

ReachingOut

FALL 2020

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF HOPELINK



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Soledad O'Brien



Gordon McHenry, Jr.



Brittany Packnett Cunningham

HOPELINK'S VIRTUAL
Reaching Out
LUNCHEON
50 Years of Hope —

Join us on **October 19th** for our virtual event with special guests:

Soledad O'Brien,
Gordon McHenry, Jr. and
Brittany Packnett Cunningham

Facilitated by Lauren Thomas, Hopelink CEO



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Learn more at

HOPELINK.ORG/ROL

Join us as we begin Hopelink's 50th year for a discussion about how we can all help change inequitable systems that drive multi-generational poverty across our region, systems that disproportionately affect Black, indigenous and other communities of color. With your support we've helped so many through the years. With COVID-19, we have to work harder than ever to help people find their path out of poverty.

For details visit hopelink.org/luncheon, email RSVP@hopelink.org or reach out to 425.897.3703.

In crisis, lies opportunity

A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO, LAUREN THOMAS



“This has been a ride, a journey, a rollercoaster ... we are all changing, reflecting and taking stock of our lives, on a collective basis – worldwide.”

That was my journal entry

on May 17, only seven weeks into the coronavirus pandemic, and nearly four months ago now. Reflecting back on those words makes my heart race.

In March, I remember feeling overwhelmed; like I was on high alert all the time. No one was prepared for what lay ahead. How would we all get through this? Each of us, our families and friends, our clients, our community?

Nearly 50 years ago, Hopelink got its start during the “Boeing Bust,” when neighbors got together to help each other through a dark time. Now, it was a pandemic turning lives and livelihoods upside down. At Hopelink, we immediately mapped out a plan for continuing to support our community in a way that ensured the safety of all clients, volunteers and staff. We adjusted our process, and we kept our promise.

In late May, we all watched in horror as events unfolded in Minneapolis, tragically taking the life of George Floyd - one of too many Black lives. Added to our sense of uncertainty and fear over the pandemic came raw emotion: anger, disbelief and deep grief.

By shining a light on the injustice that for too long has kept our nation from realizing the promise of equality for all, Floyd’s death triggered both outrage and obligation. Hopelink is committed to changing the inequitable systems that disproportionately affect communities of color.

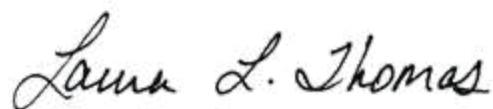
When the coronavirus pandemic turned our world upside down, wearing a face mask and washing our hands became the “new normal.” Graphic images of racial injustice reminded us that returning to the “old normal” is no longer an option. Today, our task is not to adapt, but to envision; to create a just and equitable “next normal” that works for everyone.

Over the past few months, I have thought often about those who are turning to us for help. I have grieved with friends and colleagues. And I have found comfort in community.

Hopelink staff have not missed a beat in making sure we are there for those who need our services. I’ve received emails and phone calls that simply ask, “how can I help?” And when we have reached out to ask for your support, you have responded in unprecedented ways.

I am grateful. And I am so proud to call this community home.

Thank you for sharing this journey with us.



Hopelink CEO

THANK YOU

WHO'S HELPING HOPELINK



The spirit of **BAPS Charities** is expressed through the selfless service of their volunteers across the globe. Recognizing the unprecedented impact the coronavirus has taken on our community, the BAPS Seattle Charities Chapter donated \$4,000 in support of the Hopelink food program.



Accents et cetera owner Susan Huenefeld has been a longtime supporter of Hopelink. During the coronavirus pandemic, Huenefeld donated 15 percent of the revenue from her basket sales while the governor's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order was in effect. Huenefeld and her staff created fun themed baskets such as dinner in a bag, breakfast, movie night and game night to keep their customers entertained.



Woodinville Garden Club is a non-profit organization united by their love of gardening and a desire to support their local community. This year they generously donated 100 percent of the proceeds from their online plant sales to support Hopelink during the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, they created a peer-to-peer online fundraiser to use their network of community members to help raise money for Hopelink. Their generosity and creativity raised \$16,244!



Over the course of two days in May, **Bothell Police Department** hosted a food drive for Hopelink and collected 6,700 pounds of food, along with more than \$5,000 in cash donations. The food was left untouched in storage for a week to reduce risk of virus transmission. Their donations were used to fill the food boxes that Hopelink continues to distribute to the community.

Private, Family and Corporate Foundation giving has been overwhelming in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Not only have grantors been incredibly generous, they have relaxed their application processes, shortened approval times, loosened reporting requirements and removed any restrictions on how the funds are used. Many of these funders have been long-term partners and several approached Hopelink to offer their first-ever grants. They could have stepped away during this crisis but, instead, chose to step up for their communities.

Upchurch Vineyard is a beautiful vineyard in Benton City that offers wine tastings in Kirkland. During the month of May, the vineyard donated a portion of the revenue from their Mother's Day rosé sales to support Hopelink's work feeding families in need of food, and raised a total of \$425.

GET YOUR BUSINESS INVOLVED WITH HOPELINK

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact:

Pam Cabrera
425.897.3718
PCabrera@hopelink.org

For food and fund drives, please contact:

Isabel Hoggatt
425.985.0252
lhoggatt@hopelink.org



From surviving to thriving

On the coldest nights, Stevie's only source of warmth was a brief blast of heat from the car vents. On most nights, he struggled to get comfortable. Sleep interrupted by an icy chill from the windows and air so cold he could see every breath isn't the best way to prepare for a workday. Yet Stevie never gave up; working two jobs and living in his car for more than a year. That time might have taken down someone who hadn't already lived through much worse. But Stevie is a survivor.

He grew up in Chicago, in an area where zip code is still the biggest predictor of whether a child will grow up with the "foundational opportunities" needed for a fighting chance at stability and success. Among them are good schools, strong economic development and reliable public transit; building blocks most people take for granted. Stevie wasn't so fortunate.

His adoptive dad ran a grocery store, and by the time he was five years old, Stevie was already working; learning to run the cash register, counting money, later even cutting meat for customers.

Everything changed when Stevie was 10 years old. His adoptive mom passed away, his twin sister went to live with an aunt, and Stevie's dad began a relationship with a woman whose kids now came first.

"I felt like an outcast," Stevie said.

He turned to the streets, where friends became family and a good day was one that everyone survived. But even then, Stevie had big dreams. He fantasized about playing pro sports, and saved news clippings about his heroes – Chicago Bears players Jim McMahon, Walter Payton and William "Refrigerator" Perry. Stevie imagined a day when his name would be as big as theirs.

In high school, opportunity came his way. Stevie was a freshman when he started playing football with the juniors and seniors; nearly winning the state championship one year. That time also helped him grow.

"Playing sports, when you have a coach like a father figure, getting in your face – it was tough," Stevie said. "And it made me who I am ... it made me tough."

And it got him noticed. Stevie began earning scholarships, and thought he'd found a path toward his dreams. But during his senior year, a badly broken ankle again changed his course.

Stevie continued to work; landing retail, construction and warehouse jobs, but he also stayed connected to the streets.

"I've been shot, and I've been stabbed," Stevie said. "I've had the police mess with me ... plant drugs on me. You had to adapt to the situation you were in, or not survive."

At 28, Stevie watched his closest friend die in a fight.

"He was like a brother to me," Stevie said. "A lot of the friends I grew up with were in jail or dead or strung out on drugs. I told myself I wouldn't get that bad."

Stevie credits his coaches with teaching the motivation and commitment he needed at a vulnerable time in his life, but he also acknowledges that "growing up in the jungle – and surviving" taught him resilience.

"I've been through it all my life," Stevie said. "Moving around ... I've taken a lot of losses. But I've used what I guess I'd call my survival kit to get by. In the jungle, you have to survive."



A little more than a year ago, Stevie moved to Seattle to join family. But within weeks, he found himself back on his own – without a job, or a place to live. Stevie turned to Hopelink. He visited the Redmond center for food – asking for a "no-cook" bag of groceries he could eat in his car – and he also began meeting with an employment specialist to find a more stable job.

"Meeting up with people every week – that really helped," Stevie said. "Checking in

helped keep me on track. And Hopelink was always there for me ... if I needed someone to talk to, or to get advice on the next step, they would support me."

"The most important thing Hopelink did for me was give me motivation ... and they kept my hope alive. I wasn't out there by myself."

After a year of living in his car and working two jobs, Stevie had saved enough money to move into his own studio apartment.

Hopelink helped him settle into his new place, and Stevie was able to stretch out in a warm bed, cook for himself and take a breath – finally free of the physical and mental trauma of homelessness.

"It's very important to have a place to live," Stevie said. "It means that all you have to do is go to work and pay your bills."

Today, Stevie dreams of starting his own business detailing cars, promising to do everything by hand – inside and out.

"Owning my own business has always been a dream; I guess I get that from my father," he said.

But Stevie has another dream; one born during a visit to Hopelink's Redmond center, where photos of former clients line the walls.

"I'd like to see my photo up there," he said. "I've been through a lot, and look where I am now. If I can inspire one other person, it will all be worth it."

You can read more Hopelink success stories at hopelink.org/success-stories

Hopelink responds to COVID-19



January 21, 2020 seems like decades ago now. Holiday lights were still on display, it was cold and raining in Seattle and the matchup for Super Bowl LIV had just been set. And on that day, the first confirmed case of the coronavirus in the United States was identified in Snohomish County.

On March 23, Gov. Inslee’s “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order – initially expected to last only two weeks – required all “non-essential” businesses statewide to close their doors.

During the month of April, Washington lost a half-million jobs, driving the unemployment rate to more than 15 percent. Hardest hit were workers who were already earning a lower wage, often employed part-time and non-white. Black workers lost their jobs at twice the rate of whites. Overnight, the coronavirus turned lives and livelihoods upside down.

Since mid-March, Hopelink has continued to provide all services; adapting as necessary to ensure the health and safety of those in need of support, as well as staff and volunteers. All centers are currently closed to the public but still providing services.

Programs that offer one-on-one interaction with staff – including employment services, family development case management, energy and financial assistance and financial capabilities – are now conducted virtually. In addition, the Hopelink employment program began a “Remote Resume Review” service to help job seekers tune up their resumes.

Food program responds to demand

When Hopelink closed all centers in March, the food program quickly converted from grocery store-style shopping to distributing pre-packed boxes of shelf-stable items, along with a variety of fresh foods. In addition to current clients, many others who had never before asked for help began turning to Hopelink for food.

To ensure that all food provided to the community was completely safe, Hopelink suspended food donations – which usually comprise about 80 percent of all food distributed – and began purchasing food products directly.

In April and May, supply chain concerns prompted two four-hour, drive-through, no-contact food drives at Hopelink Kirkland, requesting a specific



list of the packaged food items that are included in boxes. During the two drives, community members donated about 48,000 pounds of food – one hundred pounds every minute. The donated food was stored for a week before being distributed to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

Boxes are packed at Hopelink’s Kirkland center, and are distributed to all five center locations. Staff and volunteers pack and distribute about 3,000 boxes every week.

Demand for food has been steady throughout the coronavirus pandemic, with a total of more than 60,000 boxes – enough food for nearly 1.3 million meals – distributed in the first five months.

Hopelink staff continue to serve community

All staff who were able to work offsite made the switch in early March, in a near-seamless transition. For staff accustomed to ensuring that clients always feel welcome and respected, making sure that relationship was not lost while centers were closed was paramount.

To ensure that staff were able to respond to increased demand, 12 employees from other Hopelink departments were trained to interview clients requesting financial assistance, and nine staff members were reassigned to the energy assistance program.

Hopelink’s financial and energy assistance programs both require that clients submit documentation as part of the application process, so clients who would ordinarily have brought paperwork to their in-person appointment were able to instead use secure drop boxes at each center. Over the phone or during online calls, staff also explained how a client could take photos of documents and submit them securely.

Job losses fuel eviction concerns

In response to the pandemic, calls requesting financial assistance increased dramatically – about fivefold over previous years. Between March 25 and July 30, more than 1,300 people reached out to Hopelink to request financial assistance, and about 1,200 callers were referred to staff for screening appointments.

By the end of July, Hopelink had provided about \$830,000 in financial assistance to more than 700 households; an average of \$1,220. Although Hopelink’s financial assistance program is designed

to respond to a variety of financial “shocks” that can threaten stability, about 90 percent of the payments during this period of time were earmarked for rent.

During a typical year, Hopelink’s financial assistance program distributes about \$500,000 in total. The emergency response during the first four months of the coronavirus pandemic exceeded the amount allocated in all of 2019 by 66 percent.

Demand increases for energy assistance

During a time of year when energy usage typically begins to taper off, new applications for energy assistance increased this spring and summer – about 20 percent from mid-March through July.

In March, the federal CARES Act allocated extra funds to the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which provided about \$700,000 in additional funding to help households in the Hopelink service area affected by the pandemic.

In addition to fielding calls for assistance, staff reached out to more than 1,200 households who had received energy assistance support through Hopelink during the previous year, and were now eligible for an additional \$500 federal benefit. Targeted households included those with hourly wage earners, those who had previously lost jobs, households with multiple school-aged children and self-employed workers.

By July 30, Hopelink had provided the extra \$500 benefit to more than 1,400 households. With the additional funding and new requests for assistance, energy assistance support increased 239 percent over the same period last year.

Looking ahead

Hopelink will continue to help those affected by the coronavirus pandemic maintain stability, while also helping ensure that the most vulnerable members of the community have the support they need to recover, maintain stability and continue on their journey from poverty.



Our Vision: A Community Free of Poverty

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-  40 pounds of solid waste not generated

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-  4.0 million BTUs saved

Hopelink takes all reasonable steps to ensure the information in Reaching Out is current and accurate and does not assume any legal liability or responsibility for content.



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO NEEDS HELP?

Below is an overview of Hopelink's programs and a list of our service centers. If you know anyone that may need our help, please share this information and encourage them to contact us at their nearest center.



FOOD ASSISTANCE

Contact your nearest center



ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Call 425.658.2592



FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Call 425.883.4755



FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES

Call 425.250.3003



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Contact your nearest center



EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Call 425.250.3030



TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Metro DART: 866.261.3278
Medicaid: 800.923.7433
Mobility Line: 425.943.6760



ADULT EDUCATION

English for Work:
425.250.3007
GED Classes:
425.457.9685



HOUSING SERVICES

Eastside:
206.328.5900
North King County:
206.934.6160

HOPELINK CENTERS

📍 BELLEVUE

14812 Main St.
Bellevue, WA 98007
425.943.7555

📍 KIRKLAND/NORTHSHORE

11011 120th Ave. NE
Kirkland, WA 98033
425.889.7880

📍 SNO-VALLEY

31957 E Commercial St.
Carnation, WA 98014
425.333.4163

📍 REDMOND

8990 154th Ave. NE
Redmond, WA 98052
425.869.6000

📍 SHORELINE

17837 Aurora Ave. N
Shoreline, WA 98133
206.440.7300

For food distribution hours and more information about Hopelink programs, visit **Hopelink.org**.

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P.O. Box 3577, Redmond WA 98073-3577



For nearly 50 years, your support has helped Hopelink expand its critical social services to at-risk families and individuals in our region. Our approach – providing stability and the skills needed to exit poverty – continues to move tens of thousands of people from vulnerability and crisis toward independence.