



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

IMAGINE THIS:

You're a mom with a teenage daughter fleeing domestic violence, and you've been homeless for 5 years.

You have been promised housing over and over, only it falls through every time. You're not even sure you know the meaning of the word hope anymore.

You are a hardworking husband with a wife and teenage son. Your rental home changes owners. The rent increases at the same time that you lose your long-time job. In a devastating domino effect, you lose your house, your stability and your pride. The three of you are reduced to living in a borrowed van.

You are a pregnant mom with two children. After a health crisis, your husband abandons you. Overnight, you have no income, no support and are on the verge of homelessness. Your children are depending on you, but what can you do?

You are a single dad with a young son. If you go to the local shelter, you will be separated from your son because he is too young to be in the mens' shelter with you. You pay to live in a shed on someone's property, but this is no place to raise a child.

You are a grandmother raising your six grandchildren and your only housing option was staying on the floor in the home of an abusive relative. Survival meant leaving there and living in your van with all the kids.

This year, each of these real families – and many more like them – found an open door and caring support with Interfaith Coalition. *Because of you*, they were able to get back on their feet and into stable housing. Here is what a few of these families had to say about their lives now:

"Thank you so much for allowing us to stay this long. We don't know where we would be if we didn't have this home to stay in, but we know it would have been really bad."

"Our kids are thriving, they're in sports, they're getting good grades."

"I'm in school, we have a community, we're getting healthy. I joked with my doctor about pain in my shoulder – it was from exercising, not illness – haha – isn't that awesome?"



Some things are awesome indeed.

Help Interfaith Coalition serve more homeless families!

Volunteers who wish to share their time and leadership skills are needed on the Family Promise fund development, communications and transportation teams. Learn more about this exciting new program at our website: www.interfaith-coalition.org.

35 YEARS OF HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE - by Joe Nolting

Three and a half decades ago a group of local pastors and lay people met. They represented 24 separate congregations and, despite their differences in worship, rituals and beliefs, they shared a unifying concern for the most vulnerable members of our community.

They wondered how they could help the hungry, the homeless and those without healthcare. From this gathering, the seed of an idea formed: harness the resources of the religious community to meet crucial human needs.

Soon this seed was planted in the fertile soil of love and compassion and given the name Interfaith Coalition. Hardworking volunteers joined hands and got to work. The first project, in 1981, addressed hunger. Before long Interfaith had reorganized and reenergized the struggling Food Bank, allowing it to better serve hungry families.

Next it was time to tackle the problem of people who lacked access to adequate healthcare. Interfaith volunteers, in partnership with Opportunity Council and the Whatcom Medical Society, found local doctors willing to treat low-income sick people for little or no compensation. The Interfaith Family Health Center opened its doors in 1987. By 1992, the Center expanded and offered dental care, and mental health services were added in 1997.

Interfaith continued its work helping those at the edges of our community. Volunteers organized annual winter coat drives and distributed gifts to needy residents during the holidays. Each winter, Interfaith organized and staffed severe weather shelters to provide warm, safe spaces for homeless men and women on the coldest winter nights.

The Interfaith Coalition doubled down on its central mission: housing homeless families. By 1993, members

had raised funds to purchase land and construction began on the Interfaith Family Housing Complex. Area homeless families moved into a four-plex in 1995. Since then, Interfaith has developed 11 transitional housing units, which last year provided a safe shelter for 28 families. Interfaith's case management and intensive support enabled 85% of its tenants to move into permanent stable housing.

Some of Interfaith's programs have grown up and been

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adopted by other agencies. Unity Care NW has taken over the health and dental care component. This fall, the Lighthouse Mission assumed control

of the severe weather shelter and expanded it to house homeless individuals every night of the year.

Shedding some programs has allowed Interfaith to re-focus on helping the community's growing population of homeless families. The program recently initiated a partnership with Family Promise—a national nonprofit that works with faith communities to provide space in

their buildings to serve as temporary shelters. This is a huge challenge for the Interfaith Coalition, one that will require additional volunteers and an infusion of funds, but the payoff is immense: guiding more and more families to stable, permanent housing.

Today the Interfaith Coalition celebrates its remarkable 35 years of feeding, clothing, providing healthcare for, and sheltering the most vulnerable members of our community. The program looks to the future and envisions the power of its 44 congregations united as one heart, one mind, working together to lift up

our neighbors, to change lives.

Interfaith Volunteer Joe Nolting has lived in Bellingham since 2012.



35 YEARS OF GRATITUDE

Why I volunteer

“I volunteer with Interfaith Coalition because it provides ways to work alongside people from various faith communities and people who need a little help in getting back on their feet. Individually, we can do very little, but when we work together we can do amazing things. Interfaith staff helps us communicate, collaborate and coordinate our efforts. I support Interfaith Coalition because it helps us promote peace with justice in our community.”

Noriko Lao

Why we donate

“In addition to recognizing the role Interfaith plays in helping to provide housing for homeless families, we support Interfaith for what it is - a lean non-profit that unites a number of faith communities to work to improve the lives of others. While governmental agencies have a key role in addressing issues surrounding homelessness, Interfaith provides a framework for both large and small faith communities to make a positive impact, from providing coats to homes, in the lives of homeless people. We proudly support Interfaith and value it as an essential thread in the fabric of our community.”

Andy Day and Connie Cogburn

“We support Interfaith Coalition because of the grass roots work that they do; it is our way of sharing, giving back and supporting our community.”

Frank and Carol Hunt

Why our congregation is involved

“Want to make a pastor smile? What a joy it is for me when caring volunteers arrive and head down to our kitchen to begin the humble task of making PB&J and cheese sandwiches. With smiles on their faces, the daily CAST crews get to work. We exchange gratitude for the time and service graciously given and the space St. John’s has shared. Together, we can feel honored to be a part of the broad ministry of the Interfaith Coalition. Together, we can trust that our efforts of partnership contribute to the important calling of providing warm meals, warm

beds, solidarity, integrity and advocacy. Lining up row upon row- slices of bread; shopping week in and out; offering a smile, an ear, an extra cup of soup, a warm pair of socks – these simple actions mingle with spoken and unspoken prayers for our friends, our community, our hope. Caring with our neighbors makes this pastor smile. Thank you CAST! Thank you Interfaith!”

*Cara Tanis,
Redevelopment Pastor, St. John’s Lutheran Church*

Why I am a board member

“I have been singularly impressed with the work of Interfaith during my 37 years in Whatcom County. A few years ago, I experienced the trauma of watching a family member deal with homelessness. It changed me and personalized my commitment to work toward easing the pain and heartache of those seeking to find stability and rootedness amidst chaos. I also knew Bess and Bob Chrisman for many years and considered them contemporary saints. I am honored to be asked to follow in their exemplary footsteps.”

*Trish Navarre,
Board member from Sacred Heart Catholic Church*



This year, Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County is celebrating 35 years of serving our community. We wish to share our gratitude to our generous community - dedicated volunteers, committed community partners, member congregations and faithful donors.



**INTERFAITH COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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Bellingham, WA 98225

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HOPE AUCTION IS ON THE WAY: SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

Please consider a donation to our biggest fundraiser of the year. Do you have a service to offer, vacation getaway, craft or artwork, gift certificate or tickets to a sporting event or performance? Your donation of an auction item, business or individual sponsorship and attendance will bring hope to our community! Please contact us at 360-734-3983 with your ideas.

INTERFAITH COALITION COAT DRIVE A WARM SUCCESS!

As the cool weather finds us reaching for a jacket, we're reminded that some of our neighbors are in need of this basic item we take for granted. Thanks to generous donations, we provided winter coats, hats and scarves to many of our neighbors. Coats were distributed in Blaine, Bellingham, Ferndale and Deming. It was heartwarming to see parents find warm coats for their children and the old gentleman with so little proudly wear the best wrap he's had for years. We are humbled to experience the gratitude in words or expressions of those who benefit from your generosity.



**LIKE INTERFAITH COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY
ON FACEBOOK!**

