Cover Story

Marian is an upbeat and active mother and grandmother who had never reached out for assistance before her husband’s sudden passing. Learn how Hopelink became a part of Marian’s story, beginning on page 11.

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Our Vision:

A Community Free of Poverty

What’s New

All five Hopelink centers are about to welcome our neighbors back inside!

Every Hopelink food bank is about to become a “Hopelink Market,” providing enhanced customer service and innovation. Learn more in the next issue of Reaching Out.

It’s been two years since Hopelink staff took on a global pandemic. Unprecedented demand for services required innovation, flexibility and a total commitment to helping our community weather the storm.

Learn about Hopelink’s response to a world turned upside down – including what it meant to be an essential worker, how we helped ensure that everyone stayed safe and one staffer’s connection to Hurricane Harvey – beginning on page 14.

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Connected to community

Message from the CEO

It’s been a year since I arrived in the Pacific Northwest, eager to begin my service as Hopelink CEO. I knew that with so many of our neighbors affected by the pandemic, nothing was more important than being there for them in the months ahead.

Leading the organization began with grounding myself and establishing roots in the community - connecting and learning as much as possible. I spent time getting to know the organization, staff, community members and the beautiful cultures represented in this area.

Along the way, I also visited parks, local attractions and hiking trails – one of which included my first “bears have been spotted in this area” sign! Nothing I have learned – bear warnings aside – has been a surprise. For more than 50 years, Hopelink has been doing great and important work in our community, responding to a need for our services that is significant and very real.

We are not alone in this effort. We are part of a community that cares for each other. The kindness and compassion I see every single day – from our volunteers and staff, and from our partners, community leaders and generous supporters – fuel my spirit and inspire our work. I am grateful for each of you.

A few months ago, as I was flying back from a trip and nearing Seattle, I spotted the top of Mount Rainer above the clouds. I was in complete awe. It’s a beautiful sight. As soon as I saw it, I smiled and thought, “I’m home.” There was a sense of comfort that came with that thought. Seeing “The Mountain” brought about feelings of being where I am supposed to be and a sense of connectedness to this community.

Thank you for your warm welcome, and for all you do for the community we share.

Yours in service,

Dr. Catherine Cushinberry
Hopelink CEO

Community in Action

December-March 2021

Beach House Greetings

Beach House Greetings in Shoreline has created an annual holiday ornament since 2014, with 100% of the proceeds going to a local nonprofit organization. This year, Hopelink was fortunate to be chosen as the recipient of the sale’s proceeds.

Kingsgate Skating Club

Kingsgate Skating Club has raised funds online and held food drives for Hopelink for the past eight years – including the recent holiday season, when the group held both a food drive and an online fundraiser.

Veterans of Foreign Wars in Redmond holds breakfast fundraiser

In December, Veterans of Foreign Wars in Redmond held a “Breakfast with Santa” event in support of Hopelink. Members made breakfast and invited their neighbors to come visit Santa, while also asking for food donations for Hopelink’s Redmond center. Their drive was a great success!

The Gymnastics Connection

The Gymnastics Connection in Kirkland held food drives throughout the holiday season to support Hopelink’s Stock the Shelves campaign. Together with their community of supporters, The Gymnastics Connection collected more than 1,000 pounds of food for Hopelink food banks.

Silverback Therapeutics

Local biopharmaceutical company Silverback Therapeutics held a competition-based online fundraiser for Hopelink during the holiday season, raising funds to provide gift cards for Hopelink families. Departments within the company were all-in during the effort, together exceeding their goal multiple times after the bar was raised higher to challenge their employees.

FedEx

#FedExCares has been committed to Hopelink’s mission for more than 15 years. When the call went out to help Stock the Shelves at Hopelink food banks in December, Jan Schiffner, FedEx market sales manager for Washington, Oregon and Minnesota quickly joined the campaign. After she shared information with her coworkers, the FedEx team collected more than 800 pounds of food for Hopelink food banks.

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact: Vashetti Quiros
425.952.3066 | vquiros@hopelink.org

For food and fund drives, please contact: Isabel Hoggatt
425.897.3710 | ihoggatt@hopelink.org
One crisp winter morning, Karla Ferreira started her day in Auburn, drove clients to Seattle Children’s, drove back to Auburn, and then north again to the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance Proton Therapy Center at Northwest Hospital ... all before noon.

A typical day? Sometimes. As one of nearly 400 drivers for Hopelink’s Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) brokerage service – which provides rides in Snohomish and King Counties for medical services covered by Medicaid – Ferreira rarely knows exactly where she will be during any given day. When one trip ends, she gets her next assignment – much like rideshare services Uber and Lyft.

For Ferreira and the other drivers, two years of a global pandemic changed only the process, not the service. Among the most essential of essential workers, the drivers kept going.

Hopelink’s Bill Wooley, who serves as Contracts Specialist for NEMT, didn’t know what to expect when the pandemic hit in early 2020.

“For the first 48 hours, we wondered: ‘Will drivers still want to do this, with the potential risks?’ But they did … they stepped up. The drivers are true heroes,” Wooley said.

Ferreira loves her job, and it shows. Even masked, her smile is infectious. A long-time driver who has worked for Northwest Transport in Kent since August 2020, she enjoys helping others, as well as interacting with her passengers.

“The thing I enjoy most about my job is getting to help others and getting to know the clients, and – hopefully – bringing some joy to their day.”

Wayne Donelson, an eight-year driver for Tri-County Cabulance, discovered his passion for helping people get to and from medical appointments when family and friends needed similar services.

“A opportunity to help people in these situations get the same respect I would want family and friends to receive makes this more than just a job,” Donelson says.

Helping people and interacting with clients is also what drives Cindy Molina, who has been with MediRide, Inc. for 11 years.

“I very much enjoy helping people,” Molina said. “And at the end of my day, I feel good knowing that I safely transported clients to their appointments. I feel like I’m doing something of value.”

Molina says she also loves to drive, which isn’t a bad thing for someone who averages about 1,200 miles per week.

Throughout the pandemic, all three drivers have continued to transport passengers, while taking extra steps to keep everyone safe – including making sure their vehicles are clean and sanitized and ensuring that they and their passengers are always properly masked.

“You just need to be cautious and protect yourself and others at all times,” Molina said.

Donelson agrees.

“I make every effort to keep myself, family and clients safe, while also respecting everyone’s strong opinions on the need for masks, vaccinations and social distancing,” he said.

Despite the challenges brought by a global pandemic, Donelson said he is proud that he’s been able to serve his community.

“This is a great service that is very much appreciated,” he said. “It’s an honor to be able to assist in these efforts.”

Hopelink’s NEMT drivers are contracted to provide service through the state Health Care Authority. For more information or to schedule a ride, visit hopelink.org/medicaid-transportation.
Hopelink and Microsoft have a few things in common. Both got their start locally in the 1970s – Microsoft settling in Bellevue in 1979, and Hopelink setting up shop in Bothell in 1971. Both have grown significantly over the years; Microsoft becoming one of the world’s leading technology companies, and Hopelink expanding to serve about 65,000 people annually throughout north and east King County.*

In addition, both are committed to building a stronger community; one that works for everyone.

For Amy Liu, Microsoft’s Director of Human Services and Affordable Housing Initiatives in Washington state, that pledge makes perfect sense.

“This is our home,” Liu said. “Our headquarters are on the Eastside, and we are investing to ensure that this remains a great place to live and work. For so many folks in our community, for teachers, firefighters, folks at nonprofits … there’s a huge swath of our community and our neighbors who often can’t afford to live near where they work.”

Microsoft Philanthropies is a leader in driving change within local cities to make affordable housing easier to build. When Microsoft recognized that many people working in the community were not able to live nearby, they realized that the affordability issue likely hit the employees of partners such as Hopelink too.

In response, Microsoft not only invested in a revolving loan fund to develop affordable housing, they also have been actively working with local cities to address barriers. In addition to partnering with Hopelink on their Affordable Housing Initiative, Microsoft is a member of the Eastside Housing Roundtable, a group comprised of a cross-section of developers, for-profit and nonprofit businesses, all dedicated to increasing the development of affordable housing throughout east King County.

Liu says that taking steps to increase the availability of middle-income housing also syncs with Hopelink programs that are geared toward helping people exit poverty, by providing a next-step option from low-income housing. Microsoft’s housing initiatives are only part of their commitment to the work Hopelink is doing in the community.

For more than 30 years, Microsoft has donated millions of dollars in grants, employee giving and volunteer hours matches, capital campaign donations and special initiatives. They were the first business to make a significant additional donation to Hopelink when the pandemic hit in March 2020.

Liu says Microsoft provided additional unrestricted funds early on given Hopelink’s reach into the community and breadth of programs.

“Hopelink is such an anchor in the community, and a hub with multiple essential spokes,” Liu said. “Hopelink is one of the foundational organizations serving our community on the Eastside.”

In addition, Microsoft encourages their employees to support nonprofits throughout the year – particularly during their month-long Give Campaign in October, and through annual holiday giving trees on the Microsoft campus every December (during non-pandemic times).

And Microsoft employees are generous with their time and talents, volunteering in Hopelink food banks, tutoring during adult education classes, working with the employment program, gleaning with Hopelink Harvest, leading training sessions on Office 365 – even spreading bark at Hopelink housing sites.

Liu refers to Hopelink as a “trusted partner” in their commitment to the community. Clearly that relationship goes both ways.

*The 65,000 per-year total is the most recent pre-pandemic annual average.

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Hopelink partnership with Microsoft spans decades

Hopelink's 2021 Events & Campaigns

Farm Fresh Feast
In 2021, a total of 171 Farm Fresh Feasters enjoyed wine, a multicourse dinner prepared by local celebrity chef John Howie and a lively auction at Hopelink’s first-ever hybrid event. Guests attending the 8th annual event – in person at Columbia Winery or from their homes – raised $208,029 for Hopelink services.

Reaching Out Luncheon
Hopelink’s 26th annual Reaching Out Luncheon featured a virtual discussion with writer, comedian and host of Netflix’s “Patriot Act” Hasan Minhaj. Minhaj and Hopelink CEO Dr. Catherine Cushinberry tackled issues that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, and discussed some of the ways in which we can all help build a stronger, more equitable community. A total of 509 guests raised $735,369 to provide Hopelink services.

Turkey Trot
In November, a total of 379 participants from all over the country joined Hopelink’s virtual Turkey Trot 5K family fun run & walk in 2021, logging their Ks over the course of a week. In addition to Washington state, runners and walkers also represented California, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Wisconsin – among others! The 5K raised $48,165 to help provide vital services to Hopelink clients during the challenging winter months.

End Family Hunger
In 2021, Hopelink’s End Family Hunger campaign provided additional food to help ensure that families affected by the coronavirus pandemic would have enough to eat during the summer months. And in the fall, Hopelink provided backpacks filled with school supplies to 2,493 children.

Lend a Hoping Hand
Although Hopelink was again unable to host traditional holiday gift rooms due to the pandemic, that didn’t stop a generous community from making sure local kids had a happier holiday season! As part of Hopelink’s annual Lend a Hoping Hand campaign, 2,960 families received a total of $203,000 in holiday gift cards.
Finding joy

A spirited grandmother lights up the world

Marian Henderson Sheffield is a proud mom of two grown sons, and a doting grandmother. She also is a bit of a Renaissance woman: artist, dancer, former model, teacher, nanny and basketball coach. And she is an eternal optimist who radiates sheer joy.

“I don’t have any reason to be sad,” Marian said, “because I think that as long as Hopelink is there and I have a good head on my shoulders, I’ll be OK.”

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, where she still has family, Marian says she is also a woman of faith who has been attending church ever since she was a young girl.

Marian married in 1971 and gave birth to a son. Three years later, the brutal Pittsburgh winters prompted her husband to suggest the family relocate to the west coast. They lived in California for 11 years, where Marian worked as a substitute teacher and the couple’s second son was born.

When her sons were aged 6 and 12, the high cost of California living brought the family to Seattle. Marian enrolled in Renton Technical College and worked at a variety of jobs. Twelve years later, her husband suffered a fatal heart attack.

“That kind of destroyed my world,” she said.

A friend suggested that Marian reach out to Hopelink, where she signed up for the food bank and later energy assistance. She was a bit overwhelmed by the experience – but in a good way.

“It was just flooring to me,” she said. “I didn’t even know how to accept it, because I’d never done that before. But just being at Hopelink gave me a sense of gratitude, and brought out my energy, because I’d never had so much help before – I never needed anything when my husband was alive.”

Over time, as Marian navigated her way through grief and loss, she turned to dance to express herself, performing African dance in the 12-member Rhythms & Rituals troupe throughout the Puget Sound area. Marian loved that experience, and she misses it to this day.

And she continued to paint; a skill she developed as a teenager when a neighbor helped guide her natural talent. Along with dance, painting has been Marian’s passion, but one that faded into the background during the pandemic. She is quick to point
out that it wasn’t sadness, but less energy that held her back, and she’s eager to break out the paints and brushes now that the outside world is beginning to open up again.

During the pandemic, Marian took great care to stay safe, but still found a way to not only connect with other people but find joy in that journey as well.

“I’m used to being around people and I have a lot of friends – they call me and check up on me, and we talk on the phone,” Marian said. “And just to talk on the phone to one of my friends - that brings me joy.”

She is eager to return to in-person food bank visits and again interact with Hopelink staff and other clients. Not surprisingly, she’s always quick to introduce herself – even learning to communicate with non-English-speaking families she meets in line. Marian considers Hopelink family, and in fact hadn’t been a client for long when she began looking for a way to give back.

Volunteering at a Hopelink food bank and later a holiday gift room, Marian helped parents and grandparents select toys and gifts for the children in their lives. She loved that experience.

“I live for God, my grandson and my two sons,” she said. “That’s all I really focus on, and that makes me happy.”

Marian’s sons both became active in the church at a young age, and when Kyree was young, Marian would take him to church nearly every Sunday, where he would read the bible to the younger kids in Sunday school.

Her journey may not have followed exactly the path she expected, but she still finds a way to capture joy in every new twist and turn.

As a little girl, Marian dreamed of going to Hollywood, and pursuing an acting career. Years later, she easily recast that dream into another source of joy.

“I never quite made it to Hollywood,” she said. “But I danced in front of more than 3,000 people. And it was so great to look out there and see all of them … that gave me a sense of ‘my dream is fulfilled … I’m doing OK.’

Because I didn’t get to Hollywood, but I got to dance in front of a lot of people.”

Hopalink has helped ensure that Marian has regular access to food, warmth and a safe, welcoming space to interact with her neighbors. The sheer joy she finds in every moment? That’s her gift to the rest of us.

GiveBIG is a statewide fundraising campaign that brings together individuals and organizations committed to investing in our communities. Last year, generous donors helped raise a total of more than $17 million for nearly 1,700 nonprofit organizations, including Hopelink. When you support Hopelink by making a donation during this year’s GiveBIG campaign, you will help provide food, shelter, heat and hope for local families and individuals.

TINYURL.COM/HOPELINK-GIVEBIG
Staying the course during a global pandemic

Looking back on two unprecedented years

The early guidance was simple: Wash your hands. Cover coughs and sneezes. Disinfect surfaces. Stay home if you're sick. At first, the novel coronavirus wasn’t expected to be much of a community health risk.

Yet almost immediately – with the nation’s first reported case of COVID-19 in Washington state just days earlier on January 21 - Hopelink staff began to respond: Disinfectant wipes in all public areas. Mapped-out schedules for sanitizing surfaces. A limit on the number of people in conference rooms.

On March 3, Hopelink formed a Coronavirus Response Team to monitor and respond to CDC updates. The group began meeting daily. The order was expected to last two weeks.

At Hopelink – an essential service under the governor’s order – finding a way to safely continue to provide all services took priority. Meanwhile, as center buildings physically closed their doors to the public, staff who were able to telecommute relocated immediately, setting up laptops at kitchen tables and figuring out how to navigate virtual meetings.

In offices, coffee cups sat half-filled. Desk calendars froze in time. Plants were left on window ledges. In a couple of weeks, everyone would be back.

The fallout

In April 2020, Washington state 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.

As jobs disappeared, those living paycheck-to-paycheck because their jobs don’t pay a living wage realized they had a week – maybe two - to figure out how they would get by; how they would pay the rent, keep the heat on, buy groceries.

Responding to demand

Not surprisingly, demand for assistance increased almost immediately. In the first four months, calls to Hopelink for financial assistance increased fivefold over previous years. And while the state’s eviction moratorium enabled renters to stay in their homes even if they were unable to pay the rent, the amount owed continued to grow.

Thousands of individuals and families faced potentially insurmountable debt when the moratorium ended, likely facing eviction and making it more difficult to find another place to live. In addition, some renters said they felt pressured by landlords to either continue to pay, or self-evict.

By year’s end, the program had distributed a total of nearly $1,460,000 in rental assistance; nearly $1 million more than in 2019. In addition, during a time of year when energy usage typically begins to taper off, new applications for assistance increased about 20 percent between mid-March and July.

Taking on a different storm

For Houston-born Lucy Pyeatt, Hopelink’s energy and financial assistance director, the first few months of the pandemic felt like a storm she’d weathered before. As jobs disappeared, those living paycheck-to-paycheck because their jobs don’t pay a living wage realized they had a week – maybe two - to figure out how they would get by; how

They would pay the rent, keep the heat on, buy groceries.

“That was always the marker,” Pyeatt said, “of being the most challenging experience of my career. But COVID was equal to that. I think I worked more during Hurricane Harvey relief, but not by much.”

Pyeatt said she found herself frequently drawing from that experience.

“It was comparable in that there was a lot of work at the beginning – it required going all out for several months,” Pyeatt said. “My team probably got tired of hearing me reference Harvey, but for all of the ebbs and flows of what recovery means, that (knowledge) was something we applied often in the initial scramble.”

Pyeatt remembers hearing a local community leader in Houston say that every stage of a disaster brings both grief and gratitude in equal measure – the pain of loss tempered by relief for what remains. She also maintained that those on the front lines are best equipped to respond. Pyeatt found similarities in that view as well.

“She would say, ‘people wait for the experts, but the community members are the experts,’” Pyeatt said. “We know what we know. And we need to hold onto that.”

Programs continue to adapt

In 2021, Hopelink began seeing additional clients who had never before asked for assistance; after a year of getting by on savings or other funds, many had exhausted their resources. Meanwhile, Hopelink programs that had adapted quickly in 2020 continued to respond and adjust throughout the following year.

The Adult Education Program continued to offer online classes. A pandemic-driven decline in student enrollments continued into 2021, with enrollment in English for Work classes finally beginning to rebound last September.

In addition to virtual sessions of one-on-one job coaching, Hopelink’s Employment Program staff responded to skyrocketing job losses with a service targeted to those affected by the pandemic: a remote resume review service that offered a one-time virtual session.

Hopelink’s Financial Capabilities Program also adapted quickly.
Not surprisingly, demand for food also increased dramatically. For Matt Campbell, Hopelink’s former director of food programs, March 2020 hit like a freight train. A situation he had expected would disappear quickly changed the way Hopelink distributes food. Instead of inviting clients into Hopelink’s grocery store-style food banks – a point of pride for the food program – pre-packed boxes of food would be safely distributed at outside entrances.

Volunteers helped create a conveyor system to quickly pack boxes and were soon averaging about 2,500 boxes every week. Each box provided enough food for more than 20 meals and included canned fruit and vegetables, proteins and grains. Over time, other foods were added – including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy/deli and meat products, and – thanks to the Community Loaves program – home-baked bread.

For Campbell, serving on the front lines of a community in crisis was overwhelming at times. “I struggle to describe what that felt like – the physical and emotional toll,” Campbell said.

“Frying to support my staff and volunteers and balancing that with a family at home ... and we would hear stories of what people have been going through - with job loss, and uncertainty, and taking care of loved ones who were sick. “So many people were new to us during the pandemic - there were so many new faces every day. And I’m grateful we’ve been there for them.”

And there were COVID-19-specific concerns as well, as CDC guidance changed frequently. To ensure that all food provided was safe - and at a time when it wasn’t certain how long the virus might remain on canned goods and even cardboard - Hopelink stopped accepting food donations; a commitment that added more than $350,000 to the food program budget in the first few months.

When Hopelink began holding no-contact drive-through food drives in the spring, donations were set aside for two weeks. In 2021, food distribution continued to evolve, always with a goal of safely feeding as many people as possible as efficiently as possible. Volunteers continued to pre-pack boxes of shelf-stable food, adding pre-packed bags of fresh produce. Hopelink began a partnership with Door Dash and United Way, delivering more than 200 boxes of food bi-weekly to clients who couldn’t make it to a food bank.

And the Hopelink Mobile Market continued to visit eight to 10 locations every week, providing both fresh and shelf-stable food. In 2021, Hopelink distributed 6.5 million pounds of food – an increase of nearly a million pounds over 2020.

Over the past two years, the combination of rapidly shifting CDC guidelines and the logistical challenges of turning an entire program on its head felt like a bit of an obstacle course. But despite supply chain issues, staff and volunteer shortages, fluctuating safety protocols and even at one point, a shortage of 15-orange cans, Campbell and his team prevailed.

“The past two years have been unlike anything any of us could have expected,” he said. “It’s been exhausting in every way. And it’s been the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done.”

A community responds

Through it all, the Hopelink community stepped up to help their neighbors like never before. Volunteers packed boxes, delivered food, donated masks and tutored students online. A food bank visitor returned the next day to empty his pockets of one-dollar bills to say thank you. Others asked if they could volunteer, Hopelink supporters – many new, some longtime – reached out to offer unprecedented financial support, when Hopelink held its first-ever drive-through food drive in 2020, cars lined up for a mile. Donors dropped off 24,000 pounds of food in four hours - one hundred pounds every minute.

The Community Loaves project – which got its start early in the pandemic when five home bakers donated 19 loaves of bread to Hopelink’s Kirkland food bank – has grown to nearly 1,000 bakers providing fresh bread to more than 30 food banks in three states.

Staff step up

For more than two years, Hopelink staff have been relentless in finding a way to serve a community in crisis. Making decisions on the fly. Adapting. Innovating. Providing the same services, but in different ways. Feeding as many as possible as quickly as possible. Making sure that food was available to anyone who requested it. They provided not only support to weather a devastating economic storm, but also tools to help those affected by the pandemic emerge even stronger. While much of the past two years focused on stability, ensuring that clients would be able to build a path out of poverty after the pandemic never wavered.

Looking ahead

Today, as a world turned upside down finally begins to right itself, both challenge and opportunity remain. We know that the pandemic disproportionately affected minorities. We know that childcare was a bigger issue for those whose jobs didn’t allow them to telecommute, and that women dropped out of the workforce at a faster pace in areas where students were learning from home. And we know that working paycheck to paycheck at minimum wage can be a consistent and fundamental threat to stability.

We also know that as the post-pandemic economy continues to evolve, creating a more inclusive U.S. economic recovery must be a priority. As Hopelink staff begin to return to offices and virtual interaction gives way to in-person collaboration, the path ahead is clear: Building an equitable community, free of poverty, is not only the vision that guides Hopelink every day, it is our collective responsibility going forward.

What will a post-pandemic world look like? That’s up to us.
Government and charitable actions likely kept millions of Americans out of food insecurity during the pandemic

By Craig Gundersen, Professor of Economics, Baylor University

Congress funded economic relief and stimulus packages that supplemented the incomes of millions of Americans. For some households, these measures meant their income was higher than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. As a consequence, these families had enough money to pay for a food-secure diet. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture provided the maximum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit for all recipients on a temporary basis. This policy change represented a huge increase for many families - up to roughly $620 a month for a family of four.

And the agricultural supply chain was enormously successful in the face of a global pandemic. This success meant there were few shortages of food and only small increases in prices.

The importance of charitable food assistance also can’t be overstated. Food banks and food pantries responded nimbly and quickly to an unprecedented increase in demand and provided assistance to at least 60 million Americans in 2020. This was a 50% increase from 2019.

It isn’t all good news, though. The food insecurity gap between white- and Black-led households widened from 2019 to 2020. In 2019, the rates were 7.9% of white-led households and 19.1% of Black-led households; in 2020, they were 7.1% and 21.7%. That means Black Americans are around three times more likely to be food insecure than white people.

But everything would have been much, much worse both during the COVID-19 pandemic and before the pandemic were it not for the existence of SNAP. This nutrition program has been shown to alleviate food insecurity in study after study.

As the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, the United States can, I believe, assure a "right to food" in the United States through government interventions, especially through expansions in benefits and SNAP eligibility.

Originally published by The Conversation on September 8, 2021. Learn more at TheConversation.com.
Building inclusion and engagement into organizational life

by Mark Smutny

It was 1962 in early September at Bickel Elementary; the first day of school, the first recess, the first time I saw bigotry and injustice slash at human dignity. I was six years old.

Morning recess began with games of marbles breaking out all over the asphalt covered playground. Groups of kids lined up to shoot marbles. “No Mexicans!” one white boy declared. “No Mexicans!” snarled another group.

That afternoon, when the yellow school bus puffing black diesel smoke left me at the driveway of our farm in rural Southern Idaho, I found mom in the kitchen. “Why?” I asked. “What’s wrong with Mexicans?” “Why did those kids ban Mexicans?” She said, “We are not like that. Never use those words.”

Bickel was the designated school in my hometown for farm kids and the children of agricultural workers from Mexico. One third of the students were Latinx. The other elementary schools in town had green grass playgrounds, nets on the basketball hoops and freshly built classrooms. Not Bickel. We had asphalt, netless basketball hoops and old classrooms. Years later, I learned why.

Real estate redlining and structural racism relegated families whose skin was brown to live in the “Mexican” designated neighborhood. Known as South Park, the neighborhood was packed with tiny houses, on the south side of Rock Creek Canyon. The chasm physically and psychologically separated people with brown skin from people with white skin. The kids from South Park attended Bickel.

By every measure I am a person of privilege. My skin is white. I graduated from an Ivy League school. I am straight, male, and married to the same woman for four decades. I have never been unemployed for more than two weeks. No one has banned me from anything. Nevertheless, a burr irritates my skin and troubles my heart.

I don’t walk away from pain and injustice. I believe the quest for equity and justice should fuel every organization’s mission.

Much like I detested the hateful taunts on a blacktop playground six decades ago, today I seek to build inclusion and engagement in my life and work. I am no anti-racism expert. I do know something about how to build inclusive practices into the meetings where we spend so much of our organizational life. My hope is when all of us work together for justice and equity, the times will be redeemed.

As Dr. Martin Luther King declared when I was in second grade at Bickel, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

About the author:
Mark Smutny is the Founder of Civic Reinventions, Inc. He helps nonprofits thrive in an increasingly diverse world. His book Thrive: The Facilitator’s Guide to Radically Inclusive Meetings, 2nd ed. recently won a Gold Winner Book Award from the Nonfiction Authors Association. He may be reached at mark.smutny@civicreinventions.com.

For more information about how to host a food or fund drive, contact Isabel Hoggatt at 425.897.3710 or ihoggatt@hopelink.org, or visit our website and download the End Summer Hunger Food and Fund Drive kit.
2021 Funding

GOVERNMENT FUNDING SOURCES

Federal Government | State of Washington | King County

Local Governments:
- City of Bellevue
- City of Issaquah
- City of Kirkland
- City of Redmond
- City of Sammamish

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- The Gibson Family Foundation

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- MRC
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- The Partners Group
- Waste Management

$5,000+
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$1,000+
- Archipelago
- BAE Systems
- BECU
- Bergelectric Corp
- Chuck Olson Chevrolet Kia
- City Center of Bellevue
- Continental Garage
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- Frame Wright Picture Framing
- G&W Commercial Flooring
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- Lake & Co Real Estate
- Lake Washington Physical Therapy
- OpenText
- Ora Running
- Otak
- Proto Dental Studio
- Prosthetic Staffing
- RPM Partners
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- Ten Gun Design
- Washington Commercial Painters
- Whole Foods Market

THANK YOU for your support!

The Business Alliance

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our featured business and corporate partners who gave $1,000 or more in 2021. Every effort has been made to list your name correctly, but if you find an error, please contact Pam Cabrera at 425.897.3718. We are equally grateful to the many businesses not listed that have also generously supported Hopelink through cash and/or in-kind donations.
Then & Now: Hopelink Transportation

In the early 1970s, the laid-off workers who set up shop at Bothell City Hall to help their neighbors find jobs learned quickly that losing a source of income brought other needs – including rides to medical and other appointments.

Transportation service began as an ad hoc volunteer effort, but in 1976 gained traction with the purchase of a 12-passenger van to serve older adults in the Northshore area. For years, the “Van-Go” service provided special needs transportation, reaching beyond Kirkland into the Bothell, Bellevue and Shoreline areas.

That was the beginning of what would become Hopelink Transportation: a comprehensive program that today provides more than one million rides every year.

In 1985, the organization became a King County Metro subcontractor to operate what would become Dial-A-Ride Transit (DART), using minibuses that can go off regular routes to pick up and drop off passengers.

In 1990, Hopelink became the first Medicaid transportation brokerage serving King County. Three years later, the organization’s transportation department moved to Bellevue and expanded to serve more than 25,000 people every year.

Today, Hopelink’s Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) program provides rides in King and Snohomish counties for medical services covered by Medicaid. In 2021, the program served 37,147 clients.

In recent years, Hopelink transportation added a Mobility Management program, which provides education and resources through three travel training programs in King County. Hopelink also began providing rides for the seasonal Trailhead Direct service, as well as servicing the Water Taxi Shuttle in West Seattle.

In 2019, Hopelink’s Community Van program – a partnership with King County Metro – began providing shared rides using volunteer drivers.

Access to safe, reliable transportation – whether for medical appointments, childcare and other support services, or for education and employment – plays a key role in ensuring stability and helping people attain the tools needed to exit poverty. Today, more than 50 years after a modest beginning, the program remains essential to the Hopelink mission.
Hopelink’s mission is to promote **self-sufficiency for all members of our community**; we help people make lasting change.

Do you have a question or comment about something you’ve read in this issue? Let us know at ReachingOut@hopelink.org.

Your support helps serve nearly 65,000 people in King and Snohomish Counties every year, providing services that help individuals and families find stability in crisis by meeting basic needs for food, shelter, heat and transportation, as well as support for those working hard to build a path out of poverty through adult education, financial capabilities classes, help finding a job and family development support through comprehensive case management.

**Thank you!**

**In the next issue:**

When centers reopen to the public in May, Hopelink food banks will be known as Hopelink Markets – just one of the changes aimed at helping ensure that guests feel welcome during their visits.

Thank you to AAA Printing for their support as a sponsor of this publication.