



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

THE SMALLEST PEOPLE, THE GREATEST NEED

According to school district figures, approximately one of every 32 Whatcom County students experienced homelessness during the 2014-2015 school year.



Locally and nationally, children make up a growing segment of the homeless population.

Interfaith Coalition has provided temporary and transitional housing to hundreds of local families. But with only 11 housing units, our resources are outpaced by the rapidly growing

number of homeless families in our community.

To help meet this urgent need, we are developing a partnership with Family Promise, an organization that helps faith groups directly serve homeless families in over 200 communities nationwide.

Family Promise helps congregations use their buildings and resources to provide temporary shelter, meals and companionship to homeless families.

In most communities, Family Promise affiliates are built from the ground up – a process that can take several years.

But Whatcom County has a leg up: Interfaith has already created a coalition of faith communities, built strong relationships with complementary local

agencies and has spent the last 35 years learning how to serve homeless and struggling families.

With a Family Promise affiliate recently launched in Skagit County, we also have nearby neighbors who can share valuable experience with us.

Shirley Scott, who helped start the Skagit County Family Promise affiliate says, “The program has had a profound effect not only on the homeless families we serve, but on the volunteers who have found an opportunity to live out their faith by serving and being in relationship with people in need. Every volunteer you talk to has a story about an interaction with a family. We have received a lot.”

Nick Harris, an assistant pastor at His Place Church in Mount Vernon agrees. “I’ve been here 22 years, I haven’t seen a ministry that has brought more satisfaction to the volunteers,” he says.

Because they rely on existing facilities, Family Promise affiliates are extremely cost-effective. With the exception of a paid director and case manager, volunteers donate all the time, labor and supplies needed to run the organization. Family Promise staffers refer guest families to local social service agencies for additional support.

**Join us Thursday, Sept. 15 at 7 p.m.
at Assumption Church Gym**

Representatives from Family Promise will discuss how we can use our our faith communities’ resources to serve homeless children and parents in our community.

THE HOMELESS STUDENT - by Joe Nolting

13-year-old Katelyn slips into class ten minutes late. She eases into her seat—tries to be invisible—but cannot escape the prying eyes of her peers—eyes that take in her unwashed face, greasy hair and filthy, rumpled clothing.

She opens a battered notebook and attempts to focus. After a few moments, though, her eyelids— heavy from sleeplessness—close, and her head sags forward.

As her teacher, I knew the bare bones of Katelyn's situation. After her mother died from cancer, the family faced an onslaught of medical bills. Soon Katelyn's father lost his job in a company downsizing and everything started to unravel. Now the family—Dad, Katelyn and two younger brothers—lives in a pickup truck.

What is it like to be Katelyn? To attend school when you're homeless? To try to learn when you're exhausted? During my 30 years as a public school teacher I grappled with these issues and found no magical solution: it didn't matter how innovative and engaging my lesson was if a student lacked a safe, secure place to live.

I knew that as long as Katelyn remained homeless she was 50% less likely to complete high school than her peers (Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) and faced a significant probability of struggling with depression and anxiety (American Psychological Association). It would be virtually impossible for her family to find even temporary housing in an emergency

shelter environment, as most did not allow a father and teenage daughter to remain together.

Unfortunately, Katelyn's story is not an isolated one. During the 2014-15 school year Whatcom County had 854 homeless schoolchildren (Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) Each of these students faced daily challenges in accessing adequate rest, proper hygiene, decent health care, comfort, reasonable

safety and good nutrition—things that most of us take for granted.

Three years ago I learned about the

It didn't matter how innovative and engaging my lesson was if a student lacked a safe, secure place to live."

innovative efforts of the Interfaith Coalition to keep homeless families like Katelyn's together while providing them with temporary housing. Through careful case management, Interfaith successfully transitions nearly 90% of its sheltered families into stable housing. However, with just 11 units of housing in Whatcom County, Interfaith is only able to assist a small portion of the area's growing population of homeless families.

Recently I heard some very good news: the Interfaith Coalition has initiated a partnership with Family Promise—a national nonprofit that works with religious congregations to provide space in their buildings to serve as temporary shelters. Imagine the power of more than 40 Whatcom County congregations using their resources to help homeless families begin the journey to stable, permanent housing. It's absolutely incredible!

I'm excited about the vision of the Interfaith community to seriously address the needs of homeless families. With the Interfaith Coalition/Family Promise partnership, I see a bright future for families like Katelyn's. I see a new narrative of hope.

Joe Nolting has lived in Bellingham since 2012. He was the 2007-2008 runner-up for Alaska Teacher of the Year.



35 YEARS OF GRATITUDE

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. Together, we respond to the most urgent needs of our community. Together, we lift up our neighbors with homes, warmth and hope.

From Our Sponsors...

“Interfaith Coalition exemplifies the best attributes of a social services organization: people of faith serving people in need regardless of ethnicity, religious affiliation or economic status. It is this spirit of empathy for the well being of the entire community that continues to impress us. We are honored to support the work of the Coalition.”

Jeff McClure, RMC Architects

RMC Architects donated their services to design Interfaith Coalition’s first housing project for homeless families, a four-plex in central Bellingham. They have continued to be a faithful donor.

“We are happy to support the important and meaningful services that the Interfaith Coalition provides for homeless families and individuals. The organization is strengthening our community and we are proud to support the work of the Interfaith Coalition.”

Ashley Kimberley, Director of Marketing, IMCO

IMCO General Construction has been a generous auction sponsor for many years.

From Families...

“Thank you for helping us when we were near homeless. It could have been rough with me and my dad living in a tiny Ford Festiva. Thank you for caring enough to keep us from being homeless. I hope it saves the next family like it saved us.”

Ashley, age 15

From Faith Communities...

“Interfaith Coalition is truly putting God’s work into reality in our local community.”

*Rev. Scott Connolly, Pastor,
Assumption Catholic Church, Bellingham*



The Congregations of Interfaith

Acme Presbyterian Church
Assumption Catholic Church
Bellingham Covenant Church
Bellingham Friends Meeting
Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship
Center for Spiritual Living
Central Lutheran Church
Christ Episcopal Church, Blaine
Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale
Christ the Servant Lutheran Church
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Congregation Beth Israel
Custer United Methodist Church
Echoes
Faith Lutheran Church

First Baptist Church
First Christian Church
First Congregational Church
First Presbyterian Church
Garden Street United Methodist Church
Grace Lutheran Church, Blaine
Hope in Christ Church
Hope Lutheran Church, Lynden
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Everson
Laurel Community Baptist Church
Lummi Island Congregational Church
Lynden United Methodist Church
Nooksack Christian Fellowship
Nooksack Valley United Methodist Church
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center
Project Hope
Sacred Heart Catholic Church
St. Anne's Catholic Church, Blaine
St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Everson
St. James Presbyterian Church
St. John's Lutheran Church
St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Ferndale
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Trinity Lutheran Church
United Church of Christ, Blaine
United Church of Ferndale
Unity Church
Zion Lutheran Church, Custer



**INTERFAITH COALITION
OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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PROVIDING WARMTH TO NEIGHBORS IN NEED



Each fall, Interfaith Coalition annual winter coat drive provides warm outerwear for everyone from babies to seniors. This vital program brings warm coats to people in need throughout the county with distribution in Blaine, Ferndale, Bellingham, Everson and Deming.

Donations of clean, gently-used winter coats, hats, gloves and mittens are accepted. If you are a knitter, handmade hats and scarves are also cherished. For information on distribution and collection outlets, please check our website: www.interfaith-coalition.org.

Thanks for sharing the warmth!

SAVE THE DATES!

**Family Promise
Community Meeting**

**Thursday, Sept. 15 at 7 p.m.
Assumption Church Gym
2116 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham**

**Interfaith Coalition
Annual Hope Meeting:**

A special 35th anniversary celebration!

**Monday, Oct. 17 at 7 p.m.
Bellingham Covenant Church
1530 E. Bakerview Rd., Bellingham**

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

