



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

WHY I'M THANKFUL

"It's been a good journey," Liz said, "and I couldn't have done it without the committed people in Whatcom County like Interfaith Coalition."

Over 10 years ago, Liz woke her three children in the middle of the night. Fleeing domestic violence, she knew that, despite the fear, she needed to make a change.

Riding north on a bus, she and her young family stayed with relatives briefly. Moving to a shelter, they showered there. At 11 p.m., Liz was ironing clothes for the next school day. A pastor directed them to Whatcom County, where she found support and encouragement.

But a tough year followed, with the loss of a job and a home. More temporary stays included motels and bouncing back to shelters. Her kids even sheltered with friends.

She knew she had to keep going. The Opportunity Council offered a home in Interfaith's Our Saviour's, a partner house with Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Bellingham.

"It changed my life dramatically," Liz said. "It was a beautiful place. My kids loved it, and so did I. It gave us time to put things into perspective, a place of peace." She chuckled that it was a little scary to have so much space to spread out!

At every turn, people stepped forward to help Liz regain her life. "The floodgates opened. It was really amazing to me. I had felt alone in my struggle." People provided what she needed, from counseling to moving furniture. A principal took her kids to lunch and bought them school clothes.

Liz, who had worked in sales, resolved to lift her family up. She put on heels and walked to a motel, where she was hired as a housekeeper. "I was determined to do this for myself," she said. "I wanted to prove what you could do with hard work, perseverance and patience.

"You have to help yourself. You have to get it together. It was pretty hard and depressing, but three people were depending on me to be strong."

The three children are now busy adults, and Liz is a proud grandmother. She's completed training to be a phlebotomist, and may return to school to study management. She has dreams of starting her own nonprofit to help other

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women. Outside her neat apartment, she has a thriving vegetable garden. Life is full for Liz these days.

There's one more thing you should know about Liz: she gives back. Her many volunteer activities range from greeting at Project Homeless Connect, handing out gear at Interfaith's Winter Coat Drive, and even doing reminder calls for the District Court.

"I said when I get myself together, I'm going to do what these people do, help others, and show all their hard work wasn't a waste on me. I used it to the best of my ability.

"I love it here. So many people reached out to me. I couldn't have done it without their help. If you're willing to make a commitment, you can turn your life around."

WHY I VOLUNTEER

"I learned to give not because I have much, but because I know what it's like to have nothing."

(Author unknown)

That pretty much sums up why I started volunteering and why I got my two kids, Holly (16) and Ethan (12) involved as well in CAST. We all make sandwiches, and Ethan and I serve. I wanted them to see that homelessness can happen to anyone, from all walks of life, but sometimes a smile and a nice word can make someone's day. I love watching my kids as their empathy and kind hearts grow.

We are truly blessed, but haven't always been, and being able to give back is a wonderful feeling. Being out there restores my faith in humanity. It's definitely true that the people with the least are usually the most generous."

Crystal Morrow, CAST Volunteer

WHY WE BELONG

The members of Hope Lutheran see their mission as helping people in the community who need help and hope. They understand that together with other faith communities, they can do so much more than they could acting alone.

Hope members love their neighbors and are motivated to provide the necessities of life for people who are suffering through homelessness, hunger, illnesses and joblessness. The book club has read about people who have been homeless and have a good understanding of what will help them. They have put their knowledge and their hearts into taking action that will change the lives of their suffering neighbors and return them to healthy existences. Thank you for all your work at Interfaith on behalf of "the least of these who are members of my family."

*Pastor Marjorie Lorant,
Hope Lutheran Church*

WHY THIS MATTERS

Opportunity Council's partnership with Interfaith is an integral part of the services we provide to families experiencing homelessness in our community. We face a major shortage of affordable and accessible housing for families. The homes Interfaith manages provide many families with a crucial bridge from living on the streets to permanent housing. Families frequently exit Interfaith's short-term housing praising the program for saving their families' lives and giving them hope again.

Leah Congdon, Opportunity Council



Volunteers from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church prepare the home for families.

"They understand that together with other faith communities, they can do so much more than they could acting alone"

— Pastor Marjorie Lorant

WHY WE GIVE

When my wife Annie and I moved to Bellingham three years ago, we quickly grew to love our new community. But as we explored the city and walked the local trails, we constantly encountered homeless people and wondered what, if anything, we could do to help these individuals.

Soon the beginning of an answer took shape when good friends Andy Day and Connie Coghurn invited us over for a conversation about homelessness and the role Interfaith Coalition played in addressing this complex issue.

The evening proved to be an enlightening experience. A person with no home also has no place to bathe, to wash clothes, to cook a meal, to store belongings, to sleep without worry. Things most of us take for granted — hygiene, health, rest, comfort, safety, nutrition — are but dreams of the homeless.

We learned that Interfaith Coalition is unique because it allows families to stay together and, with three months of its assistance, almost 90% of families find stable housing.

Annie and I began our annual contribution to Interfaith by supporting “Our House” in Ferndale. We were privileged to be present at the blessing of Our House. I wrote a poem entitled **Whispered Prayers in Our House:**

And the home had taken on a name: Our House
Not ours, really, but everyone’s,
Especially those families who would soon dwell
beneath this roof —
Families who lived in broken cars,
Sodden tents, the dark edges of city parks —
Always hovering in the shadows.

Our House offered them light and warmth,
The promise of a hot shower,
A kitchen for cooking, beds with clean sheets —
Basic comforts that, for them, had become luxuries,
Like rare books locked away in a special collection.

Joe Nolting, Interfaith donor



At the blessing of Our House, attendees share messages of love and best wishes to families that would live in the apartments.

WHY WE GIVE

We donate to Interfaith because we believe in the power of faith communities working together to reach out to those who need a helping hand. We love the holistic approach — helping people to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter and medical care while also having a long-term approach towards independence and paying it forward.

I grew up in poverty and as a child I was “lucky” because we had government housing, free medical, and when I was old enough, financial support for higher education so I could break that cycle. Your organization is a beacon of hope for children so they can feel that there is a community around them that really cares and wants to see them succeed.

Julia, Interfaith donor



**INTERFAITH COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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Bellingham, WA 98225

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HOW WE IMPACT LIVES

- 88 parents and children from 23 families lived in our 11 units since January of 2015
- Almost 90% of families secure stable housing after they leave
- Over 90 families in Whatcom County are homeless any given night
- Up to 80 people spend the night at our Severe Weather Shelters
- Over 25 volunteers work three shifts at the Shelters each night
- We distribute over 3,000 warm coats and winter gear in five communities
- CAST serves over 675 meals each month to men, women and children
- CAST is run by 112 current volunteers
- 78 homeless families received donated holiday gifts last year
- We are 95% funded by local community donations
- We have 44 congregation and partner members

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Help right now by donating **cash or food gift cards**. CAST then buys supplies for simple meals prepared four nights a week throughout the year. As the weather gets colder, wetter and windier, our guests at the Severe Weather Shelters appreciate **new socks and warm gloves (for men and women)**. Please drop these off at our new office at St. James Presbyterian or mail your contribution.



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OF WHATCOM COUNTY
ON FACEBOOK!**

