



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

FAMILY PROMISE CONGREGATIONS CONTINUE TO ASTOUND

When COVID-19 hit Whatcom County, Family Promise Program Director, Carolyn Roy, began brainstorming with co-workers and key volunteers on how the program, which relies on congregations temporarily housing families experiencing homelessness, could continue. Soon she had her answer. A local congregation agreed to provide space that would safely house families at a static site, while still following social distancing guidelines. Each family has private rooms with beds, a kitchen space with essentials such as a microwave and mini fridge, and their own bathroom and closet.

Host and support congregations devised a safe way to provide meals to our families: The Volunteer Coordinator's home serves as the collection site of all supplies for that week. Those goods are delivered by the coordinator to the static site, and our staff masks and gloves up and ensures all food, treats, and necessities are given to the families.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church Volunteer Coordinator, Lyann Rust, was wowed as she watched Family Promise volunteers drop food and items off on her porch during her congregation's host week.

"I had food in my downstairs fridge and the freezer in my garage. In fact, my car was too small to deliver everything, so I needed to take our pickup!" Lyann laughs.

Beyond the essentials, the volunteers took it upon themselves to add little extras for the families, including Spanish books through Kids Need Books, nail polish kits, games, socks, magazines, and more.

"I'm so grateful for God's goodness," Lyann says. "We are all so truly blessed to be part of Family Promise."



Whatcom Family Promise congregations have continued to provide meals and shelter to guest families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Lyann Rust,
Volunteer Coordinator,
Sacred Heart Catholic Church

VOLUNTEER GIVES OF HER HEART - AND HER HOME

By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy



Noriko Lao,
Interfaith donor and
volunteer

Interfaith Coalition received its largest-ever gift when longtime volunteer Noriko Lao donated her Bellingham home this May. Noriko, celebrating her 80th birthday, is moving from her home in the Puget neighborhood into a retirement community. The house represents the biggest single donation to Interfaith since the non-profit's founding in 1981.

"I feel blessed that God provided Interfaith as the channel to make best use of my donation for supporting homeless families," Noriko said. "Interfaith provides a springboard for homeless families to get their own place."

"Noriko has the biggest heart," said Laura Harker, Executive Director. "She's been a volunteer here since she moved to Bellingham in 1993. She volunteers with Habitat for Humanity, Family Promise, and helps with our auction. When we had a women's severe weather shelter she spent many nights helping there."

"Her donation of her home is a true legacy gift that

will help local families well into the future."

Noriko moved from Japan to Washington D.C. in 1968 to attend English language school. She joined World Bank, which provides loans and grants to developing countries, and retired from that international organization as a senior computer systems analyst. Throughout her life, she has volunteered with those experiencing homelessness.



Her donation of her home is a true legacy gift that will help local families well into the future."

-Laura Harker,
Interfaith Executive Director

"Working with homeless people has been a major part of my life, as I believe housing is a fundamental human right," she said. "I hosted homeless women and men at my home from time to time, encouraging them to save up and move into their own place. I believe sharing my time and skills is as important as sharing my financial and material resources, since everything I have is from God."

WHAT IS LEGACY GIVING?

Planning for the future and having conversations about how to distribute assets creates interesting opportunities for families and organizations alike. As the name suggests, legacy giving is a way for people to leave a legacy or memory of their life through their giving; increasingly, donors want to ensure that their gifts result in positive transformations.

Noriko Lao (see story above) wanted to demonstrate her commitment to keeping Interfaith Co-

alition financially healthy and she wanted to see it happen while she is alive. Many people make recurring donations to support an organization and make arrangements for another kind of gift through their will. Legacy gifts typically are prepared with a financial planner or advisor and are meant to reflect the values and desires of the donor. And legacy gifts don't have to be monetary, either. They can include material goods, property, stocks – anything that is of value to the beneficiary. Gifts to Inter-

faith Coalition's Endowment Fund create a sustaining source of income that will continue caring for our neighbors into the future. The fund is permanent, so the legacy of support will carry forward in perpetuity.

Anyone can choose to do this type of gift, you just have to have the desire! Contact your financial advisor to learn ways you can leave a legacy gift to Interfaith Coalition.

THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US

Since COVID-19 hit Whatcom, I have been astounded at how our community has reconfigured their lives and livelihoods to support each other. At Interfaith, we have been graced to see you remain steadfast in your value of and dedication to our mission. When we have felt uncertain, you have offered encouragement. When we have been concerned about funding and thought we might be asking for too much, you gave without hesitation and then asked, "What else do you need?"

As a result, our Family Promise families are safely housed at a local congregation. Our congregation volunteers haven't missed a step to ensure these families receive nourishment through meals, thoughtful gifts, and letters of encouragement. CAST continues to run, though now we're gloved and

masked and give just smiles and hellos instead of hugs and handshakes.

Interfaith has made countless adjustments to keep staff working, families housed, and each other healthy. Yet, at each turn we have had to take, there has been someone there asking, "How can I help?" These last few months we have truly seen how helping others helps our own well-being. We are a community hungry to help, because to stand idly by isn't an option.

On behalf of the staff and Board of Interfaith Coalition, thank you for standing with each other (at a safe distance!) during this difficult time. We know it's not over, but together we'll endure.

Gratefully,

Laura Harker,
Executive Director



"A donation to Interfaith Coalition doesn't just affect the people in that home. It affects everyone that they are connected to. My family inside and outside our house thank you." — Mother, wife, Interfaith Coalition guest



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OF WHATCOM COUNTY**

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HELPING IS GOOD FOR YOU!

By Cheryl Stritzel McCarthy

Studies show helping others is contagious. When we hear about others being kind, it inspires us to be kinder. In this way, kindness creates a happier community, say researchers at the National Academy of Sciences. This effect is consistent across cultures.

Brain scans show that when we give money to good causes, the same parts of the brain light up as when we're receiving pleasurable stimuli such as food or sex. This reaction grows stronger yet when the donation is voluntary.

Volunteers are proven to feel less depressed and anxious, and more hopeful. Volunteering and

donating help maintain cognitive functioning in older adults and reduce problem behavior in teens, according to the [*Journal of Health & Social Behavior*](#).

Helping neighbors in need has been clinically proven to boost happiness, reduce stress, increase a sense of self-worth, and improve health.

It's a virtuous circle, researchers say, with happiness leading us to give, and giving making us happy.

With many COVID-19 restrictions still in place throughout Whatcom County, help yourself by helping others.

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