



MULTI-SERVICE CENTER

HELP. HOPE. CHANGE.



True Stories
2013 FALL NEWSLETTER

True Stories

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CYCLE OF GENEROSITY CARRIES PEOPLE FORWARD



Remember your first bicycle? Maybe you can still feel the sense of freedom those two wheels gave you as you rode off down the street.

It's this freedom and mobility that drives the Bikes for Kids program at Marine View Presbyterian Church, a program that partners with Multi-Service Center. "On a bike, a kid's world expands," said Don Cowan, a key member of the bike program. "We see that with homeless adults too. They may spend their nights in the woods or at a shelter, but with a bike they can go find a shower, go to the library, and get to work."

Dorian, a resident of Multi-Service Center's transitional housing, understands this personally. The bike he received from the church program has improved his world in just a short amount of time. "The bike has been such a blessing to me. It's such a convenience, helping me get from point A to point B easier and faster," he said. "Plus, I have diabetes and need to lose some weight, so the bike gets me exercising too."

The bike program at Marine View church started the way a lot of good ideas do -- in a quiet way, just one person seeing a need and doing what she could to fill it. A volunteer in MSC's Clothing Bank, Betty Long, saw bicycles come into the agency as donations, a good number of them not suitable for giving away. She took them to her father, Harold Neufang, who would fix the bikes and return them to the clothing bank for distribution.

After Harold's death, a few individuals from the church stepped up to repair bikes in their garages. Then, in September of 2000, a fully functional bike repair shop was born when the program moved into a church-owned house. The gift of the house was not without its challenges. "The house was in bad shape. The roof leaked, and we had no electricity," said Cowan. "We had to plug a long extension cord into the office next door to run our equipment. We blew a lot of fuses." He and Bill Peterson, another key member of the program, chuckle at the memory of those days.

Thousands of renovated bikes later, the program has covered a lot of miles. Now, there is no question what happens inside this house, even if you don't see the wooden sign that reads "Old Spokes' Home."

You have to weave through bikes of all sizes and models to enter the shop, where shelves and cubbies store metal parts, bicycle tires line the ceiling, and a center work bench holds tools of all shapes and sizes.

Volunteers work at various stations tinkering with chains and spokes, brakes and tires, making certain each bike passes a safety test before it gets sent to the detail station for cleaning and polishing. Bikes are then distributed, primarily to children, through community agencies such as Multi-Service Center and dozens of others. "We target people who can't afford bikes," said Peterson. "Our mission is that we give bikes away. We're kind of unique that way."

Last year was their biggest year yet -- Bikes for Kids gave away 600 renovated bicycles. A significant outlet for the bike program is Christmas House, a partnership of area churches and Multi-Service Center, in which parents who use MSC's Federal Way Food Bank are offered the opportunity each December to shop for their children, choosing new and gently used gifts for free. The Marine View bike program gave away more than 300 bikes at Christmas House last year. "The program started out being just for kids, but then we began receiving donated adult bikes, so we found agencies that could use those also," Cowan said.

The program operates on a shoestring. People donate bikes, and depending on the condition, bikes get repaired or are parted-out for other bikes. Bikes beyond repair are sold for scrap metal, money that goes back into the program to purchase new seats and other parts. When they have more bikes than they can get to -- which happens frequently -- they ship to a similar bike repair program in Africa. At its most basic the bike program is a ministry of the congregation. "This is a way for us to be in service, while doing work that we enjoy," Peterson said.

For the hundreds of children and adults, these bikes are taking them places they may never have gone before. On behalf of them, MSC thanks those who donated bikes and the teams who restored them. You have given a gift that could cycle on forever!

To learn more about Marine View Presbyterian Church's Bikes for Kids program, contact Don Cowan at 253.839.9586.

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**This is a way for us to be in service,
while doing work that we enjoy.**

BILL PETERSON IS A MEMBER OF THE BIKES FOR KIDS
PROGRAM AT MARINE VIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.



OPTIMISTIC FOR HER FUTURE

Pregnant and homeless, with less than \$20 in her pocket and all her belongings in the bags she carried, Mikida wandered the streets of Seattle wary and alert.

She slept at bus stops or in a hospital waiting room, but mostly she walked, even at night, feeling that a person on the move is less vulnerable than one who is idle. "I had nowhere to go. No home, no job, no car," she said. Three years later, Mikida's voice still quivers with emotion when talking about that time in her life.

Back then, within a short time on the streets, Mikida had discovered a network of homeless people who looked out for one another. She hooked up with a young woman close to her age, who steered her to a shelter. At other times, fatherly men watched out for her, keeping her safe.

At 21, Mikida felt she had fallen all the way to the lowest possible place she could imagine. She was shocked to find herself in this situation. She was a high school graduate and a certified medical assistant. She had a decent job. She had been on the road to stability.

But the road took a sharp turn when she and her boyfriend broke up, and when she was convicted of a gross misdemeanor for trying to sell property she had not known was stolen. Estranged from her family, she didn't know where to turn. "It was a lot of drama," she says of that time. "I didn't know where to go. I had cried wolf so many times before that none of my family or friends paid any attention. I didn't have help when I needed it." But she did have a reason to keep going. "I would walk along the streets, patting my belly and talking to my baby," she said. "The baby was a life that I knew would depend on me...I had to keep going."

Eventually, after a few weeks on the streets, a stranger took Mikida into her home, where she lived for a short time before finding transitional housing. Once she had a roof over her head, Mikida needed a job. She turned to Multi-Service Center's THRIVE program. MSC's THRIVE program helps homeless individuals improve their marketability in today's job market. Through job skills training, job search assistance, financial management and other resources, including some paid internships, people can find success in employment again.

At MSC, Mikida met with MSC case manager Jim Boland. "When Mikida came in she started telling me every reason she couldn't get a job. But she was always on time for our appointments and she was very professional. She couldn't see her potential for herself, but I could," he said. Sometimes all it takes is having one person believe in you that makes the difference. "Jim did everything he could for me," Mikida said. "He helped me create my resume and cover letter, which are beautiful. And he passed on a lot of job referrals."

In the end, Mikida had her choice of jobs. "I got so many calls from my applications that I could choose the job I wanted," she said with a bright smile. A mother of a 2-year-old son, Mikida now works in the insurance industry. "I love it," she says. "I'm gaining confidence and experience." She is optimistic for her future. She can tick off the many lessons she has learned from her experiences, but she is very clear of one thing. "Having a job is the most important thing to survive," she says. She has advice for others: "Even though it may be gloomy, focus on the one bright spot. It could be a really bad day -- it's raining, I have a flat tire and my cell phone is dead -- but I am alive and breathing. Being able to do this really helps. Otherwise, my thoughts would just get more dark and negative and that didn't get me anywhere."

With optimism like that, one has the sense that Mikida will take her many life experiences and turn them into a very bright future for herself and her family.

“ I would walk along the streets, patting my belly and talking to my baby. ”

MIKIDA, PROUD MOTHER AND STAR OF A TRUE MSC THRIVE PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY.

NEW COMPUTER LAB TO BOOST STUDENT TRAINING

Members of the community raised the money for this lab, beginning with Federal Way Rotarians, and including Make A Difference paddle-raise donors at MSC's 2013 Crab Feed & Auction. Together, they raised \$40,000.

"While many of our customers can post a message on Facebook or text on their cell phones, they don't have experience creating a resume on the computer and attaching it to an email. They may not know how to fill out online applications for jobs or colleges. These are integral skills to be competitive in today's market," Sahli said. Increasing numbers of employers are using online applications to screen candidates for open positions. Even fast food and retail employers have gone digital in their application processes.

Later this month, Multi-Service Center opens a state-of-the-art computer lab to enhance training for students working to obtain their GEDs and to increase their marketability in the workforce. The lab provides dedicated space for ten computer stations in a freshly painted, youth-friendly environment. "The computers will enhance our students' abilities to be employable and more self-sufficient in the 21st-century," said Sahli.

A critical incentive driving the lab's creation is the change in how GED curriculum and testing will be administered nationally. Beginning in 2014, all GED testing and curriculum will be web-based, rather than paper-based.

Students' computer literacy will be integral to their success in earning a GED. "It's a huge advantage for us to have technology at our fingertips now," said GED student Bryan Argueta. "This will help me get my GED faster than I normally would." Bryan is one of 175 students, ages 16 to 60, currently enrolled in MSC's GED program.

The new GED testing procedures are still in the development stage, and are not expected to be released to any programs until later this fall. According to the national GED Testing Service, which oversees the testing, the new exams will be designed to better prepare students for vocational training, college or careers by testing the skills employers are looking for now.

Multi-Service Center's new lab will offer students more than GED preparation; the technology will make a difference in other ways, Sahli noted. "Not only will technology help them in their jobs, and in preparation for college, but technology increases their sense of empowerment and their abilities to access resources for self-advocacy," she said.

The addition of a computer lab also opens up greater opportunity for additional computer-related training, such as classes in using typical

office software, for instance, or brushing up on typing skills. Computer etiquette for the professional setting will also be a big emphasis. "For example, etiquette would include such discussions as why having an email moniker like 'sassy princess' isn't appropriate in the job market, as well as how to use professional social media like Linked-In," said Sahli.

While the new computer lab is expected to be a gathering place for MSC students, it really has community support at its core. Members of the community raised the money for this lab, beginning with Federal Way Rotarians, and including Make A Difference paddle-raise donors at MSC's 2013 Crab Feed & Auction. Together, these groups raised approximately \$40,000 to create this lab. In addition, the education program relies heavily on the support of volunteer tutors, who help MSC serve far more students than would be possible otherwise. The lab is expected to open by the end of September. "We are delighted to offer such a wonderful opportunity to our students," said Robin Corak, CEO, Multi-Service Center. "The lab will really help them move forward in their life goals, and in their abilities to build stable futures for themselves and their families."

RESCUED FOOD INCREASES OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES

When Jeanne came to Multi-Service Center's Federal Way Food Bank the first time, the check-in volunteer told her what kinds of foods she could expect to receive each week: canned soups and vegetables, grains, dairy products, fresh produce, breads, and frozen meats. She raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Oh my. I didn't expect any meat at all," she said. "How great! Thank you."

The variety and quantity of foods customers like Jeanne can receive are, in part, a result of the food bank's partnership with the Grocery Rescue Program. Developed in 2004 by Food Lifeline, the Grocery Rescue program allows food banks like MSC's to pick up donated products from area grocery stores. To the stores,

these food items are considered unmarketable, such as items at their "sell-by" date or produce that is bruised or too small.

These rescued items comprise 34-percent of the food donated to MSC's food bank each year.

"The grocery rescue program has made a tremendous impact on the amount of foods we are able to provide for customers, helping us to expand and increase the staples we provide" said Terri Turner, director, MSC Food Bank. "Before this program, the only meat we could offer was canned tuna; now, we have all types of meat choices for all size families."

The acquisition a few years ago of a large walk-in freezer for the food bank warehouse, has allowed the agency to participate with the food rescue program to a greater extent. Food handling requirements of the grocery rescue program require that frozen foods stay frozen until customers receive them.

Food bank volunteers, who are specially trained and certified to handle grocery-rescued food, make stops at seven area stores to collect food each week. For the approximately 900 families who use the food bank each week, this program offers an abundance of options to feed their families wholesome food.

YOUR GARDEN EXTRAS ARE WANTED

Did your garden go wild this summer with all the sun? Consider donating your extra produce to MSC's Federal Way Food Bank. Drop off your extra produce at MSC's Food Bank Warehouse, located off the alley behind our main building in Federal Way (1200 S 336th Street). Drop off hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday - Friday. Questions? Call Terri Turner at (253) 838-6810.





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MSC is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit agency that offers people pathways out of poverty through support and resources in education, employment, housing, energy assistance, food, and clothing. We also provide statewide advocacy for elderly and disabled residents of long-term care facilities. **Learn More: Call (253) 838-6810 or on the Web at www.multi-servicecenter.com**

Help. Hope. Change.

Helping people achieve greater independence and discover the power of their choices.



TRUE STORIES ABOUT AMAZING PEOPLE.

In this column, I want to tell you stories. Stories of adults and children living in South King County who need our help. Stories of generous businesses, community leaders and volunteers who have given hope to those who had none. Stories of people whose resiliency, courage and determination changed their lives. True stories about the amazing people I meet as the CEO of the Multi-Service Center.

Children can tell the truest stories in the fewest words. Seven-year old Lila shared her story in a note. She wrote, "Dear Helpers, Thank you for giving me food when I was hungry. Love, Lila" Lila is one of the children living in MSC housing who received lunch provided by MSC this summer. Did you know that 62,092 children in South King County depend upon the free and reduced lunch program for their morning and noon time meals? During the summer the increased costs of food and childcare add to an already meager family budget. Some children go without breakfast or lunch, others participate in summer lunch programs like the one offered by MSC. MSC served over 11,000 lunches to children this summer.

Earlier this year as a result of Congress not being able to come to terms on a budget, automatic budget cuts known as sequestration began March 1, 2013. While many non-profits and government entities were affected by reductions, the impact has varied due to how they choose to implement the cuts. Reduced federal funding impacted MSC with programs taking a 10% cut. Because of diversified funding sources it has been possible to mitigate the effects of cuts on existing programs for a few months. However, should sequestration continue with future budgets our customers will feel the impact of reduction in services.

One MSC family has already felt the impact of sequestration. Shaila Bule, her husband, and her four small children reside in MSC's Family Shelter. Shaiya's husband was able to find work at a local restaurant but unfortunately the pay was not enough to afford housing. MSC began working with the family on a plan to obtain stable, safe housing. Soon the Bule family had the choice of

two housing options, long term housing with a section 8 voucher in Pasco, WA or temporary housing in a local transitional housing program. They had a difficult choice to make.

Secure employment, health care access for their disabled child, and their limited English skills factored into their decision. They decided to move to Pasco assuring their family of long term housing. The transitional housing unit was given to another family, Mr. Bule quit his job, and they began to make preparations for the move. Then the roof fell in as they received word the housing in Pasco was unavailable due to budget cuts. They were back where they started, no home and no job. Fortunately, the Bules weathered this situation far better than most. Mr. Bule's employer rehired him and thanks in part to the support of our partners and donors, MSC was able to keep the family in their shelter, while they work diligently to access longer term housing for the near future.

"I hope you share the stories of MSC families with your friends and neighbors."



Robin R. Corak
Robin Corak

