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


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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

True stories about amazing people.

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

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True Stories

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Remember your first bicycle? Maybe you can still feel the sense of freedom those two wheels gave you as you rode 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 player in 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.”

Donor, 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 going away. She took them to her father, Harold Neufang, who would look at 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.”

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.

BILe CANON IS A MEMBER OF THE BIKES FOR KIDS PROGRAM AT MARINE VIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHurch.

MSC accepts bequests, or can offer you the opportunity to help MSC while receiving income from your investments.

For more information on these planned gifts, contact Barbara Whitehurst at (253) 835-7676, ext. 149, or barbara@multi-servicecenter.com.

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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 now she was on welfare. 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. At that time, she didn’t know where to turn. “It was a lot of drama,” she says. “I didn’t know where to go. I had cried 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.

When Jeanne came to Multi-Service Center’s Federal Way Food Bank for 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. “Wow! Great! Thank you.”

The acquisition a few years ago of a large walk-in freezer for the food bank warehouse, has allowed the agency to handle a large volume of food donations 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 Tom Turner, director, MSC Food Bank.

“Before this program, the only meat we could offer was canned turkeys, now, we have all types of meat choices for all size families.”

Through their computer literacy program, Multi-Service Center’s Federal Way Food Bank provides resources for self-advocacy,” she said. "I'm gaining confidence and experience. She is optimistic for her future. She can talk 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 dark and negative and I didn’t get me anywhere.”

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

OPTIMISTIC FOR HER FUTURE

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-raiser donors at MSC’s 2013 Crab Feed & Auction. Together, they raised $40,000.

rescued Food increases options for Families

Lifeline, the Grocery Rescue program allows rescued foods from area grocery stores. To the stores, “Before this program, the only meat we could offer was canned turkeys, now, we have all types of meat choices for all size families.”

Thank you.”

During this fiscal year, 1,715 students have received a total of 1,439 different job 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

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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,” said GED student Bryan Argüeta. “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.

Multi-Service Center’s new lab will offer students more than GED preparation; the technology will make a difference in other ways, Sahl 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 ‘nasty princess’ isn’t appropriate in the job market, as well as how to use professional social media like Linked-In,” said Sahl.

While the new computer lab is expected to be a gathering place for MSC students, it also has something very practical at its core. Members of the community raised the money for this lab, beginning with Federal Way Rotarians, and including Make A Difference paddle-raiser donors at MSC’s 2013 Crab Feed & Auction. Together, these groups raised approximately $40,000 to create this lab. In addition, 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 Carkas, 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

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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 aims at reducing food banks like MSC’s to pick up donated products from area grocery stores. To the store owners, 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 Tom Turner, director, MSC Food Bank.

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