



MULTI-SERVICE CENTER

HELP. HOPE. CHANGE.



# True Stories

2020 SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER



# COMMUNITY HELPING COMMUNITY

## Make a SLAM DUNK AGAINST POVERTY DURING MARCH MATCHNESS!



Double your impact when you donate to MSC in March! All donations will be matched up to a total of \$10,000 thanks to the Winton Charitable Trust!

Don't miss this opportunity to have your donation matched and make a slam dunk against poverty in our community!

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Phone: 253.838.6810

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**Thursday, October 15, 2020**  
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### CONTACT US

#### For services

253.838.6810 | WA Relay 711

[www.mschepls.org](http://www.mschepls.org)

#### To volunteer

253.835.7678, ext. 105

[www.mschepls.org](http://www.mschepls.org)

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### MISSION

MSC is building a future without poverty by creating pathways to help, hope, and dignity for our neighbors.

### VISION

Empowered individuals. Thriving communities.

### VALUES

TEAMWORK  
PASSION  
RESPECT

INTEGRITY  
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

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# IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

"I really enjoy and believe in helping people without judgment, and that's what housing first and harm reduction is. They go hand-in-hand."

Chris Cates is one of MSC's housing supervisors and is also one of the first in King County to use the housing first and harm reduction model back in 2011. After five years as a paralegal, Chris became one of the first case managers for the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) program in Seattle and joined the MSC staff in 2018.

Simply put, the concept of housing first is prioritizing a stable living environment before addressing other issues or barriers someone may be facing. Harm reduction is trying to offer people safer solutions or practices as options.

"Housing first and harm reduction aren't overnight fixes. It's about building relationships, it's baby steps," shares Chris. Chris likes to share the story of Houston to show how the housing first and harm reduction model work:

*Houston was known in downtown Seattle as one of those guys always screaming at buildings or screaming at people. Social workers and outreach staff were told not to approach him anymore. The police were very cautious with him. When I first met him, all I did was bring him a cup of coffee. I told him I'd be back to talk with him if he wanted to get well first. I was giving him, in a way, permission to get high before he talked to me which no one had ever done for him, it had always been punitive. It didn't work right away, but I kept on bringing him coffee. Eventually it came to the point of him just seeing me and asking where his coffee was. Some people would get offended by that, but I was thinking this guy finally knows me and we're building a relationship. I also started to bring him clean needles. I wouldn't say anything, I'd just leave them there. It took about three months of coming to him with no judgment, and I got to know him very well and became his case manager.*

*Through the relationship we had, I found out that he wasn't yelling at people, he was yelling at the drugs because he hated them so much. He felt that he was a slave to them because if he tried to quit he'd get really sick. We got him housed, on methadone, and eventually clean. This is someone who hadn't been housed for twenty years.*

To be successful with the housing first model, Chris feels that providers need to follow three guidelines. First, you can't have an ego. You aren't going to be able to help everyone and you don't always know what is best for someone. Second, you have to be consistent. Even if you give someone a cup of coffee and they call you all sorts of names, you still need to come back the next day with another cup of coffee. And finally, success with housing first is all about relationships and building trust.

Chris also has a personal history that helps him build meaningful relationships with those he is helping. After being in the military, Chris spent five years in the criminal justice system before he entered a diversion program and went to school to become a paralegal. This combination of education and criminal history was one of the reasons he was selected as one of the first case managers to pilot a harm reduction model with the Seattle Police Department.

"I kind of break the general rules," shares Chris. "You're always told you can't be

their friend or their family, but at the end of the day, you sort of are. Most of these people have nobody. So, they are my people. Yes, I may be their case manager, but that relationship has to be different than someone coming to talk to their therapist."

Housing also isn't going to be the answer for everyone, but everyone at least deserves the chance at housing. "One man had been homeless for a long time and once he was in housing, had pushed all the furniture to the walls and built himself an encampment in the middle of the room," shares Chris. "That was someone who was so conditioned, he preferred to live on the street."

"Housing first and harm reduction also aren't free-for-alls," shares Chris. "It's not that people get to do whatever they want and we expect them to eventually get better. It's putting them in housing first because that's a barrier, but once they are in housing there is structure and accountability. It's letting them get housed and then working on their issues."

*Chris supervises the staff at MSC's William J. Wood (WJW) Veterans House in Federal Way. WJW has been a low-barrier housing program for veterans and their families. Under Chris's leadership, this facility is now working towards becoming a true housing first model. If you have questions about housing first, harm reduction, or any of MSC's housing programs, please feel free to reach out to MSC at [info@mschelps.org](mailto:info@mschelps.org).*







## I CAN RELAX

At 58 years old, Sonya is happy to have found stability again. As a mother of eight kids, she and her husband had struggled with disabilities, limited income, and housing stability throughout their 31 year marriage. When her husband left and moved out of state, Sonya found herself losing housing stability once again, this time with two teenagers, her daughter, and a grandson Sonya has had custody of since he was three days old.

Sonya has had major medical issues including a heart condition, lupus, and a tumor. The stress of being unstably housed causes her symptoms to flare up, including chest pains and headaches. Sonya and the kids were staying in her car or staying with friends until they were able to enter MSC's family shelter.

"My case manager at the shelter helped me with everything we needed," shares Sonya, "whether it was clothes, food, whatever. She made sure we got what we needed."

They were at the shelter almost a year until moving into MSC's permanent affordable housing. This housing will help her maintain stability by providing housing that she can afford on her limited income. Sonya is also able to access MSC's food bank and energy assistance programs.

Sonya's smile shines through as she talks about her kids and her 21 grandchildren. "I feel good now, less stressed, and I can relax," she says.

## HELP, HOPE, CHANGE NOMINATIONS OPEN

MSC's Help, Hope, Change Award (HHC Award) celebrates a community leader or corporation that exemplifies the mission of MSC to provide pathways out of poverty for our neighbors. The award is presented annually at the MSC Helps Luncheon in October.

Nominees are eligible if they 1) live, work or make an impact within MSC's service area of South King County, 2) have made significant contributions to helping our neighbors living in poverty to find help, hope, and dignity (including but not limited to policy

change work, direct services, or significant contributions to support MSC or other organizations), and 3) are willing to attend the luncheon in October and receive the award. Nominees can be individuals, corporations, or organizations. Current MSC board members and staff are not eligible.

Nominations are open through March 31, 2020. To nominate an individual, company, or organization, or to find out more about the award, please visit [www.mschelps.org/getinvolved/hhcaward/](http://www.mschelps.org/getinvolved/hhcaward/).



2019 Honoree John Thiesen with King County Councilmember Pete von Reichbauer and MSC CEO Robin Corak.



# THINGS WILL CHANGE

“Don’t stop, keep going, those words meant a lot.” Says Sharon.

Over a decade ago, Sharon’s family moved back to the Seattle area from Minnesota to be close to Sharon’s mom who was having medical issues. Sharon and her partner had been together for 23 years and had three children. In Minnesota, they owned a house and Sharon had a good job, however her partner struggled off and on with drug use.

Once in Seattle, his drug use became worse, and Sharon knew she had to leave to make life better for her and her children. “I’d always kept my independence and money hadn’t ever been an issue,” she said.

However, without any support from her children’s father, it was more of a struggle than she anticipated. Sharon had been working temporary jobs and was having difficulty finding permanent work. The instability in her income eventually caught up with her and she had difficulty paying her utility bills and rent.

On a visit to MSC’s Kent office for energy assistance, Sharon not only got help with her energy bill, but something she needed much more. Help with her confidence to move forward and change her life at a time when she had lost a lot of hope.

“I saw the MSC staff treat people with kindness. I talked with the receptionist and we shared experiences. She told

me to keep going and things would change and they did,” shares Sharon. Now, ten years later, Sharon’s life is different, and she gives that conversation at MSC a lot of the credit, “She showed me I could make change and she gave me courage.”

Sharon recently joined MSC’s economic stability department as a staff member. “I remember that conversation so clearly, and that she told me I can’t talk negatively about myself. I needed to ask myself what I am going to do to change my story. Now I’m helping other people like she helped me and it feels good.”

*MSC’s energy program can help with energy bills even if you don’t have a shut-off notice. You can find more information and eligibility requirements on our website at [www.mschehelps.org/gethelp/energyassistance](http://www.mschehelps.org/gethelp/energyassistance).*







P.O. Box 23699  
Federal Way, WA 98093-0699

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, online at [www.mschehelps.org](http://www.mschehelps.org), or social @mschehelps

# Help. Hope. Change.

Empowered individuals, thriving communities.



## TRUE STORIES ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our latest newsletter. We are excited to share stories of MSC's work in the community. Inside this issue you will find stories of help, hope and change.

We have also heard many questions in the community about housing first and harm reduction, and have tried to address those questions in this newsletter. We hope that this brings some clarity on why housing first is a best practice and can bring long-term change for our neighbors in need.

In December, we completed our tri-annual Community Needs Assessment. As we have seen in the past, housing affordability and homelessness are the top concerns in our area. Other high areas of concern included substance abuse, mental health and living wage employment. The information from the assessment helps us ensure that we are addressing the highest needs in the community. You can find the full report on our website.

We also have lots of exciting things on the horizon including our 19th Annual Crab Feed & Auction

in June which is one of our largest fundraisers. The generosity of those that attend this event is so important to our success, and we thank you in advance for your support.

We're also looking forward to our MSC Helps Luncheon in October and are accepting nominations for our Help, Hope, Change award through the end of March. This award recognizes the efforts of our local community members and businesses who have made a commitment to making a difference for those living in poverty throughout South King County.

As always, thank you for your partnership as we work towards providing help, hope, and dignity for our neighbors in need!



Best wishes,

*Robin R. Corak*

Robin R. Corak  
Chief Executive Officer

