

Fall 2019

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



Community support makes it possible to provide housing, services, facilities

When Opportunity Council purchased the Harbor View apartments in Friday Harbor in San Juan County last summer, it ensured these 20 subsidized apartments would not become “market rate” housing. Had the cost of this housing increased, it would have been devastating for current residents.

“The sale to the Opportunity Council was a Godsend,” said resident Leah McConnel, who has lived at Harbor View for 13 years. “I have a lot of medical bills and if I had to pay regular rent, I would be homeless,” she added, and noted Friday Harbor has few rentals and the rents are high.

Harbor View is just one of Opportunity Council’s current projects, thanks to community support.

Current Building Updates

East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRC) “building 2” in Kendall
A second building is under construction next to the EWRRC with dedicated space for the Foothills Food Bank. The building, scheduled to be complete in January, also has two multi-purpose community spaces.

Recovery House in Bellingham
This facility will fill a high priority community need by helping prevent incarceration, reduce homelessness, and help individuals struggling with opioid addiction. Scheduled to be completed in Spring 2020, Recovery House will provide a six-month residential program of care and treatment.

22 North in Bellingham
This 40-apartment facility is celebrating its one-year anniversary in November. Thanks to generous community support, Opportunity Council developed this facility in partnership with NW Youth Services. It opened last fall to provide housing for youth, Veterans and people with disabilities who are homeless.

Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) housing in Oak Harbor
LIHI is proposing to build a 50-unit housing complex for Veterans and people who are homeless and the Opportunity Council has agreed to support this project by providing case management for the residents. LIHI operates housing for the benefit of low-income, homeless and formerly homeless people throughout Washington State.

(See page 7 for more information about community support for these projects.)



Board members and staff visit the Harbor View Apartments in Friday Harbor, San Juan, that were recently purchased by the Opportunity Council and will soon be remodeled and weatherized. Front row, l-r: OC Executive Director Greg Winter, board members Christianna Clinton, Ramona Menish, and Sandy John. Back row, l-r, board members Rebecca Boonstra, Thomas Boucher, Steve Jones and Mark Tompkins.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Your support helps address needs, improves the quality of lives

By Greg Winter, Executive Director

After nearly four years of leading this organization, I still marvel at the sheer variety of ways we partner with our clients and their communities to help them achieve hopeful futures.

This newsletter provides examples of an array of our responses to the emerging needs and hopes of the people we serve:

- Rescuing affordable housing so renters don't have to choose between paying medical bills or rent.
- Building a facility to increase capacity of a rural community to address food insecurity.
- Expanding pre-school hours to full-day to accommodate the needs of working and student parents.
- Helping families transition from homelessness to homeownership.

- Bringing energy assistance directly to Tribal communities to address equity in access to these services.
- Planning to develop a new Recovery House to prevent incarceration, reduce homelessness, and help people struggling with opioid addiction.

At Opportunity Council, we are inspired to take on this complex work by the resilience of our clients and their determination to succeed.

Your support to address the root causes of poverty is vitally important to our mission to help people improve the quality of their lives. Thank you for being there with your generous financial contributions and volunteer time. We cannot do this without you.

Opportunity Council staff joined community partners, elected officials, advocates and neighbors who participated in Housing Week in Whatcom County, October 21-25.



Cold-weather shelter programs to open

Two cold-weather shelter programs will be available in Whatcom County this year and supported by Opportunity Council staff and community volunteers.

The Women's Winter Weather Shelter, located in a building at the City of Bellingham's Civic Field complex, will offer 30-40 guests a warm place to shower and sleep. This service is in response to a growing community need. The Lighthouse Mission's Shelter has been exceeding capacity and the numbers keep increasing as winter approaches.

OC hired professional staff with experience in serving populations experiencing homelessness.

"We're excited for the opportunity to meet a crucial need for our community," said Steven Bass, Opportunity Council Street Outreach Coordinator.

More housing support

Through the Governor's Opportunity for Supportive Housing (GOSH) program, OC case managers are working with community partners to provide wrap-around services for people exiting Western State Hospital and re-integrating back into the community.

This coordinated support includes partnerships with caregivers, mental health providers, peers, and family members as needed to provide a supportive environment for clients to make the transition.

Generations Housing Project (GHP) is another new program the Opportunity Council launched this summer to help address the senior housing crisis.

GHP connects a host home with an affordable room to rent to limited and low income seniors. Recent host homes have been comprised of other elders desiring to age in place, retirees, single parent households, and empty nesters.

Through host homes and facilitating roommate matching, this program is placing low income seniors since its inception and was a 2019 grant recipient of the Chuckanut Health Foundation.

A number of volunteers will be working with staff to make sure the Women's Winter Weather Shelter can operate seven days a week through the winter months from December to February.

In addition, the Volunteer Center of Whatcom County is working with the County Health Department to recruit "on call" volunteers for a severe weather shelter project that will operate as needed from the beginning of November until the end of February. This project involves four churches who will open when temperatures drop below 28°F or 1" of snow is forecasted or on the ground. The faith communities who are actively supporting this effort include:

- Fountain Community Church will be open to take in anyone who needs to stay warm the night severe weather shelters are open.
- Christ The King at Norway Hall will serve up to 50 men including about 10 folks with medical needs.
- Garden Street United Methodist Church will host a limited number of families with children.
- Bellingham Seventh-day Adventist Church in North Bellingham are interested in hosting women, men and couples.

"The Volunteer Center often gets inquiries from individuals who want to help people experiencing homelessness during the winter months and these shelter projects are a great way for the community to step up as a very real support during the coldest time of the year," said Summer, Coordinator for the Volunteer Center of Whatcom County.

HOW TO HELP

If you are interested in volunteering for either the ongoing Women's Winter Weather Shelter or to be on call for the Severe Weather Shelter project, please contact Summer Starr 360-734-5121 ext 212 or summer_starr@oppco.org.

Thank you for giving kids a great summer in East Whatcom

"I didn't even taste the kale!"

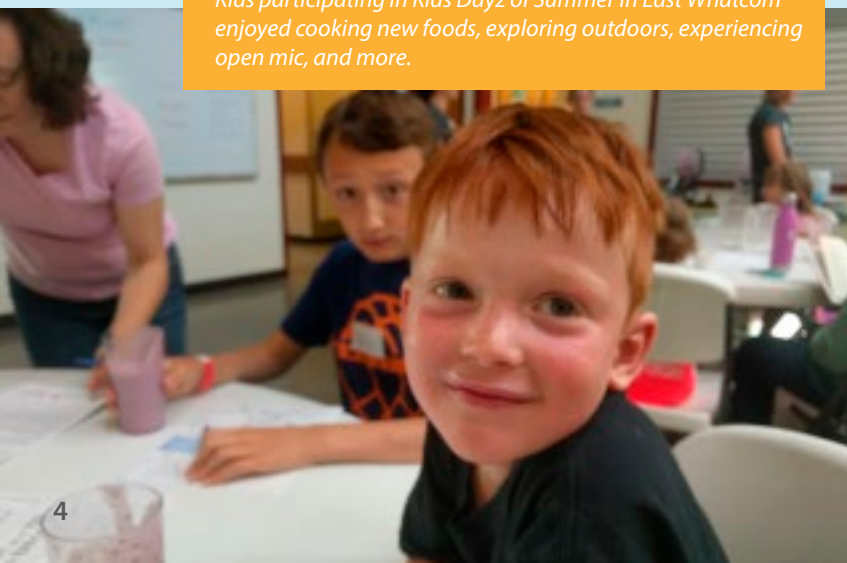
Nearly 100 kids attended Kids Dayz of Summer at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRC) this summer.

Kids took part in Cooking with Common Threads Farm, Nooksack Tribal Stories, Double Dutch Jump Rope Academy, Grief and Loss Discussions with Our Tree House, Kids Karaoke and Open Mic. They made new friends, learned they were good at grating cheese, fell in love with Chana Masala and some discovered they liked "healthy green" food hiding in smoothies.

When Common Threads Farm staff blended berries, bananas, milk, plus one other secret (green) ingredient to make a nutritious smoothie, they asked the kids what they tasted in their smoothie. Kids responded "bananas!" and "berries!" and "milk!" When staff showed them a giant leaf of kale as the secret ingredient, the campers gasped. One chuckled out loud, "I didn't even taste the kale!" Campers decided smoothies are a great way to eat greens and took a few leaves of kale and chard home to add to other favorite recipes.

"We couldn't have done this amazing work without the stellar help of so many organizations who stepped in to share with the community youth up here," says Jessica Bee, EWRRC Coordinator.

Kids participating in Kids Dayz of Summer in East Whatcom enjoyed cooking new foods, exploring outdoors, experiencing open mic, and more.



2020 Census is around the corner

Census day is officially April 1, 2020, but preparations for the census are underway now. This decennial census not only determines political representation for the next 10 years, it will also determine funding for critical social programs.

It is estimated that for every person missed in the census, Washington State will lose \$1,900 in federal funding for programs like energy assistance, Head Start, Medicaid and more.

The Opportunity Council is getting involved to support census outreach and ensure that critical social programs continue for people in our community.

In the coming months leading up to the census, the Opportunity Council will support non-profit partners with census-related activities, mobilize community leaders to become census advocates, and set up Questionnaire Assistance Centers where individuals can find support in filling out the survey.

For more information about the Opportunity Council's census work, contact Summer Starr, summer_starr@oppco.org

Emergency Child Care Voucher Program expands

For more than 20 years, the Emergency Child Care Voucher Program has provided temporary, limited assistance to help families in Whatcom County access or maintain licensed child care during times of financial crisis. It's a vital service for families. If parents don't have child care, they can't work. Thanks to generous support of individual donors, the United Way of Whatcom County, and the Norcliffe Foundation, Opportunity Council has expanded the Emergency Child Care Voucher Program to serve families in Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Island, and San Juan Counties, helping families maintain stability during difficult times.



Landlords and staff pictured (l-r) Aude Cornet, Doug Wight, Nicole Wargo, Sandi Jones, Laura Magi, Louise Akers, Adrienne Solenberger, Jas Gill, Dave Hansen, Cheri Richie, and Julie Burns.

Appreciation Brunch

Recognizing landlords

Opportunity Council hosted a Landlord Appreciation Brunch September 27 to honor corporate and private landlords who have helped provide housing for people in Whatcom County.

Landlords were praised for working with the Opportunity Council's Landlord Liaison in 2019 to provide over 100 new units of affordable housing as well as maintaining nearly 200 units of housing through the use of tenant-landlord mediation.

The Opportunity Council presented five awards to landlords who have demonstrated a dedicated effort to providing safe and affordable housing. Awards recipients were: (Cherie Richie) Lakeway Realty, (Sandy Jones and Bethany Aldrich) Windermere Property Management, (Louise Akers) 1800 Place Apartments, (Jas Gill and Jenn Eckermann) Horizon Property Management, and (Aude Cornet and Julie Carney) QTS Properties.

Gary Dolin, Senior Social Worker with Dept of Veterans Affairs, spoke at the event and commented afterwards how important this is to have community partners.

"The impact of this support is phenomenal," said Dolan "By working together we help solve one of the most serious social dilemmas in our society. No one should be without a roof over his head and the growing number of people who are homeless is increasing faster than we can keep up with. This is a community problem, and not a Veteran problem."

OC BRIEFS from around the NW

Taking services to communities

Energy Assistance (EA) in Whatcom County has new partnerships to expand outreach to local Tribal communities. EA staff are offering services weekly at Lummi Commodities and once a month at Nooksack Social Service.

Supporting people from homelessness to home ownership

Island County Service Center has scheduled eight offerings of \$wellness (financial wellness) in 2020 with four on North Whidbey and four on South Whidbey. Staff are currently seeking funding to increase capacity for this program and add a youth component. Three people who participated in this program last year have transitioned from homelessness to home ownership.

Services provide energy savings—plus health!

Weatherization Plus Health projects result in significantly improved occupant health outcomes, according to preliminary results of a study completed in August. Demonstrated benefits include a reduction in unscheduled office visits and a reduction in health care costs for people with asthma. The study included clients served by Opportunity Council and three other Weatherization agencies in Washington.

Helping child care businesses get started

The OC's Quality Child Care Division's Small Business Development Initiative has worked with 60 parties interested in starting or growing licensed care. Thus far 5 new businesses have obtained licenses, and 43 are preparing (37 Family Home Child Care, 6 Centers) to meet licensing requirements or business knowledge basics.

Preschool Expansion

The 2019-20 school year saw six more OC preschool classrooms in Whatcom County expand to full day (6+ hours). Out of 19 total Head Start and ECEAP preschool classrooms operated by Opportunity Council, 13 now offer the full day model, allowing parents increased opportunities to work and/or go to school. This greatly increasing their ability to provide for their families and plan for the future.

NEWS & DONATIONS

Oktoberfest 2019

Cheers for volunteers

This year's Oktoberfest Sept. 27 was a big hit. Thanks to guests coming out for brews, music and food vendors at the Depot Market building in downtown Bellingham, over \$9,000 was raised for the Volunteer Center of Whatcom County. Thank you to our breweries, cider houses and local wine vendors who made this event a great success and supported volunteerism throughout our communities.

Thank you to our sponsors, Heritage Bank, Haggen, Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery, WECU, Exxel Pacific Inc., North Coast Credit Union, Homebridge, Bank of the Pacific, Larson Gross PLLC, 92.9 KISM, Lithtex NW, Signs by Tomorrow

A stellar planning committee organized this event. Thank you to community volunteers Dawn Wefer, Cascade Radio Group; Scott Less, 92.9 KISM; Brandi Civico, Phillips 66; Thomas Boucher, North Coast Credit Union; Jorge Alvarez, Heritage Bank; Max Burrage, Rockwood Realty; Kari Humphreys, Starry Most Productions; Thea Hart, Bellingham Event Security Teams.



Rachel Marier Photography

Nearly 500 people attended the annual Oktoberfest event featuring brews and beverages, seasonal cuisine, music and fun to raise support for the Volunteer Center.



Golfers win and kids win at the annual Golf FORE Good tournament in August.

Golfers play "FORE" good, kids are the real winners

Over 100 golfers competed in the Opportunity Council's "Golf FORE Good" Tournament Friday, August 2, at Shuksan Golf Course. The golfers, sponsors, donors and volunteers raised support for children in OC's early learning programs.

With appreciation to our golfers, presenting sponsor Peoples Bank and all the sponsors, including HUB NW, IMCO General Construction Inc., Pacific Continental Realty, Windermere Real Estate, CAZ Energy, Heritage Bank, Philadelphia Insurance, Puget Sound Energy, Rice Insurance, Robinson Hardwood & Homes LLC, SPIE, WECU, American Family Insurance - Nancy Leavitt Agency, Tom Mumford, Cigna Health Care, Dawson Construction, Kulshan Community Land Trust, Northwest Fence, Overhead Door Company of Bellingham, Inc, Sun Life, Windermere Management by Ebright Wight, LLC, Arrow, Pacific Surveying and Engineering, Premera Blue Cross, Kelly's O'Deli, Inc., Hemplers, Fred Meyers, Cash and Carry, Central Welding, Lithtex, Special-T Signs, Boundary Bay Brewery.

You make a difference

Because of you, a second grader has a new backpack and is excited to go to school.

Because of you, one of our older residents has a room to call her own.

Because of you a family will get a hot meal at Maple Alley Inn.

Your support makes a difference every day.

As you plan your year-end giving to continue to make a difference, please consider planning to also leave a gift in your will that will continue to help others in the future.

When you help everyone in our community thrive, our community is stronger for all of us.

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

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

Donate while you shop

If you are shopping online this season, please remember to name the Opportunity Council as the recipient of your Amazon sales.

The Opportunity Council recently received a quarterly donation of \$77.25 thanks to customers shopping at smile.amazon.com. To date, AmazonSmile has donated a total of \$747.01 to Opportunity Council

Thank you for supporting Opportunity Council when shopping at smile.amazon.com.



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.



We can't do this without you

Thank you for the major donors supporting OC development projects, including Peace Health, Rotary Club of Bellingham and the Horn Foundation for Recovery House; Chuckanut Health Foundation, Whatcom Community Foundation, Walton Foundation, Mount Baker Foundation, McEachern Charitable Trust and other supporters for EWRRRC building. (See more about these projects on page 1.)

Thank you Kulshan Brewery and donors for supporting a “period pak” fundraiser and making sure women have these basic personal hygiene supplies.

Thank you donors in Island and Whatcom County who generously gave both cash and school supplies for kids to make starting school exciting – and less stressful – for families.

OC appreciates community support in so many ways.

Recently that support was from a local food truck.

Back East BBQ catered dinners for the Pathways out of Poverty program, a family enrichment program.

“Ryan and Danielle at Back East BBQ are easy to work with,” said Edith Tate, Pathways Organizer. Tate said they were happy to cater for a program at an organization that has helped their friends and family members.

“When I followed up to arrange payment, they said they would like to donate their food and services,” Tate said, adding they did this in part because they support Opportunity Council’s decision to pull out of The Firs kitchen contract.

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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 Vouchers • 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



Contributors to this issue include Jessica Bee, Jennifer Armstrong, Adrienne Solenberger, Lisa Clark, Jenny Weinstein, Greg Winter, Debbie Paton, David Webster, Summer Starr, Rose Marcotte, Tilda Doughty, Edith Tate, Kaitlyn Miller, Rose Lathrop.

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www.opcco.org

A note of thanks **We appreciate your help finding, funding a new kitchen for kids**

Thank you to everyone who stepped up in a big way to help us find a new commercial kitchen for our early learning programs.

It has been a challenge to find a suitable kitchen to provide meals for 450 children in our early-learning programs. We appreciate Lynden and Bellingham school districts providing temporary kitchen facilities, giving us time to find a suitable, permanent home.

After exhaustive research of more than a dozen sites, we're pleased to say that we have found a new home for our kitchen. Thanks to the many individual donors who supported the decision we made to live our values, the funds are there to build-out our new kitchen. Thank you also to Peace Heath, Glasser Foundation and the office of Head Start for supporting this effort.

Watch for an announcement this month. We are finalizing a lease and excited to share this news soon.

Again, thank you for your generosity support of our decision to live our values.

Greg Winter,
Executive Director

Event Calendar

November 11

Veteran's Day

OC offices closed

November 21

Thanksgiving meal at Maple Alley Inn

November 28-29

Thanksgiving holiday

OC offices and Maple Alley Inn closed

December 5

OC board of directors meeting

4pm Bellingham. For more info: 360-734-5121 x333

December 18

Maple Alley Inn Winter Holiday Meal served

December 25

Christmas Day

OC offices and Maple Alley Inn closed

January 1

New Years Day

OC offices and Maple Alley Inn closed

January 23

OC board of directors meeting

4 pm, For more info: 360-734-5121 x333

February 20

Early Learning Advocacy Day

February 28

Homeless and Housing lobby day

