deploy talents that they already possess.

Without your support, it would be very difficult to offer the resources needed to address the wide array of services that

help people chart their own path to stability and prosperity.

Thank you for supporting people who are working toward a more hopeful future.

"...getting and keeping a job is so much harder when you are homeless; when you are constantly hungry; when you have unmet healthcare needs; when you cannot afford to fix your car."

Oktoberfest 2018 *Prost! For Volunteer Connections*

Guests enjoyed the sights and sounds of bratwurst, beer steins, dirndls and lederhosen at the Opportunity Council's Oktoberfest on Saturday, October 6. The event featured seasonal beers from eleven breweries and netted \$8,000 for the Volunteer Center of Whatcom County. Breweries and cider houses help make this event a great success to support volunteerism throughout our communities.

Thank you to our sponsors, Heritage Bank, North Coast Credit Union, CPR – Cell Phone Repair, 2Roofs, Homestreet, Bank of the Pacific, Larson Gross, US Bank Of Washington, SaviBank, Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery, Cascade Radio Group.

A stellar planning committee organized this event. Thank you to community volunteers Dawn Wefer, Cascade Radio Group; Thomas Boucher, North Coast Credit Union; Jorge Alvarez, Heritage Bank; Max Burrage, Rockwood Realty and Keaton Wersen, Larson Gross.



Thank you to all our Oktoberfest participants.
Your support makes it possible for volunteers to make a difference throughout our community.

OC BRIEFS

Expanding resources for students, job seekers, and families.

Increased Home Improvement services

Sixteen families in Skagit County will get their home repaired through the OC's Home Improvement program. Repairs may include new roofs, replacing rotting bathroom floors or other improvements to help keep a family living safely in their home. This program works closely with partner agencies that provide weatherization and energy bill assistance, Community Action of Skagit County and Skagit Housing Authority.

New workshops for youth in Island County

Island County staff is working with Juvenile Court Services to deliver an education and employment training program for youth on probation. B.R.A.C.E. (Building Responsibility and Connecting Education) is scheduled to start in November. It will offer weekly workshops and helps youth with career exploration, employment and criminal records, resume and cover letter writing, preparing for an interview, what to expect once hired, and budgeting for a change in income.

San Juan listening forums Scheduled

As part of Governor Jay Inslee's Poverty Reduction Work Group created in 2017, the Opportunity Council is co-hosting three community listening forums in San Juan county in November. The listening forums are designed to inform strategies that address intergenerational poverty. The Work Group hopes to learn about innovative local best practices and develop better relationships between state policies and the unique needs of local communities. The group is tasked with developing a strategic plan to reduce poverty, improve communities and make needed progress related to housing, health integration, employment and education.

Home-improvement training

Over 50 people from around Washington state increased their weatherization skills last summer by attending trainings at the OC's Building Performance Center in Bellingham. Classes included weatherization trainings for energy auditors, inspectors, and Healthy Home evaluators.

Thank You For Supporting Veterans

Navigator program expands with grant, local support

Veterans and their families are finding housing, employment and help with benefits through programs at the Opportunity Council, thanks to community support and dedicated staff who understand what Veterans and their families need.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is a federal grant that helps eligible low-income and homeless Veterans. The program also has strict qualifying criteria.

OC Housing Case Manager Monica Lopez, who has worked with military families for 18 years, realized some Veterans and their families in Island County were not qualifying for help through the SSFV and she was inspired to start a Veteran Navigator Program in Island County similar to one in Whatcom.

“Monica does a great job helping Veteran families and connecting them with service providers,” said Lisa Clark, Island County Opportunity Council director. “She will tell you she doesn’t want to just ‘put a band aid on a problem.’ And I see that every week when she’s coming alongside families to problem solve with them.”

OC program specialist Doris Kent coordinates the Whatcom County Veteran Navigator Program and assisted Lopez in starting the Island County program to help Veterans with matters that may not be covered through SSVF. That support could include books for a student learning a new skill or a gas card for someone who needed to go to the hospital in Seattle.

These Veteran services are also supported with the addition of Dan Correll, HUD/ Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Case Manager, stationed at the Island County office, who provides intensive support services to those veterans receiving a VASH voucher.

The value of this Veterans Navigators has been embraced by Island County Veterans. Two Veteran motorcycle groups, VFW Post 7392 Riders Group and Brothers In Arms MC #291, support the program with regular fund-raisers and donations.

Want to read more?

Doris Kent, Opportunity Council program specialist, has made it her life’s mission to help veterans and their families make claims for benefits they don’t know they’re eligible for. She sees her own family in the Veterans who come to see her.

Read more about her story in this [Whatcom Talks online article](#):

<http://www.whatcomtalk.com/2018/09/01/meet-doris-kent-gold-star-mother-and-warrior-for-hope/>

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Helping Kids, Teachers, Learn

Community partnerships key to success

A pilot program helping both children and teachers learn was recognized in the Whatcom Family YMCA blog in September. YMCA thanked the Opportunity Council/Child Care Aware of NW Washington for the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) Pilot Program.

“Ultimately, this program will help our teachers learn and grow in assessing children’s areas of development, further their own professional development, and help improve our program’s practices in both curriculum and assessment,” the article stated.

TSG is an assessment tool that preschool and prekindergarten teachers use to support child development and learning.

Thank YOU, YMCA.

We are grateful for your partnership in this project.

Thank you for golfing “FORE! Kids”



Over 100 golfers competed in the Opportunity Council’s “Golf FORE Good” Tournament Friday, August 3, at Shuksan Golf Course. The golfers, sponsors, donors and volunteers raised over \$20,000 (net) for children in OC’s early learning programs.

With appreciation to our golfers, presenting sponsors Peoples Bank and Superfeet and all the sponsors, including Kulshan Community Land Trust, Cigna Health Care, Bay City Supply, Rice Insurance, Overhead Door Company of Bellingham, Inc., Northwest Fence, Buri Funston Mumford, Premera Blue Cross, Sun Life, American Family Insurance -Nancy Leavitt Agency, Dawson Construction, Puget Sound Energy, Robinson Hardwood & Homes LLC, Philadelphia Insurance, Aetna, CAZ Energy, Belcher | Swanson Law Firm, P.L.L.C., Barron Smith Daugert, PLLC. Heritage Bank, WECU, HUB NW, IMCO General Construction Inc., Pacific Continental Realty, Windermere Management, Hilltop. Whatcom Refrigeration, Central Welding, Lithtex - design and press printing, Special-T Signs, Boundary Bay Brewery.

ConEd Offers Energy Saving Tips

3 ways you can save energy at home

Families are learning how to manage their energy usage and reduce energy bills through our Conservation Education program. These home energy assessments and energy savings plans include tips that anyone can use this winter.

Here are three energy-saving tips:

1 For every 1° that you lower your thermostat, you can save 2%-5% of your heating costs. Set your thermostat between 65-68° in the daytime. Turn your thermostat down to 60° at night and when you leave the house for more than 2 hours.

2 Setting your clothes washer to wash clothes on Cold/Cold temperature has an electric cost of \$.02/load. In comparison, washing on Warm/Warm has an electric cost of \$.15/load, and Warm/Hot costs \$.35/load.

3 When appliances or electronics are plugged in, even if they are not turned on, they still consume energy. Unplug appliances, electronics, phone chargers, and lamps, and turn off power strips to reduce “phantom” draw.

Thank you for making a difference now AND in the future.

You help families get housing, child care, food, or employment through your gifts to the Opportunity Council.

As you plan your year-end giving and how you want to continue to make a difference, also consider leaving a gift in your will to help others in the future.

You leave a lasting impact in your community when you use your will to give a portion of your assets to a program of your choice. You don't have to be wealthy to do this and you can still provide for your family. Even a modest gift makes a great impact.

**Thank you for changing lives through your gifts today.
Consider leaving a gift that will continue to change lives in the future.**

Legacy giving resources:

<https://www.freewill.com>

<https://www.lawdepot.com/law-library/estate-articles/how-to-leave-a-gift-to-charity>

or contact us for more information, (360)734-5121, ext 333

Volunteers use surplus materials to create a home

Thank you to our Housing Development Department, Dawson Construction, volunteers and Lummi Nation leaders who built and donated a tiny home to the Lummi Stepping Stones program. LSS is addressing the unmet need for Native Americans who are affected by homelessness on and off the Lummi reservation. In this unique partnership, OC used surplus material from our 22 North housing project plus donated material and labor to build this tiny home.



These individuals and companies joined with others to complete a tiny home project: Nick Lewis, Lummi Indian Business Council member; Chuck Wright, VECA; Tim Jensen, Scaboria Construction; Matt Hazenberg, Dawson Construction; Mark Julius, Lummi Stepping Stones; and Jon Martin and Chris Clay from the Opportunity Council.



A new tool to find housing

An OC Housing Lab started in Bellingham in May to offer help with housing searches, applications, renter education and referrals, plus eviction prevention and roommate/landlord mediation. To date, we have served over 270 households.

OC Landlord Liaison Adrienne Solenberger answered questions about the new lab and how it's working.



Q. Why did this lab start?

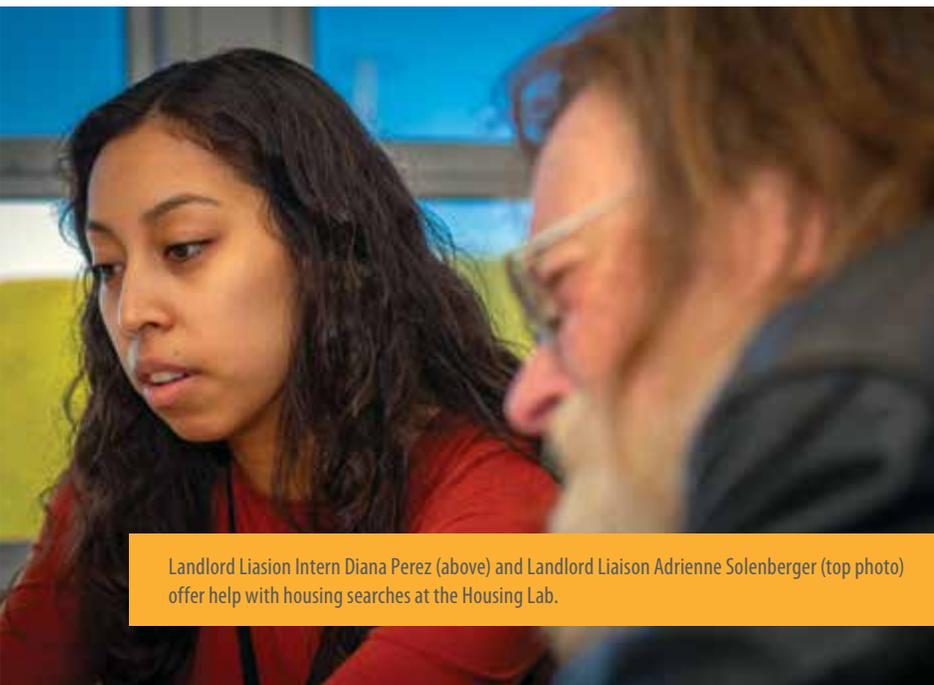
A. Several individuals have expressed frustration finding a home. Often times we hear folks say they feel as though they are on “a waitlist to nowhere,” or that they “don’t qualify for any help.” Housing Lab staff are there to help persons experiencing a housing crisis and provide the best resources possible whether it’s a renter toolkit or mediation.

Q. Is there anything else you want people to know about how this program is making a difference?

A. Housing Lab aims to provide support for anyone who needs skills and resources to get and maintain safe and stable housing. There is no eligibility criteria and participants are encouraged to attend as needed until they feel as though their housing concerns have been resolved.

Q. Are other resources available during the housing labs?

A. Representatives from Law Advocates are available during Housing Lab from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. each Tuesday. Participants can also receive assistance connecting with other community resources such as DSHS, Veteran Assistance, BFET employment support, and local housing providers such as the Bellingham Housing Authority.



Landlord Liaison Intern Diana Perez (above) and Landlord Liaison Adrienne Solenberger (top photo) offer help with housing searches at the Housing Lab.

The Housing Lab is located at 625 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham and is open on Tuesdays, 10 a.m. to noon.

For more information, call 360-255-2091 x 136, or visit: housinglab@oppco.org

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 Housing Development • 22 North • Financial Literacy and Renter Education (F.L.A.R.E.) • Whatcom Asset Building Coalition • Employment Case Management • Project X-it



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

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22 North is Opening!

Thank you for providing 40 more homes for people who are homeless.

With support from local donors, funders and financing, the "22 North" facility is opening in November to provide 40 more homes for people who are homeless.

In partnership with Northwest Youth Services and the Veterans Administration, OC staff are working to lease 40 units at the new housing facility on State Street in Bellingham. The building is on track for full occupancy by December.

To view a gallery of photos showing the construction and inside of the building, go to:

www.oppco.org/22-north



Event Calendar

November 12

OC offices closed for Veteran's Day

November 22-23

OC offices closed for Thanksgiving holiday

December 6

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

December 25

OC offices closed for Christmas holiday

January 1

OC offices closed for New Year holiday

January 25

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

February 28

Homeless and Housing lobby day

Visit us online for more event information and updates, www.oppco.org

