



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

FAMILY PROMISE SHOWS WHAT GIVING REALLY MEANS

“What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.” - Oscar Wilde, Irish poet and playwright

My story is a confirmation of this saying. I came to Interfaith’s Family Promise this summer, with fear and uncertainty in my heart. I was scared. I’d heard traumatizing stories about moving into shelters, especially as a single mother of three kids.

But Family Promise was way better than expected. We entered a homelike setting and were greeted by host congregations and Interfaith staff. Their friendly welcome felt like arms opened wide. We relaxed. We felt comfortable. We felt safe.

During our stay, we moved to different churches every week. I felt I was on some sort of pilgrimage- -but I loved it! We met a whole lot of different, interesting and loving people who were ready to volunteer with us, despite not being blood-related. We were never looked down upon or treated as “homeless.”

Their support kept us mentally, emotionally, and physically sane. Food was never a worry. We had nice, cozy beds and rooms to rest in. We had the homelike Day Center house, which is so much better than roaming the streets with your luggage all day. Through Family Promise, I found a new family who showed what giving and sharing really means. This family has made me stronger and more confident. Their support is helping me work toward goals I hadn’t

“ I see I had potential for greatness... but I never saw it until this beautiful family helped bring it out.”

-Mother and Family Promise Guest



Volunteers from St. Paul’s Episcopal Church serve a hot meal to Family Promise guests. While at Family Promise, one guest said it was a relief that “food was never a worry.”

thought of before. The help and love I felt from members of the churches was so overwhelming, it reminded me of the scripture “There’s a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Prov. 18:24)

When I look back at the person I was before, and who I am now, I see I had potential for greatness within me. It was screaming for expression, but I never saw it until this beautiful family helped bring it out.

I am more than grateful to Family Promise. God bless the founders, staff, and every volunteer.

-from a graduating Family Promise mother

THE WARMTH OF KINDNESS

This looks brand new, and it's in my favorite color!"

"I didn't think I would find anything to fit me, but I even have a choice."

"You guys are such angels – I could not have afforded coats for us this year."

These comments and more came from hundreds of guests at our Winter Warmth Drive distributions this fall. Though winter hadn't quite arrived, many knew that for them, the season can mean choosing between paying the heat bill or buying coats for growing children.

Every year for more than two decades, Interfaith volunteers have collected more than 3,000 gently-used coats of all sizes from individuals, groups, and congregations, and distributed them at sites in Blaine, Deming, Ferndale, and Bellingham.

Some of our guests live on the streets full time – ALL of our guests want to be treated with care and dignity. And our volunteers did just that: "This color looks incredible on you." "I saw a coat that would be perfect with your hat – would you like me to get it for you?" Generosity wasn't limited to volunteers; guests at Bellingham distributions saw there was a need for help, and jumped in to set up tables, haul heavy bags, and clean up.

The Coat Drive isn't really about coats. . . .it's about kindness.



Volunteers from United Church of Ferndale prepare to distribute coats at one of the distribution sites.

JOIN THE HOPE PIPELINE!

Connecting to hope isn't just for the families we serve. Inspiration is something we all need. Lisa Blum, one of Interfaith's most dedicated volunteers, spoke at our recent annual meeting on what volunteering means for her. Excerpts follow:

"Interfaith is a way for me to connect into what I call my Hope Pipeline. Through CAST, the Coat Drive, and Family Promise, I can find common ground with folks who share my beliefs, and those who have different attitudes than I. We can make and serve sandwiches through CAST, set up beds in Sunday School rooms for Family Promise, get the Interfaith Transitional Housing clean and comfy for new families, collect and distribute coats, talk with each other, laugh with each other. All of us! Volunteers and guests! On the same level!"

"I get to share that positive feeling when my friends text me to say they have something – a TV, bed linens, outgrown coats – and do I know someone who can use them? We are making a difference through our combined efforts."

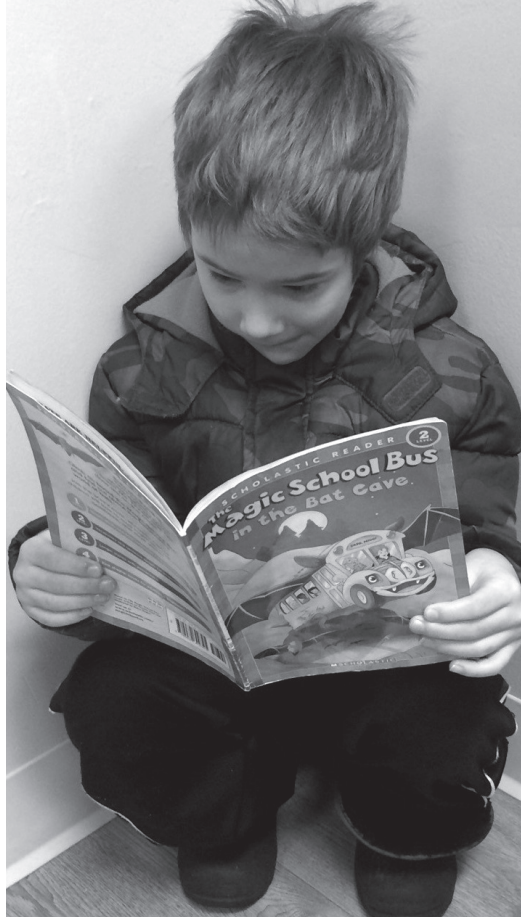
"Interfaith has been described as an oasis of hope for people experiencing homelessness. I say, that oasis is just as apparent and necessary to the volunteers."

A MILESTONE FOR THE BOOKS

This month, Joe Nolting's Interfaith program Kids Need Books (KNB) will give away their 50,000th book. That staggering milestone is even more surprising considering Joe started KNB only two years ago.

Low-income families are hungry for quality reading material, Joe says. The challenge lies in procuring books, which come from a range of donors. (To donate, bring books to Interfaith at 910 14th St., Bellingham, during working hours.) KNB distributes at literacy fairs, county food banks, migrant worker camps, and more.

KNB is at the Alderwood School satellite food bank weekly. On a recent Thursday evening, a mother with several children approached Joe's book-covered tables. Her 5-year-old boy was starting to recognize a few written words, and she wanted to encourage him. Joe located a Curious George sight-



A young reader enjoys his new book from Kids Need Books.

word kit—a collection of 10 short books, with a chart and stickers to track progress. The mother clasped Joe's hand to thank him, before heading toward the food bank line. Moments later he saw the 5-year-old son, seated on the floor next to her, engrossed in the first Curious George book.

Book by book, child by child, KNB is fighting poverty by building literacy. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the U.N., puts it this way: "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope." One study shows that having books in the home has a bigger effect on eventual socio-economic level than the education level of parents. Another shows that reading promotes empathy and imagination while lowering stress.

Families throughout Whatcom County would agree—50,000 times over.



ANOTHER HOMECOMING!

Volunteers are working to fix up Interfaith's fifth unit in Ferndale in partnership with the City of Ferndale. This century-old house on Washington Street is next to an Interfaith house acquired in 2017, which also

serves families experiencing homelessness. (Interfaith first expanded its housing to Ferndale in 2010 with a triplex near Ferndale High School.) Watch your inbox for a story on this, coming soon.



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LET'S DO MORE TOGETHER THIS SEASON

We invite you to make an end-of-year gift to Interfaith, where individual efforts multiply into a mighty force that empowers local families out of poverty and into homes. Please use the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.interfaith-coalition.org.

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