



# INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

## ROAD PROJECT PAVES WAY FOR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Last March, the City of Ferndale initiated a partnership with Interfaith Coalition by offering a house for Interfaith to use as transitional housing until it is needed for a future transportation project. The home needed some attention, so calls went out for help to ready the house for its first family. Volunteers worked through March and April demolishing a rotten deck, repairing wiring, replacing a window, sprucing up the yard, and then cleaning, making curtains, and moving in donated furniture and other furnishings. In early May, our first family moved in!

This home is Interfaith's fourth unit in Ferndale, and there has been incredible assistance from member congregations in the Ferndale area to create and support these homes for families in need. Linda Anderson, an Interfaith Coalition board member from congregation Christ Lutheran Church, and her husband Kurt, are frequently among the first volunteers to show up when the call goes out. Linda echoes what many volunteers say: "I am so thankful that I am blessed with a stable home and loving family, I want to make sure that others have that chance in their lives...If we can help one family at a time, give them hope, and encourage them to achieve independence, that is my dream..."

Many volunteers have first-hand experience with families in need. Loretta Tedrow, from United Church of Ferndale, shares: "A few years before the Ferndale units opened, I knew a boy who was the "adult" in his two-person family. Attention-deficit and hyperactive as he was, he still knew he was the one in charge of keeping their boat afloat by way of an unpredictable network of only slightly more stable friends and family. It's discour-

aging to be unable to offer a "miracle rescue" to every kid like him, but volunteering with the Interfaith transitional housing units in Ferndale has been a way to dispel some of that discouragement. Bottom line--families who want to be together need to have that possibility, especially during difficult times, and Interfaith helps that happen."



*It is important that each family have somewhere to feel safe and secure. Living in tents and cars is not a great way to grow up."*

Kurt Anderson

Working together, sharing, and collaborating is what Interfaith is all about. As Kurt Anderson urges us:

"The load is made easier with many congregations working together to create a welcoming house, and grounds. We could do more, in other local areas, if communities could work together!"

## FORMER CLIENTS BECOME BIGGEST AUCTION DONORS

By Eric Thomas

Recently, 34 people gathered at Infusion Cuisine near Lynden to dine on a four-course dinner prepared and hosted by restaurant owners Eduardo and Yesenia



Diego. The meal, a donation by the Diegos to Interfaith's annual fundraising auction, raised \$6,800 – the most ever for an item at the auction that this year garnered almost \$194,000 and accounts for more than 40 percent of the nonprofit's budget. The

\$6,800 bettered the previous auction item record of \$3,000 raised by a dinner for 20 people that was donated - again - by the Diegos the year before.

That Eduardo and Yesenia have become one of Interfaith's biggest benefactors is a success story for both them and the organization. Five years ago, when the Diegos were desperate and homeless, Interfaith provided them with a house and other assistance that helped them get back on their feet.

The couple had recently moved from San Diego, where Eduardo worked as a sous-chef, only to have a promised job turn into a dead-end when the owner refused to pay him. Living out of a single room of a house as Eduardo worked two jobs and Yesenia one, they left when they felt conditions there posed a threat to their three children.

"Everything was black at that time," Yesenia recalled. "We had nothing. We didn't even have money to rent an apartment. Just trash bags with our clothing." Then, an acquaintance referred them to Interfaith Coalition, an organization supported by over 40 Whatcom County congregations that provides 11 housing units for families in transition. Last year 63 children and 41

adults were sheltered – as the Diegos had been at the house in Fairhaven years ago. "The kids were so happy," Yesenia recalled. "We were recharging our batteries so we could move on. Without Interfaith I don't know if we could have done it."

That assistance is what motivates the Diegos to participate in the Interfaith auctions. "We had all these people helping us," Yesenia said. "We're very grateful. That's why we are giving back for what we received back then."

The Diegos' hard work, friendliness and humility, coupled with Infusion's tasty Mexican, Asian and Italian dishes, are proving to be the right recipe for the restaurant. Many of those who paid \$200 each to attend the dinner are regular Infusion diners and had rave reviews of the food and service.

"What better way to support Interfaith and Eduardo?" said Philip Petrasek, who along with wife Linda have long been involved with Interfaith and visit Infusion often. "It (the Diegos' evolution from Interfaith clients to major financial supporters) is a great example of what Interfaith is able to do for the whole area." Fellow Infusion fans and Interfaith stalwarts Richard and Linda Luke said the Diegos' story touched their hearts. "This is what Interfaith is all about," said Richard Luke. "Helping people come to their full potential."



*We were recharging our batteries so we could move on. Without Interfaith I don't know if we could have done it."*

Yesenia Diego

In addition to the Diego's donation, Interfaith Coalition appreciates the support of Lynden United Methodist Church for underwriting some of the dinner's food costs.

**Infusion Cuisine, located at 6912 Hannegan Road, is open from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Takeout and catering are available. 360-778-1726; [www.infusioncuisine.com](http://www.infusioncuisine.com).**

## LOCAL CONGREGATIONS HELPING MEET GROWING NEED

*Updated school statistics tell us that approximately one of every 26 Whatcom County children experienced homelessness for all or part of the 2015-2016 school year.*

That's a worrying increase from one in 32 during the previous year.

Interfaith Coalition has supported hundreds of local children and parents experiencing homelessness. But our resources are outpaced by the growing number of families in our community. To help meet this urgent need, we are developing a partnership with Family Promise, an organization helping faith groups directly serve homeless families in over 200 communities nationwide. Houses of worship are used for temporary lodging, meals, and companionship to families transitioning out of homelessness. Host congregations provide space for four weeks each year. During the day, families go to a day center, where children are picked up and taken to school, and parents work with a case manager to access housing, jobs, and community resources.

We already have four host sites, and more congregations are discerning participation. Assumption Church was the first congregation to commit as a host. Pastor Scott Connolly shared that Assumption chose to participate because "...we have to reach out to those who are most in need in our society. We are only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. We want people to know that the Catholic Church cares about strengthening the entire cord of the human community here in Bellingham..." When asked if it will be difficult to rearrange their facility use for four weeks out of the year, Rev. Scott said "It will be a sacrifice, but we have to make choices about putting other people first. It may be inconvenient for some of our parishioners, but nothing like having to sleep on the streets every night."

Northlake Community Church was already blessed with a legacy in Family Promise. Two previous pastors had experience working with the program, and Rev. Jeff Geise, the current pastor, said that they recognized the call to be a host congregation as a service opportunity – one with a proven record of successful action. First Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, recently

committed, as well as the Firs Conference and Retreat Center, showing a generous and creative vision of space sharing.

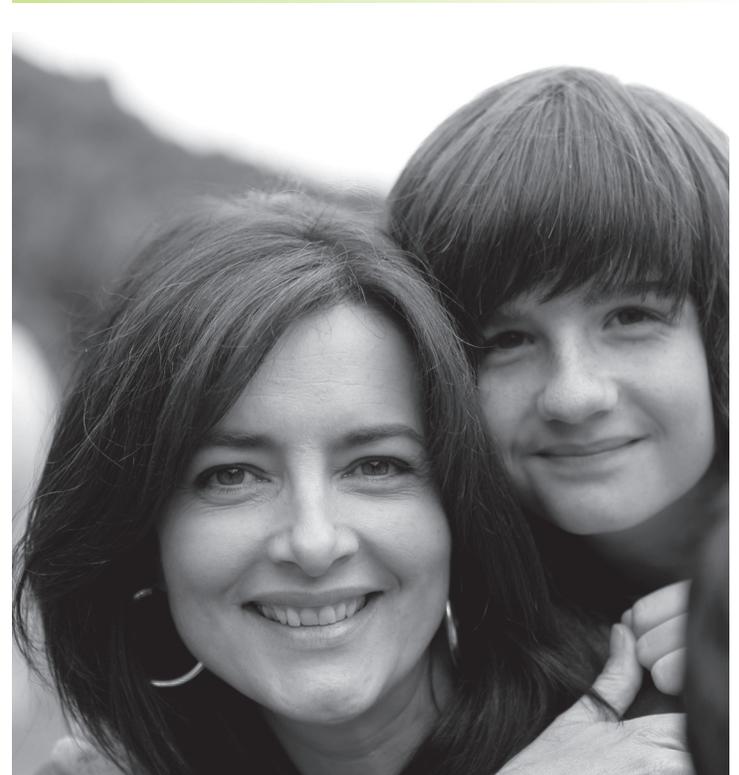
"Passionate" and "determined" are two words that accurately define the volunteers who are working to recruit more host congregations, secure a fifteen-passenger van for transportation, raise funds to launch Family Promise in Whatcom County and find space for the Day Center. There have been some day center possibilities, but we are still seeking more options to have the best choice. The Day Center space can be in a congregation or commercial space.

It is a fact that no single congregation or group can be the solution to this situation, but working cooperatively, we can make a significant impact. **Please contact us if you or your congregation want to get involved in this exciting new program.**



*It will be a sacrifice, but we have to make choices about putting other people first.*

Father Scott Connolly





**INTERFAITH COALITION  
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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**SUMMER OPPORTUNITIES TO  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**PROJECT HOMELESS CONNECT**

Project Homeless Connect on July 21 is a one-day, one-stop event at Bellingham High School that coordinates on-the-spot services for homeless people. Last year, more than 600 people received services, as well as basic items to make their lives a little easier. Interfaith Coalition participates by collecting essential items. Can you help? A wish list includes camping supplies, new socks and underwear, blankets, flashlights and batteries, and personal hygiene items.

**KIDS NEEDS BOOKS DONATIONS NEEDED**

Kids Need Books! hands out gently-used and new books to low-income children each week. The program was developed initially to help bridge the “summer slide,”

the academic decline low-income students face during summer months away from school and books. The program proved so successful—it evolved into a year-round effort with plans this summer to expand throughout the county, including migrant camps. Your donations are welcome and appreciated.

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR MAINTENANCE &  
YARD PROJECTS**

Help Interfaith Coalition maintain our 11 units of emergency and transitional housing for families. This summer, there are many opportunities for involvement. We have projects for all levels of skills and enthusiasm! Projects include landscaping and yard work, fence painting and carpentry projects.

Please contact Interfaith Coalition at [info@interfaith-coalition.org](mailto:info@interfaith-coalition.org) or 360-734-3983 for more information.

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