Vision

A community free of poverty.

Mission

Hopelink’s mission is to promote self-sufficiency for all members of our community; we help people make lasting change.

Hopelink’s 2017 Community Impact report is presented in chapters that address key areas related to poverty: access to transportation; access to food; access to stable housing; and access to living-wage employment. Each of these chapters introduces challenges associated with the topic, and then provides the results of Hopelink programs that are addressing those challenges.

All of the information presented in this report is based on data collected through Hopelink programs and the agency’s 2017 Community Needs Assessment.
Hopelink’s Area of Impact

Clients Served by Service Center
- Shoreline: 2,952
- Kirkland/Northshore: 6,456
- Bellevue: 5,798
- Redmond: 4,163
- Sno-Valley: 1,434

Hopelink Housing
- Duvall Place: Duvall 8 units
- Avondale Park: Redmond 59 units
- Hopelink Place: Bellevue 20 units
- Kenmore Place: Kenmore 11 units
- Heritage Park: Bothell 15 units

Transportation Services
- DART Transit 964,592 rides
- Medicaid Transportation 43,960 riders
- Mobility Management 5,832 clients

Hopelink transportation services cover all of King and Snohomish counties.
Theory of Change

Hopelink’s Theory of Change visually demonstrates the goals and objectives of its services within the community.

Healthy Individuals and Families

*Hopelink’s Theory of Change Model*
Introduction

From root causes that begin in childhood, to outside economic factors, to sudden crises or illnesses that topple a family’s entire foundation, the reasons for poverty are many. For that reason, efforts to address—and ultimately, eliminate—poverty must include both services and strategies that consider the big picture while focusing on both immediate needs and long-term issues.

As there are many, sometimes overlapping causes of poverty, there are also many and often overlapping ways to address both cause and effect.

Although this report looks at categories of need individually, and positions them on Hopelink’s “Theory of Change” model that sees need and services on a continuum from stability to the ability to exit poverty, clients are able to enter and exit Hopelink services at any point, and may utilize one service or several. In addition, Hopelink programs and services are designed to overlap, as necessary.

For example, a family struggling to pay the rent during a sudden job loss may need food and energy assistance in order to stay in their home and avoid eviction, as well as family development assistance in order to plan a more stable future.

An elderly client who regularly visits the food bank may confide that she is no longer able to get to her doctors’ appointments now that she is unable to drive, and is in need of transportation services.

A single dad needs a GED or help finding a better job in order to move out of his car and into safe, affordable housing.

The Hopelink approach to ending poverty is designed to address various causes, multiple needs and a variety of objectives; all of which play a role in our overarching goal of helping clients attain stability and the tools and skills needed to exit poverty for good.
A veteran in need of regular medical treatment was having a hard time finding transportation to his appointments ... until he discovered Hopelink. Now, getting to the doctor is one less thing for him to worry about, and he is able to focus on his health. “This is huge,” he said. “It is so important to be mobile!”

– Hopelink Transportation Client
CHAPTER ONE

Access to Transportation

Access to reliable transportation—whether for medical appointments, childcare and other support services or education and employment—plays a key role in ensuring stability and helping people attain the tools needed to exit poverty.
Safe and reliable transportation can be the difference between keeping a job and becoming unemployed, getting to a doctor’s appointment and going without necessary care, and accessing food and other support services and becoming isolated.

**Transportation is consistently the second largest expense** for households. The Center for Neighborhood Technology estimates that in King Country, average transportation costs are $13,000 a year and equate to 19 percent of household income. With the overall cost of transportation for lower-income individuals continuing to grow, it now has a significant role in determining where people can live, work and access the support they need.

**Barriers to public transportation** include both cost and availability. According to King County Metro, costs have tripled in the past 40 years for low-wage workers. And although some of these costs have been eased by various programs that support low-income households, obstacles remain.

In addition, while public transportation can be a viable option in urban areas, for those displaced to more suburban communities, the challenges are greater. Larger service areas and more dispersed populations mean that services may not be convenient or suitable for riders who need transportation to access services or multiple places of employment at varying hours.

**The need for access to reliable and efficient transportation** goes beyond employment. Service providers also must be prepared to provide support for various riders with different needs. They may rely on transportation to get to the grocery store and carry groceries back home, or may need transportation that enables them to travel with medical equipment. People with disabilities or seniors may require additional support. Other potential users of public transportation find the complexity of the system difficult to navigate.
Hopelink Provides: Access to Transportation

Hopelink provides safe and reliable transportation options for people throughout King and Snohomish counties. Through three programs—Non Emergency Medical Transportation, Mobility Management and DART—the agency connects people to vital services and trains them how to utilize the system. Hopelink also provides additional access to clients through the provision of bus tickets.

NON-EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION

Between 2013 and 2015, the number of people without healthcare coverage across King County has fallen from 20 percent to 10 percent. With increased access to coverage, one of the remaining barriers to healthcare is the ability to visit places to receive treatment.

Through a contract with the state of Washington, Hopelink provides Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) in King and Snohomish counties for medical services covered by Medicaid. This ensures access to treatment for low-income clients with varying needs. Transportation services include bus fare, gas reimbursement, cars and lift-equipped vans for wheelchair mobility.

With access to healthcare, clients are better able to sustain employment and work toward exiting poverty. In 2017 alone, more than 25,000 trips were for cancer care, nearly 170,000 were for dialysis and almost 3,000 trips helped people with disabilities.

In total, for 2017, Hopelink provided 43,960 clients with rides to and from appointments. The service provided 1,638,529 total trips and related services. Of all of the trips Hopelink provided, 584,460 were on public transportation.
## Hopelink Provides: Access to Transportation

### MOBILITY MANAGEMENT

For many King County residents, access to public transportation can be a daunting prospect. This is especially the case for vulnerable populations; including people with disabilities, older adults, low-income individuals and those with limited English proficiency.

Hopelink’s mobility management team provides education and resources through various travel training programs throughout King County. Programs provide information about travel options, trip plans, one-on-one transportation assistance and training to partners who work with clients. In 2017, Hopelink provided assistance to 5,832 clients.

### TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE

In 2017, a total of 7,931 Metro bus tickets were distributed through various Hopelink programs to assist clients with access to various services. The estimated value of these tickets is $23,793.

### DART TRANSIT (DEMAND AREA RESPONSE TRANSIT)

Through a contract with King County Metro, Hopelink provides public transit to the general public. DART buses operate on a fixed schedule, but one that has more flexibility than regular Metro Transit; the smaller buses can go off regular routes to pick up and drop off passengers in service areas defined by Metro. These routes connect with major bus routes to provide riders with more transportation options, as well as ease access to services and places of employment. Standard public transit fare applies to this service.

In 2017, Hopelink operated 20 routes for DART buses. The buses traveled a total of 1,315,646 miles and provided 964,592 rides.
“It’s not easy to ask for help. I find it the hardest thing to do. Coming out of domestic violence, losing my home, and divorce, and a premature child, you made (the food bank) a safe, happy place; a place I could hold my head up high. Your support has been life changing.”

— Hopelink Food Bank Client
Access to Food

In Washington state, about one in seven people (13.7 percent) do not have reliable access to a sufficient amount of affordable, nutritious food, and may not always know when they will eat again.
Food insecurity is largely the result of financial difficulties, with factors such as unemployment, lack of support services and poverty playing a role. Research shows that the cost of food for one person in King County is nearly $4,000 per year. Multiplied by members of a household, this number is particularly significant when you consider that 89 percent of Hopelink’s client households have an annual income of $30,000 or less.

Food insecurity can have a devastating effect on a person’s health and wellbeing; particularly seniors, children and younger adults. Research has shown that food insecurity can be related to poor academic performance, mental health issues, obesity and even missing medications due to irregular eating patterns.

Those experiencing food insecurity often have to decide between such competing expenses as rent, healthcare or nutritionally adequate foods for their family, and oftentimes, sufficient food is the only “discretionary” budget item.

Various social programs are in place to help people acquire additional food, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and programs such as free-and reduced-price school meals. Some of these programs have barriers to entry, such as declining public funds or eligibility restrictions.

For some Hopelink clients, additional income can mean they no longer qualify for various support programs, yet they still do not make enough money to sustain a sufficient standard of living. For these people, and others that do not qualify, food bank and additional programs offered through organizations such as Hopelink can be critical in maintaining stability and navigating the path out of poverty.
Hopelink Provides: Access to Food

Hopelink’s food assistance programs provide emergency and supplemental food to families and individuals; ensuring access to fresh, healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate meals.

In all five food banks, Hopelink’s grocery store-style layout helps ensure a respectful shopping experience for clients; enabling them to take their time reading labels and choosing specific foods. With the help of hundreds of volunteers, Hopelink food banks help ensure stability by providing regular access to food for those who need assistance meeting basic needs.

Hopelink also offers home delivery, classes and cooking demonstrations in our centers to educate clients on how to prepare healthy meals using the food that is available in our food banks.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

In 2017, Hopelink provided a total of 2,065,422 meals, with 13,740 clients receiving food assistance. Forty-five cooking demonstrations were provided at Hopelink centers, and 26 clients enrolled in Hopelink’s six-week “Cooking Matters” course.

HOPELINK HARVEST

Hopelink Harvest collects surplus produce for distribution at Hopelink food banks, increasing clients’ access to fresh, healthy food. Through partnerships with local farms, farmers markets, community gardens and individual growers and with the help of volunteers, the Hopelink Harvest program provides fruits and vegetables to local families and individuals. In total, 99,110 pounds of fresh food were collected through this program, and 70 gleaning events took place at local farms.
“The Hopelink shelter was a place for stability and grounding; learning tools to succeed. We literally arrived with the clothes on our back, and we left with a million dollars full of knowledge and tools for life.”

– Hopelink Housing Client
The availability of secure and affordable housing is essential to individual and family stability and wellbeing. In King County, the number of people who are homeless continues to rise; from 8,858 in 2012 to 11,643 in 2017.
The Challenge: Access to Stable Housing

A 36 percent increase in the population of King County between 1990 and 2015 has brought the total to more than 2 million residents; the 13th largest county in the nation. Yet it is the factors surrounding this growth, rather than the increase alone, that are taking a disproportionate toll on low-income households—particularly in housing.

First, a large portion of this growth has been fueled by an influx of highly skilled tech workers associated with large companies in the area. As more people settle in the region, the competition for housing has increased; forcing up house prices and rental costs.

And although the growth in higher-income positions often brings an additional need for less-skilled workers to perform the jobs that support this growth, lower-wage jobs do not keep pace with escalating costs. As a result, even with the growth in the overall job market, the region is experiencing a continual increase in homelessness.

In addition, as housing costs increase throughout the region, low-income individuals and families are forced to allocate more of their resources to housing, leaving less to meet other needs. A U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study shows that nearly one third of the households in Hopelink’s service area pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs, leaving less for other necessary expenditures.

And while the housing challenge is fueled by more than just growth in the area, so, too, is its impact. Along with the struggle to find affordable housing, low-income households also face other challenges that are exacerbated by higher housing costs; such as wages not keeping up with rising inflation, higher costs of childcare, increases in energy costs and increased transportation costs.

An increasingly volatile rental market—with sudden rent hikes that may be beyond the ability to pay—can result in homelessness or displacement; requiring that a prospective tenant come up with first and last month’s rent and a security deposit before they are able to move from homelessness into a new residence. And a 2012 Journal of Urban Affairs study indicated that even a $100 increase in median rent corresponded to a 15 percent increase in homelessness in metropolitan areas and a 39 percent increase in rural/suburban areas.

If they are priced out of housing near work and have to move to more affordable housing in the suburbs, low-income families and individuals then face decreased access to support services, less frequent or more costly transportation options and a difficulty accessing basic services, such as healthcare and support for children in crisis. Research shows that the stresses of homelessness are more noticeable in children, who face health issues and decreased educational performances. They also are twice as likely to experience emotional or behavioral issues.
Hopelink Provides: Access to Stable Housing

The availability of reliable, affordable housing is a cornerstone of stability. To that end, Hopelink addresses access to housing in various ways. While we provide shelter and longer-term housing options, we also focus on eviction prevention and help with energy costs. The short-term focus is on preventing homelessness, or helping homeless families end their crisis, gain stability and obtain permanent housing.

Keeping a roof over their heads provides a family with the stability to focus on gaining the skills and knowledge needed to exit poverty. These are acquired through case management and other essential services such as employment assistance and financial coaching.

HOUSING

In the past year, 545 clients (160 families*) were served through all of Hopelink’s housing programs.

EMERGENCY FAMILY SHELTER

With a goal of ensuring that Hopelink families have the stability needed to obtain permanent housing, Hopelink’s emergency shelter program provides month-by-month housing. In 2017, Hopelink helped 190 clients (58 families) with emergency shelter. These families had been homeless; on the streets, in a car or another unsafe location. Of the families exiting our shelters, 53 percent achieved greater housing stability.

*Some families utilize more than one program.
Hopelink Provides: Access to Stable Housing

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING
Hopelink’s transitional housing provides more than a place to live; it helps families gain employment, increase their income and obtain permanent housing. Hopelink housed 287 clients (79 families) in transitional housing. Of those who exited the program, 76 percent achieved permanent housing, and monthly family incomes increased by 109 percent on average from entry to exit.

PERMANENT HOUSING
Hopelink’s permanent housing helps families continue their progress toward self-sufficiency. Through one-on-one case management designed to help them achieve their goals, residents have access to the services needed to help them gain employment and continue to increase their household income. An escalated rent structure motivates families to ultimately achieve market-rate housing. In the past year, Hopelink housed 97 clients (32 families) in permanent housing. Of these, seven families obtained permanent housing outside of Hopelink.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE
Hopelink provides energy assistance ensuring that seniors, people with disabilities and others living in poverty are able to stay warm in their homes. Hopelink administers two energy assistance programs that assist low-income renters and homeowners with their winter heating and energy bills. These are the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and the Puget Sound Energy (PSE) HELP Program, funded by Puget Sound Energy.

The energy programs offered are income eligible and not contingent on an emergency situation; therefore, this support helps clients retain more funds that can be diverted to help mitigate other challenges they might be facing. In the past year, Hopelink helped 10,371 clients and distributed $3,016,273 in heating assistance. The average energy assistance provided per household was $608.
EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

A family that is facing eviction risks losing much more than a roof over their heads. Once evicted, the climb back to stability requires not only saving enough to pay rent at a new place, but coming up with both the first and last month’s rent and a security deposit. Hopelink’s Emergency Financial Assistance program helps keep families from falling through the cracks into perpetual homelessness; providing one month’s rent so that a family is able to stay in their home.

Eviction prevention assistance also protects a family’s rental history, keeps them from incurring the costs of eviction and the significant expense of starting over in a new residence, and most importantly, ensures the stability of knowing they have a place to live.

In addition to eviction prevention, Hopelink provides limited financial support for such things as prescriptions or utility bills not covered by traditional heating assistance programs. In the past year, Hopelink helped 1,875 clients through emergency financial assistance and $491,919 was distributed to mitigate crisis and prevent eviction.

- $491,919 distributed for emergency financial assistance
- 1,875 clients received emergency financial assistance
- 1,194 clients (450 households) helped with eviction prevention and/or move-in assistance
- 437 clients (140 Households) helped with utility costs
- 368 clients (352 households) helped with additional needs such as prescription or transportation costs
“Thanks to my employment specialist’s patience and professionalism in helping with resume and cover letter writing, as well as interview skills, I got several job offers within a month. However, the biggest and most important effect of the mentorship is my confidence growth. Her appreciation of diversity in various forms, including linguistic and ability diversity, helped me find my strengths and do my best.”

– Hopelink Employment Services Client
Access to a Living Wage

A living wage is essential in order for clients to exit poverty. In King County, an income of $78,000 is required for a family of four to be economically self-sufficient. The income level required for one person is $29,000.
The Challenge: Access to a Living Wage

In King County, 20 percent of households earned less than $35,086 in 2015, while the top 5 percent earned more than $250,000. In 2017, nearly 90 percent of four-person households served by Hopelink had an annual income of less than $30,000—far below the $75,000 required for a family of four to be economically self-sufficient in King County.

As the gap between high and low earners increases and costs continue to rise, those in the low-income bracket are finding it harder to access housing, food, healthcare, transportation and education.

Education continues to be the most important factor in whether or not someone has access to a living wage. As more manufacturing jobs become automated, and those responsible for programming and operating machines require higher education, the situation worsens for low-skilled employees that were previously earning a good wage. As things change, more people lose employment and fall into the low-income bracket.

For many displaced workers, education or re-education are not possible due to prohibitive costs. And currently, 19 percent of Hopelink clients do not hold a high school diploma or GED, which makes it particularly difficult for them to compete in the job market.

King County is a diverse area, with immigrants and refugees making up more than 20 percent of the population. This group experiences a number of barriers to the job market, with language often the most challenging. Limited English proficiency means workers cannot access positions that require extensive communication with customers, coworkers or vendors. It is often the case that immigrants find themselves in the lowest-earning positions.

Without a living wage, clients often struggle with competing budget needs and find themselves taking on debt and becoming more financially burdened. Access to financial advice is often out of reach or not a high priority, as clients focus on short-term solutions to mitigate crisis after crisis.
FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Hopelink’s Family Development program helps families attain stability and develop the tools and skills needed to exit poverty; guiding them as they set and achieve specific goals. Case managers work directly with families to help them map out a plan for the future; identifying goals and strategies for success.

Along with referrals to resources within Hopelink and the community, case managers provide guidance and accountability for families working to get back on their feet. The Family Development program is one of the key resources available to families who are homeless but no longer qualify for the family homelessness system because they may be staying temporarily with a friend or family member.

In 2017, Hopelink provided family development services to 507 clients (148 families). Of the families who exited the program: 93 percent of families achieved and/or maintained stable housing; 47 percent of adults improved their employment status; and 50 percent of families increased their total income by at least 30 percent.
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
Hopelink’s employment specialists provide several key services to low-income adults seeking employment, including help preparing to find work: résumé assistance, interview skills and practice, consultation on attire and, most importantly, coaching on the critical skills needed to get—and keep—a job.

Hopelink employment specialists also help connect clients with opportunities for employment. They work with employers to identify job opportunities, notify clients of community hiring events and help them prepare to attend. Hopelink employment specialists guide clients through the entire job-seeking process until they achieve employment. Finally, they provide post-employment support; helping ensure success for both the client and the employer.

Hopelink provided 212 clients with employment services and 43 percent exited the program with an improved employment status. The average wage of those exiting the program was $15.70 per hour.

FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES
Hopelink’s Financial Capabilities program provides tools and services that guide clients toward financial stability. Clients receive one-on-one support and access to workshops covering topics such as budgeting, banking and risk management. In 2017, the program assisted 125 clients with financial coaching and provided 29 workshops.
ENGLISH FOR WORK
With a goal of helping non-native English speakers gain and keep employment, Hopelink’s English For Work (English as a Second Language) program served 231 students in 2017. Of those who completed the course, 80 percent had significant gains in their English language skills, and 15 percent improved their employment status. Of all employed clients who completed the course, their average wage when exiting the course was $14.60 per hour.

GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED)
For those who dropped out of school in the United States or moved here without a high school credential, earning a GED—the equivalent of a high school diploma—is an essential step toward exiting poverty.

Hopelink’s GED program provides classes to improve math, reading, writing, social studies and science knowledge, as well as basic computer training. Support services include helping students identify and enroll in the best possible education path to help them progress toward living-wage employment and out of poverty.

A total of 88 students enrolled in Hopelink’s GED program. The program can take more than a year to complete so not every student is tested each year. In 2017, 14 students earned their GED.
Conclusion

In 2017, Hopelink’s service area was home to more than 670,000 people. More than 87,000 were living below the poverty line; part of an increasing trend that has seen the poverty rate grow from 10.2 percent to 11.2 percent over the past five years. During that time, homelessness has also increased.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate in King County decreased dramatically; from 9 percent to 3.9 percent between 2010 and 2016. Economic growth in our region, especially in the tech industry, has increased median incomes without increasing wages for middle and low-income groups. More lower-paid jobs have been created to support growth, but the pay is not enough for those workers to afford to live here.

This report shows that nearly 90 percent of the four-person households Hopelink serves have an annual income of less than $30,000, yet the amount needed by a family that size to be economically self-sufficient in King County is $78,000 annually. That gap illustrates both the depth and breadth of need.

During 2017, Hopelink served 62,800 clients. More than 20,000 of those clients were served through community service programs that provide stability, while 1,713 clients received help to become equipped to exit poverty.

Increasing the number of people we are able to serve and ensuring that all services are efficient, effective and appropriate for all clients at any stage in their journey requires both expanding services and tackling challenges.

• We will continue to address the effects of poverty through proven programs that successfully stabilize clients in crisis, and then equip them with the tools and knowledge they need to exit poverty.

• We will double these existing services through a capital campaign commitment that has already expanded services in Shoreline and will open another new service center in Redmond in August 2018.

• We will focus on the systems that create and perpetuate poverty, such as childhood trauma and inequality.

Each of these steps, services and strategies will help address challenges and grow our impact as we continue to focus on building a community free of poverty.
Demographics of Community Service Clients

The data on the following two pages is a compilation of information provided by clients who receive Hopelink services other than—or in addition to—transportation.
Demographics of Community Service Clients

- **Gender**: 56% female, 44% male
- **English Proficiency**: 77% speak English, 23% limited English
- **Working Age Employment Status**: 63% unemployed, 37% employed
- **Disability Status**: 78% no disability, 22% have a disability
- **Households Receiving Food Stamps (SNAP)**: 58% received food stamps, 42% did not receive food stamps
- **Immigrant or Refugee**: 66% No, 34% Yes
- **Health Insurance Status**: 88% insured, 12% not insured
- **Families Reporting Income**: 84% one or more sources of income, 16% zero income
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Hopelink is a registered 501 (c)(3) organization.