Celebrate 20 Years of Hopelink's Annual Reaching Out Luncheon with Food Network's Alton Brown.

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Alton Brown is a Food Network guru, culinary scientist, author and philanthropist. His quirky humor and professorial banter have endeared him to TV and live audiences nationwide. Brown is best known for creating and hosting the Peabody award-winning cooking show “Good Eats.” He is also a supporter of charities with missions to end hunger, poverty and homelessness.

Join us Monday, October 19 from noon to 1:15 p.m. at the Meydenbauer Center, 11100 NE 6th St. in Bellevue. We are now taking table captain and guest registrations. Check-in begins at 11:00 a.m. and seating begins at 11:30 a.m. There is no charge to attend the luncheon but this is a fundraising event where guests are asked to make a donation to support Hopelink’s services. The suggested minimum donation per person is $150.

Presented by The Boeing Company

MORE INFORMATION  Call 425.897.3703 or e-mail rsvp@hope-link.org.
Building a stronger, more vibrant community: overused buzzwords, or a real commitment to a better future?

Could be either. At Hopelink, it’s the latter.

Hopelink is on a mission. We are building a stronger, more vibrant community to ensure that more of our neighbors who are struggling will have access to stability and the tools they need to exit poverty for good. We are committed to this goal because we know there is real, tangible value in creating a community that works for everyone.

We know that a hungry child can’t learn as well in school. We know that a parent who doesn’t have the skills they need to get a good job faces an uphill battle in escaping poverty. We know that a senior who can’t afford to heat their home, or buy healthy food, is at risk every day of getting sick – or worse. And we know that a homeless family that is focused on survival is often frozen in time – unable to take steps toward stability.

These children, these parents, these grandparents, these families are all part of our community. We have the power to ensure that each has the best possible shot at stability, and a life free from poverty. And at Hopelink, we are taking tangible steps to make that happen; turning buzzwords into new beginnings.

Stability begins at home

Having a warm, safe place to live is a cornerstone in the journey from crisis and vulnerability to independence. Yet for those who are able to work, we often take for granted the simplest tools that are needed in order to get a job: an address and phone number where you can be contacted; a hot shower and fresh clothes for an interview; enough nutritious food to get through the day.

More than 4,000 King County families face this challenge every single day. Of the more than 10,000 homeless people in King County, nearly 3,800 live on the street.
In the early 1980s, Hopelink began leasing a nine-unit apartment building in Kenmore and turned it into the first emergency, short-term shelter for homeless families in that area. That facility is still the only homeless family shelter in north King County.

Over the past 30 years, hundreds of local families have found a new start through the Kenmore shelter and Hopelink’s family development program, moving from crisis to stability and ultimately independence.

The building has served us well, but although the structure is sound, extensive renovations have been needed to ensure it is able to continue to serve as a safe haven for homeless families. Renovations were completed in July, and we have also expanded the facility from nine units to 11. Today, Kenmore Place is on track to provide stability to more than a thousand local families over the next 50 years – helping to ensure a stronger, more vibrant community.

Financial literacy key to financial stability

A stable place to live and adequate food are essential first steps in the journey to stability and independence, but they are only the beginning.

For a lot of low-income families, financial stress is yet another stumbling block. Lack of access to trusted financial services and information can become a barrier to progress for those who have never learned about such things as banking options and budgeting basics.

That’s why we are so excited that Hopelink has been selected by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to participate in the federal agency’s Financial Coaching Initiative, which provides for a full-time financial coach to help with clients’ financial goals. This new service provides another opportunity to expand our services and help more people in our community.

Hopelink was chosen as one of 20 “host sites” nationwide in a competitive process that garnered 160 applications, and is the only site in Washington state. One of the priorities in the selection process was to ensure that the selected organizations also provide other services, such as job training and education, social, and housing services, which are all part of the Hopelink model.

Donna O’Connor has been providing one-on-one financial coaching at all five Hopelink
centers since April, and she says that she sees a visible transformation in clients as she helps them sort out their finances. Many who are apprehensive at first come away with a newfound confidence to help guide them along the path to financial stability. Ensuring that economically vulnerable consumers have the skills they need to make smart financial decisions is another way to help ensure a stronger, more vibrant community.

**Adequate wages essential**

Hopelink is, at its core, an anti-poverty organization. Every day we are working toward a community free from poverty, where opportunity is not limited by where you have been, but expanded by where you want to go. Yet no longer is opportunity ensured by simply “getting a job.” Today, just having a job is not enough to get ahead, and increasingly, it is not even enough to just get by. That’s why a living wage is another key component in the path toward stability.

We are committed to the belief that a stronger, more vibrant community begins at home. That’s why Hopelink has made the decision to increase our minimum agency wage to $15 an hour. We have made this change because we believe in the work we are doing in the community, and we value all 250 staff who have chosen to carry out this important work.

In the end, a strong, vibrant community is not unlike any solid foundation: it starts with vision, is built in measured increments and is crafted with proper tools. A safe, secure place to live, financial know-how and adequate wages are all key components of the community we all want to call home.

Donate online at hope-link.org
Who’s Helping Hopelink

Mox Boarding House in Bellevue held their second annual tabletop tournament, The Gauntlet: Moxtropolis, which raised $95,000 to support Hopelink services. Twenty teams competed to raise money in the weeks leading up to the tournament and team “Bungie” came out on top. Team “Removed from Play” finished first during the day-long tabletop tournament.

Kenmore’s Church of the Redeemer organized a collection for residents of Hopelink’s newly remodeled shelter at Kenmore Place, providing $900 worth of kitchen, bathroom and laundry room goods. The church followed this effort by collecting school supplies for the residents’ children, as well as Thanksgiving baskets to ensure that each family will be able to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner this year.

Emerald Heights Retirement Community in Redmond collected more than $6,500 and nearly 1,700 pounds of food to benefit Hopelink’s End Summer Hunger program. Hopelink bags were hung on the door of every resident and then filled with food donations – just one of the remarkable drives Emerald Heights does year-round to benefit Hopelink programs.

Ford of Kirkland went the extra mile to help families during the summer months by donating more than 1,900 pounds of peanut butter through their annual, company-wide peanut butter drive. The donations were delivered to Hopelink’s Kirkland food bank and distributed to families throughout the summer.
Xtreme Consulting Group, Inc. in Kirkland and Universal Avionics in Redmond went head-to-head in the final round of Hopelink’s 2015 Can Madness food drive. The annual tournament encourages businesses to team up to fill our food bank shelves after the holidays when donations traditionally taper off. This year, 32 businesses in Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, Shoreline, Seattle and Renton brought in a record 47,996 pounds of food and $5,517 in cash donations.

End Summer Hunger coin drives are an annual tradition at elementary schools in Hopelink’s service area. This year, Enatai Elementary School in Bellevue raised more than $2,000 almost exclusively in coins and pocket change. Many more schools in our area had equally impressive outcomes; bringing in more than $14,000! Briarcrest Elementary School in Shoreline raised $1,456, while Carnation Elementary School in Sno-Valley donated nearly $600 in just the final few days of the school year.

Northern Lights Montessori School in Redmond showed how much they care by holding a “We Care” Valentine’s Day drive for our Redmond food bank. The young students collected 420 pounds of our most-needed items, made signs that read “We care for our community,” and even helped load the Hopelink van!

As a part of their school’s band concert, the Associated Student Body at Kamiakin Middle School in Kirkland coordinated a drive that brought in 3,309 pounds of food for Hopelink’s Kirkland food bank.

Redmond residents generously donated $1,731 and 603 pounds of food on July 18 through the City of Redmond’s Redmond Recycle. The event collected donations for Hopelink along with recyclable household items.

A huge thanks to the National Charity League; a dedicated group of mothers and daughters who volunteer their time year-round to help Hopelink’s programs and events flourish. Every year, they participate in Carillon Point Properties’ Outdoor Movie Nights that benefit Hopelink in Kirkland – an annual event that last year raised more than $2,000 for Hopelink services.

For more than a decade, the First Lutheran Church of Richmond Beach in Shoreline has helped bolster Hopelink’s food program through annual donations of hundreds of pounds of food. This summer the congregation also collected 400 pounds of much-needed supplies.
Make the Hopelink annual Turkey Trot fun run & walk a part of your family’s holiday tradition. Join almost 1,500 community members who get together each year to have fun and raise money to help low-income families, seniors and children in our community.

On Sunday, November 22, Hopelink will hold its 15th annual Turkey Trot fun run & walk to raise money to provide emergency services for low-income families in our community during the winter months when they face added pressures such as higher home heating costs and increased food bills.

Registration and festivities for the 5K fun run & walk from Marina Park to Carillon Point and back begin at 9:00 a.m. The race starts at 10:00 a.m. Participants may register online at hope-link.org. The pre-registration fee (before October 31) is $30 per person, or $25 per person for teams of four or more. The pre-registration fee from November 1–15 is $35 per person, or $30 per person for teams of four or more. From November 16–22 registration is $40 per person and $35 per person for teams. Strollers and pets are free. Each registrant receives a Hopelink Turkey Trot 2015 tech-shirt, race bib and entry into our drawing for fun prizes.

Visit hope-link.org/turkeytrot for information and registration.
Elena Diaz was on a bus in San Salvador when two men – both gang members – approached her. One waved a gun.

“We know where you live,” the man said. “We know what color your house is. We know where your son goes to school.”

Elena was terrified. She worked for the government office of public safety, responsible for legal and technical recommendations for the correctional system. So although she protested, Elena had reason to believe the men knew exactly what they claimed.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Elena said. “I can’t help you.”

“Just shoot her,” one of the men said to the other.

That day was a turning point. The increasingly perilous balance between life and death in her home country of El Salvador had tipped, and for the first time, Elena feared for her life and that of her eight-year-old son. She got off the bus and took a taxi home.

The youngest of nine children, Elena has fond memories of her earliest years; growing up with a father who sheltered her from the chaos of living through a civil war and a mother her brothers used to call “the boss.”

“My childhood was calm and serene when my dad was taking care of me,” Elena said. “He protected me. It was paradise.”

Everything changed when Elena was only six years old. Her father died, and her mother became the sole breadwinner. In addition to the financial strain, the loss left a hole in Elena’s heart.

“When my father died, part of my life went with him,” she said. “I loved my father a lot, and I still miss him like it was yesterday.”

Her mother had always worked hard running a small restaurant, and after she became a widow, Elena began joining her every day.

Elena says that even at the age of six, she loved helping out.
“I would never sit down; I would be working,” she said. “I enjoyed it. I would clean the tables and set the tables and put out the salt and pepper. I did that every day.”

Over time, Elena and her family felt the effects of the civil war in many different ways – from having to walk to school because the rebels had shut down the roads and bridges, to seeing people get shot – and even getting caught in the crossfire.

“One day my mother sent me out to do the shopping and I heard a noise that I thought was fireworks. A store owner who was a friend of my mom’s told me to get down … I felt something in my leg, and realized I had been shot. I went back to the restaurant and showed my mom, and she got the bullet out.”

Elena was 10 years old.
And she vividly remembers one visit to her grandmother’s house, who lived by a coffee plantation near a military check point.

“A car came through and a man got out, followed by a bus,” she said. “Two men got off the bus and they were taken to the plantation. I heard horrible screaming.”

Both men were later found dead.

“Now I think about it and it was horrible,” she said. “But at that time, it was normal … to see bodies everywhere.”

Elena’s mother got sick and then died when Elena was only 22, leaving her to care for three nieces between the ages of 9 and 13. Determined to succeed, Elena studied law and began to work in the office of public safety; reviewing cases sent to her by prisons.

“One day, we were asked to transport some documents to another location and we were not given protection or any kind of security,” Elena said. “We were concerned because we knew that if any of the gang members happened to see us, we would be killed. But my boss told me that if I didn’t want to do the work, there were a hundred other people who wanted my job.”

That’s the day Elena encountered the gang members.

“They told me I had been warned and that was the only chance they would be giving me,” she said.

“I knew at that point this could not continue, and I couldn’t live with the fear of something happening to my son,” she said. “So I called my boss and I told him that I was not going to be able to go to work the next day. I went home and I closed my windows and stayed inside. I was very scared. It was one of the worst experiences of my life.”

On the day she resigned, she noticed two men following her.

“The experience of being afraid of your son disappearing is the worst experience a person can have,” Elena said. “I didn’t go to the police because I was afraid that either the gang members were paying the police, or the police themselves were gang members.”

Elena had never planned to leave El Salvador; she had family and a house and a good job and felt she was living well. None of that mattered when she realized her life was at stake.

She knew she needed to get out as soon as possible, so Elena contacted the U.S. Embassy and was promised an appointment in three months. Too afraid to stay that long, Elena packed up two suitcases and she and her son got on a bus to Mexico.

Her intent was to seek asylum in Canada where friends lived, and she was granted a one-year U.S. visa on the Texas border in
order to complete the process. But once the pair were safely in the United States, Canadian officials told her they were no longer in danger and therefore not eligible for asylum.

Staying with friends in upstate New York, Elena learned the waiting list for legal immigration assistance might be as long as three or four years – not an option on a one-year visa. She was caught in the middle. Another friend in Washington state suggested that Elena come to Washington and buy working papers and just start working.

Arriving here in August 2012, Elena hit the ground running.

She found emergency shelter at Mamas Hands in North Bend and searched for English classes while looking for a place to live. Elena was referred to Hopelink by a social worker at the eastside social services agency Encompass, and in November 2013, Elena and her son moved into Hopelink’s Duval Place. Immediately, she felt safe.

“I was very relieved to see that my son had his own space again and that he could go outside and play,” Elena said, “and that I didn’t need to worry about him being kidnapped by someone who was following us.”

She credits Hopelink with providing the stability she needed to start a new life.

“If you have a safe place to live, it’s like having a center of operations and you can get a lot of things started and you can make things better,” she said.

The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project took on her case and Elena eventually was granted asylum. She became a permanent resident in March.

A woman of strong faith, Elena firmly believes people must work hard in order to make it. And she is living proof of her commitment. Today, Elena is employed as a support specialist at Encompass, helping 42 families in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program. She is happy to be working and paying her bills and says she lives in gratitude every day, surrounded by good friends and a renewed sense of community.

Far from the turmoil of her homeland, Elena is excited about her future. She and her now 12-year-old son live in their own apartment, and she is hoping to return to college and to someday own her own home.

“The most important thing is having a place to live – a place for family to be together, and Hopelink gave that to me,” Elena said. “The program has been a blessing.”
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“It was terrifying... just to realize that I could be out on the streets — not knowing where I was going to sleep the next night, I’d never experienced that before.”

– Hopelink Kirkland Food Bank client

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“I basically lost everything — I lost my job, I lost my house, I lost my kids. I had to start from scratch, and Hopelink is where I turned.”  —Hopelink client
I used to be the one helping others — I never thought I’d be the one needing help.”  
— Hopelink Kirkland Food Bank client

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I used to be the one helping others — I never thought I’d be the one needing help.”  
— Hopelink Kirkland Food Bank client

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

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EDITOR: Darrell Bulmer
DESIGN FIRM: Wolken Communica
CONTRIBUTORS: Lauren Thomas and Kris Betker

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For more information about Hopelink and its services, call 425.869.6000 or visit the website at hope-link.org.

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425.869.6000
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Redmond, WA 98052

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