



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

REWRITING THE STORY: FROM HARDSHIP TO HOPE



Your support of Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County stays local, helping those most in need. Together, we can:

- Empower local families to get out of poverty and into housing
- Leverage individual small actions into big results
- Connect people of diverse faiths to come together to serve others
- Share our abundance with neighbors in need - like this mom quoted below:



"I was born and raised in Whatcom County. I was living in Ferndale with my youngest son's father when he quit his job. We got evicted. I don't want to talk about the domestic violence. He went to jail. My two sons and I were living in a Motel 6 when an Interfaith apartment became available. I cried when my caseworker called me and said we'd have a place to live."

-Mother of boys ages 9 and 1, in Interfaith transitional housing

INSIDE:

ONE KIND ACT



A generous gift to Interfaith opens up a new chapter of hope, for the giver and for those receiving the gift.

ONE KIND A

A STORY OF HOPE IN TWO PARTS | *By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy*

PART 1: THE FAMILY

The little house is appealing, with bright green trim setting off a cheerful front door. It's tucked into a neighborhood of family homes. Jessica, newly graduated from Interfaith Coalition's Family Promise, was driving around looking for it.

"When we got to the address, I sat outside and I cried," Jessica says (name has been changed). "I loved the colors of the house, I loved the garden. Now we have a place, because someone was so kind."

The little house in central Bellingham is Interfaith's newest transitional house, and the first leased to Interfaith by an individual owner rather than a church, city, or other group. Its owner, Susan McClendon, learned about Interfaith via a Bellingham Herald article. Susan wasn't using the house, since she lives with and cares for her mother nearby. Leasing it to Interfaith, which sublets it to a family in need, is a way to help others while assuring the house and yard are kept up. Susan hopes others will follow her lead.

Meanwhile, at the little house, Jessica and her 6-year-old son were running around their newly leased home. "I was saying, look at this, look at that, look at everything we can do, look at all the windows!"

Jessica says. "My son can be a kid again. He can ride his bike. I want to do a little vegetable gardening. I've already got little tomato plants going."

Jessica and her son fled domestic violence to come to Family Promise five months ago. "I have no record of any kind. I never had problems. Our life was normal. I worked, I wasn't on welfare." Her son's father had left years before, but even after that Jessica was surviving, working as a nursing assistant and renting a one-bedroom apartment.

Then she met someone. "He was very good at manipulating," Jessica says now. "He said 'it's better this way, I can help take care of you guys.' You don't know when you meet a person this is going to happen. I was hurt pretty bad. I was beaten often. He hurt me a lot, physically, emotionally. It got so bad I called the cops. I lost my job because of it, I lost who I was because of it..." Jessica stops. She takes a breath, starts again. "I'm working with services to improve that. He doesn't know where we are."

Jessica's son will start school in the fall. She'll walk him there, along sidewalks with other neighborhood parents. "This house means we can have stability. That's something I took for granted before. To be in a place where you can keep your shower things in one place, where you can cook. My son can get his toys back. His toys had to be kept in storage, and we were lucky to have that. Most people (experiencing homelessness) lose everything."

Jessica wants to become a licensed practical nurse. When she talks of the future, her words come in a rush. "I want to be in a nice house and have a great job and take care of my family. I really want to be a homeowner! I never want to rely on someone else. It sounds simple, but after going through what we have gone through, that's all I want."

“When we got to the address, I sat outside and I cried,” Jessica says (name has been changed). “I loved the colors of the house, I loved the garden. Now we have a place, because someone was so kind.”

Family Promise



ACT

When a Bellingham homeowner heard about Interfaith's practical approach to homelessness, she offered her own, unused house to Interfaith to lease to a family in need. That one kind act is transforming lives.

PART 2: THE HOMEOWNER

Susan McClendon had never heard of Interfaith Coalition before she read a story on the local nonprofit in the Bellingham Herald in April. "I was impressed by their practical approach to homelessness," Susan says. "But when I read about the homes they lease to house some of these families, I was really intrigued."

Susan owns an 800-square-foot house in central Bellingham. She bought it years ago, before she moved to Bellingham, thinking she'd retire there someday, since her mother lived nearby. She had the interior remodeled, and the exterior painted in a fresh, two-tone-green color scheme.

But circumstances changed. Her mother's health deteriorated. Susan left Atlanta, where she was working in commercial architecture, and moved into her mother's home in Bellingham to care for her. Then Susan was diagnosed with colon cancer herself. As she dealt with treatment and recovery, her little house nearby stayed empty.

"Despite the remodel, the yard was never finished and was now seriously overgrown," Susan said. "I didn't want to sell the house—it might yet be my home.

"Maybe my little house and its contents might be of interest to Interfaith."

It was clear from the beginning the new arrangement would work, Susan says. Interfaith got the house ready, doing yard work, minor repairs, moving furniture, checking smoke detectors, and changing locks. Susan leases the house to Interfaith, which sublets it to a family. Interfaith pays water, sewer, and garbage pickup, and reimburses Susan for property taxes and insurance. The family (a mother and young son) pay other utilities. The family was previously in Family Promise, and now is working with Lydia Place's Rapid Rehousing program, which subsidizes expenses. As

the family's income increases, the rental subsidy will decrease, eventually allowing those funds to flow to others in need.

Susan is the first individual homeowner to partner with Interfaith Coalition this way; Interfaith has partnered with churches and the city of Ferndale to lease homes previously. Susan hopes to inspire others to look into this option.

"The process is painless," Susan says. "Interfaith started cleaning up the yard before we'd drafted the lease!"

The young mother has volunteered to carry on gardening and help keep the yard up. "She wants to do something in return," Susan says.



"Interfaith calls this a partnership and it definitely is," she says. "I am absolutely grateful to help a family in need, but I'm also glad that one of my problems has been eliminated. I need to get on with the rest of my cancer-free life."

What would she say to others considering partnering with Interfaith this way? "Certainly inquire! They'll be sensitive to your needs."

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**-Jessica,
Family Housing Guest**



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OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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WHAT'S HAPPENING AT INTERFAITH:

Winter Warmth Drive Coming Up

Have any extra coats, scarves, hats, or gloves? Donate to our annual Winter Warmth Drive, held throughout October and November. Drop off coats and other warm gear to collection points at congregations and businesses around Whatcom County, or call Interfaith at (360) 734-3983 to find a collection point near you. Our neighbors in need thank you.

United Way funds Family Promise

Interfaith Coalition is now a partner agency with United Way of Whatcom County! We are so grateful for this partnership and will be receiving \$20,000 for our Family Promise Program. Together we will work to help break the cycle of poverty for people in our community.



**United Way
of Whatcom County**

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT! For less than \$1 a day you can help a homeless child have a warm, safe home. Please sign up to donate monthly. All monthly donations made before year end will be doubled thanks to Barlean's Fish House! *Donate at: www.interfaith-coalition.org*

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OF WHATCOM COUNTY
ON FACEBOOK!**

