HELP. HOPE. CHANGE.

MULTI-SERVICE CENTER

True Stories
2013 WINTER NEWSLETTER
Finding a Sense of Security

Carmela and Chris remember being homeless like it was yesterday.

One morning in 2007, Chris went to the restaurant where he worked to find it all boarded up. Shortly after, Carmela found out she was pregnant with their first child. After her maternity leave, she was unable to find employment.

“We were good citizens—working hard and paying our taxes—just like everyone else. We were able to buy whatever we wanted. Then one day the bad economy hit and we were jobless and on our way to becoming homeless,” says Carmela.

Chris’s unemployment benefits, temporary employment here and there, and help from Chris’s mom kept them in a motel for a short while, however they soon ended up “couch-surfing,” relying on the kindness of friends, and sometimes acquaintances, to provide them with shelter for a night or two. Eventually, they had depleted their savings, Chris’s unemployment had run out, and they found themselves in a group shelter.

The shelter was a scary place to be with young girls. “I always slept with one eye open,” says Carmela. “We had a bunk, and strangers surrounding us. You didn’t know who you could trust.”

Carmela spent all her time trying to find some permanency for her family. She called 211 diligently every morning by 7:59 to make sure their name stayed on the waiting list for transitional housing. She jumped through all the hoops, and did anything requested of her to make sure her family would be able to find the safe and secure housing they needed to thrive.

Carmela’s persistence paid off. A year ago, Diana from MSC called them and they entered MSC’s temporary housing program. “That call from Diana was what we needed to keep going,” says Carmela. “This is now my home. I have a yard, my own doors, and my own carport, even though I don’t have a car. We can feel safe, and our kids can be happy.”

Both Chris and Carmela want a different life for their children than they experienced. Chris and Carmela met when they were young and attended a therapeutic daycare for children of addicted parents. Carmela laughs as she remembers her first encounter with Chris when they had a disagreement over who got to play with the train. At 16, they reconnected and have been best friends ever since.

Carmela and Chris are thankful for the contributions the community makes to support families in MSC’s housing programs. “I didn’t have pots and pans to cook for my girls, and I was able to get some because someone had made a donation of pots and pans,” says Carmela. “The value of those donations is not just related to money or things—the real value is that those people cared enough to take the time to donate.”

“We don’t want to be in this position, but we are. Even if you fall down, you always have to get back up. When you get to a place like this at MSC, you feel so secure. Your stress is reduced and it makes you a better person.”

With their basic needs met, Carmela was able to pursue career options. She has applied for the National Guard and is going through a re-employment program with WorkSource. Chris has a disability which makes finding work difficult.

“We don’t want to be in this position, but we are. Even if you fall down, you always have to get back up.”
For the Long family, making meaningful gifts to the community is a tradition that passes from generation to generation.

Makayla’s grandmother, Betty Long, was one of the founders of Christmas House—a community program that benefits MSC clients. The unique approach of allowing families to choose their own gifts during the holidays was what set Christmas House apart from any other program for holiday gifts at the time of its founding 28 years ago.

“Taking the families through and listening to their true stories, that is the most fun. They are so thankful, even for the small gifts that we take for granted,” says Betty. For Betty, Christmas House is a meaningful gift that she can give the community that embodies the spirit of Christmas.

Betty’s daughter-in-law, Lynne, was already volunteering for MSC and Christmas House before she joined the Long family, so she fit right in! For Lynne, the best part of Christmas House is watching a parent carefully select the right gift for his or her child.

Lynne remembers one mother in particular. This mother only wanted a Razor scooter for her child. Unfortunately, there were no more scooters to be found. Later, when Lynne found that shiny new Razor hiding in the back of the store room, she knew exactly where it needed to go. “Making that connection and being able to truly touch someone’s life in a positive way is what Christmas is all about,” says Lynne.

Makayla’s earliest memories of Christmas House are of helping her grandmother sort stuffed animals into piles for gifts and boys. Now, Makayla is responsible for creating stocking stuffers for parents to take home from Christmas House.

“Stockings are the best part of Christmas, so every kid should get one,” says Makayla. Several generations later, Lynne found that stocking stuffers, as well as refurbishing bikes for children, are 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday-Friday. 

Documents can be dropped off 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 am to 4:30 pm, Monday-Friday.

For the Long family, making meaningful gifts to the community will continue with future generations as well, just as Christmas House continues today with the support of many organizations, businesses, and volunteers.

The Long family tradition of making meaningful gifts to the community will continue with future generations as well, just as Christmas House continues today with the support of many organizations, businesses, and volunteers.

Barnes & Noble Book Fair December 14

Shop online or at any Barnes & Noble with ID Code 1115479 during the week of December 8-14 and a percentage of the proceeds will support MSC programs.

Also, join MSC at the Southcenter Barnes & Noble on Saturday, December 14, between 11am-4pm with your donations of books or gifts and enjoy carolers, children’s programs, and a visit from Santa!

EVENTS

"I don’t remember a time when I wasn’t doing Christmas House, I was born into it."
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.

We are so fortunate that many of you choose this time of year to make an annual contribution to Multi-Service Center so we can help families meet their basic needs: helping them to achieve greater independence and discover the power of their choices. I am inspired by the gifts the community bestows upon MSC and our customers throughout the year. I want to share some of these gifts with you. They are stories of the greatest gift of all. Help, hope, and change for those that need it most.

Gifts come in all shapes so giving doesn’t always mean just writing a check. The ways to support MSC are limited only by your imagination. What is meaningful to you? Is it ending homelessness? Is it ensuring children never go hungry? Is it making sure that a student earns his or her GED so he or she can go on to find a living wage job?

Some gifts are small, some gifts are large, yet all gifts are meaningful. Some families choose to honor loved ones by a donation to help those served at MSC. How would you feel if you opened that sweater box and instead of another sweater you received a note saying that a gift was made in your honor to help provide housing for a homeless family?

Knowing that many MSC parents struggle to provide their children with daily needs like a place to sleep or a warm meal, countless volunteers and donors from our community have created Christmas House where these parents can still “shop” for their children during this very difficult time in their lives. Can you imagine being able to give your child the gift they had hoped for thanks to the generosity of someone who understood your need to give?

This holiday season I hope you give yourself the joy of knowing what an impact you have made in the lives of others by giving a meaningful gift, to someone in need. I want to thank you in advance for considering a gift to Multi-Service Center. Please know that we will use every dollar wisely and to the greatest benefit of those we serve.

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Holiday wishes to you and your loved ones.

Robin Corak
Chief Executive Officer