

Spring 2019

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



Three's a charm

Meet the self-proclaimed, "Golden Girls," three Whatcom County residents who unexpectedly found housing by teaming up together when they couldn't find affordable housing on their own.

Through "Roommate Café," a new program at the Opportunity Council, residents are exploring shared-housing options. The program began in February as part of Generations Housing Project (GHP), a home sharing program that reduces elder homelessness by identifying opportunities for shared housing.

The roommate-matching service can bring people together to find housing options.

"We each kept striking out on our own," explains Abigail, one of the "Golden Girls."

After spending over 18 months in an emergency shelter and living on the streets, Abigail found an option for housing with two potential roommates, Joyce and Anne.

Anne was a medically fragile widow living in her car when she received the call about an opportunity to share

housing with two other senior women. She is quick to share her thoughts about getting that call.

"I was like, holy Hannah!! It's about time," Anne said.

Joyce is the busiest of the three. She volunteers with individuals who experience mental health disability and also teaches part time. Joyce came to the OC's Housing Lab when she found herself at risk of losing her housing after a \$200 rent increase.

"Everything was too expensive," she said. "Of course I was willing to share housing if it meant not living on the streets."

Joyce also recognizes that sharing a home comes with both benefits and challenges.

"[Being a roommate] is about compassion and compromise," Joyce said.

In this case, it's also about banding together to provide a home for three people who could otherwise be homeless.

The program is funded in part with a grant from the Chuckanut Health Foundation. Some names in this article have been changed for privacy protection.



Senior residents are finding options to share housing through "Roommate Café" at the OC's Housing Lab located at 625 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham. The Roommate Café hours are Thursdays, 10-11:30 am. The Housing Lab is open Tuesdays, 10-12 am.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Your engagement in problem solving leads to action

By Greg Winter, Executive Director

One of our donors recently told me that what she appreciated about Opportunity Council was our approach to responding to the emerging needs of our community.

I couldn't agree more.

Over time, OC has become a more complex organization because we encounter new challenges that confront the people we serve. And we try hard to rise to those challenges in partnership with community coalitions.

Recently, in preparation for the groundbreaking celebration for the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRC) expansion, I reflected on the path we took to get here. It wasn't straight and quick. It was born of a deliberate effort to engage the local community in problem solving and dreaming. Opportunity Council helps set the table, but the potluck of ideas and solutions are provided by members of the community.

“Opportunity Council helps set the table, but the potluck of ideas and solutions are provided by members of the community”

This newest facility at the EWRRC was largely motivated, almost five years ago, by a group of local residents, farmers, and other stakeholders at the Foothills Food Summit. The resulting Foothills Food Access Plan catalyzed the planning for this new multipurpose facility that will become the new home of the Foothills Food Bank and a base of operations to combat food insecurity in the Foothills region.

Our best work and innovations come from the people and partnerships in the communities we serve.

- In partnership with the Lummi Nation, the Opportunity Council's Energy Assistance Team is now offering services weekly at an outstation office at the Lummi Nation.



OC Executive Director Greg Winter (r) joins former OC directors Dave Finet and Kay Sardo at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center ground breaking celebration in Kendall, WA, March 22.

- OC's Early Learning Department launched an integrated classroom last fall in partnership with the Lynden School District that includes preschool children with disabilities with typically developing peers.
- Our participation and support from housing affordability task force groups in Island and San Juan counties resulted in housing projects we're working on in Oak Harbor and Friday Harbor.

And our new Generations Housing Project derives from ideas discussed by a coalition of organizations participating in the Aging Well Initiative, sponsored by Chuckanut Health Foundation. This new program is helping homeless seniors secure rooms for rent in "Host Homes" and facilitate roommate matching with other seniors, like Abigail, Ann, and Joyce, featured in this newsletter.

These community responses to emerging needs is a big part of what we do and why Community Action agencies were established over 50 years ago as part of the War on Poverty. We are only successful in delivering these innovative services with the help of you—our donors, partners and supporters.

A new building is underway in Kendall

East Whatcom County community members and funders celebrated the next phase of the Resource Center in Kendall at a groundbreaking event Friday, March 22. HB Hansen, a general contractor based in Lynden, started construction on the second building in March.

The new 4,500 square foot multi-purpose facility will become the new home of Foothills Food Bank. With appreciation to the project funders, Whatcom County, Washington State Department of Commerce, Chuckanut Health Foundation, Whatcom Community Foundation, McEachren Charitable Trust, Mt. Baker Foundation, and the taxpayers of Washington State.

East Whatcom community members together with Opportunity Council and Whatcom County staff participated in the design process for a new multi-purpose building in Kendall and celebrated the ground breaking on March 22.

OC Briefs from around the NW

PSE partners with OC Island County

Opportunity Council's Island County Service Center was selected as a 2019 Puget Sound Energy Powerful Partnership Agency. The purpose is to increase education in our community about the ways PSE can help them save energy and money on their bills as well as provide access to safety and emergency preparedness. We will be posting information and notification throughout the year of any activities where PSE and Opportunity Council are presenting.

Early Support team rated highest for service

The WA Dept of Children, Youth & Families released its 2018 direct customer response data from families whose child(ren) with special needs were enrolled in Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT). OC's ELAFS program team was the highest rated for service satisfaction in Whatcom County and exceeded the statewide averages on all indicators.

BPC trains in Idaho

Building Performance Center (a HID program) began providing technical training services for the State of Idaho's Weatherization Network. Trainings since January, including Weatherization Installer, Energy Auditor, and Quality Control Inspector, were held at locations across Idaho and at BPC's Bellingham facility.

San Juan County housing can be rehabbed

A grant secured from the Federal Home Loan Bank will provide funds to rehab the Harbor View apartments in San Juan island as soon as this property sale closes. These 20 apartments will remain affordable thanks to a 2017 sales agreement between the Opportunity Council and the building's private owners. The sale is expected to be completed this year. The apartments were at high risk of transforming into market-rate housing and the sale of the property to Opportunity Council means it will remain affordable to low-income households for years to come.



Advocacy days at the state capital

Preschool parents traveled to Olympia, Washington, for an early learning rally and meetings with legislators. Parents shared the impacts OC programs have for their families and asked for funding to increase wages needed to retain staff and an increase in the allowed number of over-income slots so more families could access these programs.

Housing advocates from Whatcom, Skagit, and Island counties also went to Olympia to attend Housing Advocacy Day and speak with legislators about how they can support the most vulnerable in our communities.

“We went to share our concerns and let our pro-housing legislators know that we appreciate their efforts. And that there is still so, so much more need in our communities,”

- Conner Darlington,
Street Outreach Specialist at the Opportunity Council.

Community partners and OC staff met with Rep. Debra Lekanoff (D-Bow) during Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day Feb. 28.



Parents, partners and staff gathered on the State Capitol steps during Early Learning Advocacy Day Feb. 7.

New Outstation at Lummi Reservation

In partnership with the Lummi Nation, the Opportunity Council's Energy Assistance Team is now offering services weekly at Lummi Community Services.

Energy Assistance opened an outstation office at Lummi Commodities at the Lummi Nation on March 13. The office was made possible after an expansion and remodel of the Commodities offices. An energy intake specialist will be stationed there weekly to conduct energy assistance appointments and make referrals to other agency programs.

Head Start & ECEAP

Sign up now for preschool

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

Families with children ages 3 and 4 can apply for the Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) for the 2019- 2020 school year.

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.

TO APPLY

Call (360) 734-5121
Visit us at 1111 Cornwall Ave. Bellingham, WA 98225
or apply online at www.oppco.org



Wood Smoke Reduction Program in East Whatcom

Home Improvement began the installation phase for our 2018-19 Wood Smoke Reduction Program in Whatcom County's Columbia Valley. Services include installation of high efficiency wood stoves and/or ductless heat pumps to replace low-efficiency wood heating appliances. We expect to serve 25 households by July.

The Columbia Valley Urban Growth area experiences some of the poorest air quality in the state, due to topography and the high percentage of households relying on wood heat. The goal of this program is to limit exposure to wood smoke particles, especially for populations with chronic respiratory conditions.



Solar panels are on their way to OC housing in Bellingham

The Opportunity Council is one of three organizations in Washington to receive funding from Puget Sound Energy to install solar panels on low-income multi-family housing facilities.

The grants are part of PSE's Green Power program with additional funding from the energy program at Washington State University.

Solar panels will be installed at an agency owned four-plex in Bellingham and the Opportunity Council expects them to produce enough energy to power the entire four-plex over the course of one year.

EVENTS

Dorothy Place Luncheon

Thank you for providing a safe, supportive home

Friends gathered March 27 at the annual Dorothy Place fundraising event. The luncheon was held at the Bellingham Airport Holiday Inn and featured Mayor Kelli Linville and Connie Burk, guest speaker from Seattle with over 25 years of experience working in the anti-violence movement.

Dorothy Place provides 22 apartments plus support services for women and families who are homeless and have experienced domestic violence. Donors contributed over \$35,000 at the event to help families move on to live safer, more secure lives.



Bellingham Mayor Kelli Linville, program emcee Bonnie Southcott, and guest speaker Connie Burk shared personal experiences and helped celebrate community support for Dorothy Place.



Guests gave generously during this event to make sure families living at Dorothy Place can have "a sense of stability, safety, community connectedness, and meaningful access to resources."

DINE OUT!

for Maple Alley Inn

TUESDAY, MAY 7TH



Join us for the 19th annual Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn on Tuesday, May 7th

Treat yourself to breakfast, lunch, and 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. 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

Veteran Resource Fair

*Saturday May 4 / 9 am – 1 pm
Oak Harbor Library,
1000 SE Regatta Dr. Oak Harbor*

Have you served in the United States Military? Find out what resources and benefits may be available to you.

Veterans and their families are invited to attend and meet with local, state, and federal Veteran Service providers and Veteran Service Organizations. Participants include VFW, DAV, Island County Veteran Services, WorkSource, Brandman University, PSE, Red Cross, Veteran Resource Center, WDVA, HUDVASH

Veterans will have the opportunity to sit down with Veteran Navigators to see if they qualify for benefits, enroll on the spot into the VA health care system, ask questions about claims and more.

If you are a Veteran Service provider and would like to host a booth at his event please contact Monica Lopez, 360-679-6577, ext. 2136, or email monica_lopez@oppco.org



DONORS

Your support makes a difference

When you donate or volunteer, you are providing a more hopeful future for families, job seekers, Veterans, students, senior neighbors and others.

Here is a sample of how you are having an impact:

- A major \$500,000 grant from the **Thomas and Martina Horn Foundation** is establishing a working capital fund to increase the OC's capacity to develop affordable and special needs housing. Watch for more information this year about how this gift is making a difference for people who need housing.
- **Bellingham Kiwanis Club** is supporting the Homeless Student Stability Program so that families experiencing homelessness can get help with move-in assistance, rental application fees, sports and academic club fees and other needs for school-age children.
- **A private donor** has made multiple donations to the Financial Stability program so that people can be job-ready with workplace and interview clothing, certifications, and transportation support.
- **A new volunteer** is working in our employment program, offering tutoring on Word and Excel for jobseekers and mock interviewing.

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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 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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Veteran Resource Fair

Saturday May 4
9 am – 1 pm
Oak Harbor Library,
1000 SE Regatta Dr. Oak Harbor
See inside for details

Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn

May 7 – all day!
See inside for details

Annual Luau Fundraiser

Saturday May 11, 5 pm
Elks Lodge, Oak Harbor, WA
Proceeds benefit Veteran Support Services
Advance tickets available until May 5: 360-679-7971

Event Calendar

April 15-21
National Volunteer Week

April 25
OC Board of Directors Meeting
4pm, Bellingham
For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 333

May 4
Veteran Resource Fair Oak Harbor*
For more info: 360-679-6577, ext. 2136

May 7
Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn
www.dineoutbham.com

May 11
Luau Fundraiser
5pm, Oak Harbor
Advance tickets: 360-679-7971

May 23
OC Board of Directors Meeting
4pm, Bellingham
For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 333

May 27
Memorial Day - Offices closed.

June 27
OC Board Meeting
4 pm, For more info:
360-734-5121, ext. 333

July 19
9th Annual Project Homeless Connect. - Whatcom 9am-4pm
Bellingham High School
For more info: 360-734-5121, ext. 217

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

