



INTERFAITH CONNECTION

Partners in faith. Changing lives.

IN DIFFICULT TIMES, START WITH THE BIG THINGS

It was early in the morning when I arrived at the post office in Wyndmere, ND many years ago. Luke, the Postmaster, had invited me to share his work and to learn a bit about the community where I served as pastor. He brought in the big cart of mail and, after he explained how the mailboxes were laid out, I began to sort the mail for the folks of Wyndmere.

It didn't take long for me to run into trouble. I looked in dismay at the pile of mail remaining to be sorted and the sorting boxes that were



Consider what is most important and start there, allow the most important, the big thing, to cradle the rest."

quite full. I tried to cram more mail into already packed boxes or setting the mail on the counter in front of the boxes, hoping that would be a fix. No matter what, there was a lot of mail left to sort and I was at a loss.

Luke checked in with me. "Pastor, that won't work. Watch, you need to put the big piece in first. Then it will cradle all the rest and everything will fit." Luke deftly removed and rearranged the mail from one of the boxes, placing the large pieces in first and gently laying the rest on top.

While I may never work as a postmaster, Luke spoke wisdom that day. Put the big piece in first, then all the rest will fit.

That is good counsel when we feel overwhelmed, when we don't know where to start. Put the big piece in first. Consider what is most important and start there, allow the most important, the big thing, to cradle the rest.

Interfaith Coalition and Family Promise of Whatcom County made a lot of necessary adjustments in the past year. How we do our work has changed. Now, hoping for light at the end of the Covid tunnel, we recognize there are a lot of moving parts to consider as we plan for our future. We might hope to go back to what it was, yet somehow that doesn't feel quite right. The more we talk about what our future will look like, the more we realize we have a lot going on and it feels overwhelming.

In this time of planning for a still unknown future, the staff and Board will be thinking about the big piece that needs to be placed first. Conversations have begun and will continue.

You are invited to share your thoughts as volunteers, congregation and community members, or simply as someone who cares about the work Interfaith has been doing for 40 years.

Thank you for your partnership, in the past, on this very day, and into our future. You are an important piece of Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County and all that we do.

Blessings,

Deanna Wildermuth

Executive Director

A SWEET SURPRISE FOR OUR FAMILY HOUSING COORDINATOR

Our Family Housing Coordinator, Shannon Laws, does planned inspections of our homes to ensure appliances are working properly and confirm the home is in safe and operating condition.

Recently, when Shannon began an inspection for a family in our Family Promise of Whatcom County program, the parent shared with a smile, “Please make sure to inspect my boys’ room. They’ve been anticipating your visit all day.”

From the twinkle in this parents’ eye, Shannon knew she had a very serious task ahead of her. With clipboard in hand, she made her way to the boys’ room to make a special inspection. With the parent at her side, she announced, “I am here to give a proper inspection of this bedroom.” The boys giggled.

Not only had they cleaned their room, the boys had also assembled and displayed a magnificent Lego space city. Standing on either side of the small table, they waved their arms to showcase their masterpiece, smiling ear to ear.



Later that day when writing her report, she included a special note: “Your home passed inspection, especially the boys’ room upstairs. Very clean, well-organized, and excellent creative Lego creations. Thank you all for taking great care of the home.”

The next day, Shannon received an email from the parent. “Thanks for the report on the inspection. I read your comments aloud at our weekly family meeting this morning, and the boys were excited that you mentioned their Lego creations.”

WELCOME RED CEDAR ZEN COMMUNITY TO INTERFAITH



Interfaith Coalition welcomes its newest member, the Red Cedar Zen Community (RCZC) which began locally in 1991. RCZC is a Soto Zen Buddhist tradition with an emphasis on meditation and mindfulness. Being part of Interfaith Coalition provides their members an increased opportunity to practice their primary spiritual tenant “to end human suffering.” RCZC has been a Family Promise Support Congregation for three years and along with their Guiding Teacher, Tim Burnett, they look forward to serving our neighbors in need together.

If you would like to hear more about becoming a member or business partner of Interfaith Coalition, please contact Janie Pemble at janie@interfaith-coalition.org or at 360-734-3983.

THE BED RACE RETURNS!



One of our favorite FUNdraisers returns this September: the Family Promise of Whatcom County Bed Race! Details and registration information will be available at interfaith-coalition.org/bed-race

LAURA'S PLACE: A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

After nearly three decades of service, longtime Executive Director, Laura Harker retired from Interfaith Coalition last September. In honor and gratitude for the thousands of lives her work impacted during her time with Interfaith, our Board of Directors announced that the very first housing complex we ever opened would be re-named "Laura's Place." In April, the sign was erected and surrounded by a small flower garden that the four-plex residents will help to water and maintain.



After helping create and support the Interfaith Community Health Clinic, now Unity Care NW, Laura and Interfaith Coalition recognized the lack of services for families experiencing homelessness. Laura helped guide the Coalition in its efforts to address this gap. The results were a four-plex, a single-family home, four congregation partner homes, a tri-plex and

two city-owned homes in Ferndale, and one privately-owned home, which have housed many families throughout the years. Laura was also instrumental in implementing Family Promise of Whatcom County, our housing program that uses holistic case management to help families reach their goal to get back into permanent housing of their own. Her outreach through Winter Coat Drive, Severe Weather Shelters, and Holiday Gifts was one of the many ways her compassion for others shined.

As Interfaith continues to work towards a future without poverty or homelessness, we thank and honor Laura for her leadership, vision, work, and immense dedication to the belief that everyone deserves a home. With the foundation she laid and the support that you provide, we look forward to carrying her legacy onward.

Continued from back cover:

HOLISTIC CASE MANAGEMENT

Our case manager is a powerhouse at digging deep to find obscure resources for families and developing partnerships with agencies. When she learned that a family had been facing numerous housing barriers and that their Section 8 housing voucher was expiring in seven days, she moved into advocate-mode. Bringing in the expertise of Opportunity Council and Law Advocates, she talked with rental agencies, landlords, and HUD.

"There may have been some begging," she joked.

It paid off. Before the voucher expired, she secured an extension, which gave the family more time to find housing. Working side-by-side with the family, our case manager made sure all paperwork was in order and submitted before deadlines. Within 30 days, the family secured housing and moved into their new home.

We strive for cultural competency when working with families, being mindful of their values, beliefs, culture, and identity of the parents and children. While working alongside a Spanish-speaking mother of two in our housing, our case manager connected

with a Homeless Liaison with Opportunity Council to learn about farm workers, their community and culture, and resources that are available specifically to them. She was then able to tap into resources she previously didn't know existed and is now able to add those to the "toolbox" for other families.

Volunteers help connect the families to resources that agencies do not offer. Cars have been donated by volunteers to families in our housing and maintenance and detailing has been done for free. They also have helped us connect with businesses that provide services or goods that our families need and offer those services or goods at low or no cost.

By being able to holistically support families' goals to get out of homelessness, they become part of the process and we pick up some new tools for our own toolbox along the way.

Your donations help build the toolbox that families use to get out of homelessness.

Donate at interfaith-coalition.org/donate



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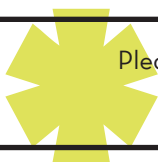
HOLISTIC CASE MANAGEMENT



When families enter our Family Promise of Whatcom County housing, they've already overcome one of their biggest hurdles: the vulnerability of asking for help after a traumatic experience. The chaos of homelessness is dizzying and complicated. When we welcome a new family, our goal is to be a stabilizing presence through holistic service.

Holistic service looks at the family's values, perspectives, strengths, and needs and builds upon their existing abilities. Families set their own goals in health and wellness, employment and financial stability, and housing stability. This approach gives the family a voice in the process. Once goals are set, our case manager works alongside the families to, as she puts it, "look at what they want to build and assemble the toolbox for them."

(Read more about our holistic approach inside)



Please note: Because we are all living day-to-day at this time, details in this newsletter are subject to change. Visit our site for the most up-to-date information: interfaith-coalition.org



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