

Taking Care of Our Own

Kittitas County's combined effort to address poverty is needed more than ever as the effects of the sluggish economy and housing downturn continue to affect too many of our friends and neighbors. Even in sectors where the economy is improving, too many are being left behind. As Community Action celebrates 50 years we look back on our progress in the war on poverty and look ahead to the work yet to be done.



SUSAN GRINDLE IS THE CEO OF HOPESOURCE.

The most recent census reported that 9,978 persons in Kittitas County live below the federal poverty line; 1,571 are children.

The picture gets bleaker when you realize that the federal line is really quite low. For a family of four, the FPL is \$23,550 per year - \$1,962 per month, \$453 per week to feed, clothe, house, and provide childcare and medical care to four people. Let that sink in; rent alone would gobble up most of that money.

Unemployment is still almost double what it is in good years. More than 2,500 of our neighbors are out of work.

Regardless of the causes of the widening gap between the rich and poor, we all pay over \$3.00 for a gallon of gas – wealthy and poor – but the poor get hit hardest. High costs disproportionately hit those who are already struggling. Housing costs, fuel, medical care and even child care hit low-income families really hard. Most impoverished households have small children at home; those kids need care while Mom or Dad is at work. If grandparents or friends are not available to provide affordable or free childcare the way out of poverty for many families is nearly blocked

Here at HopeSource we are working to address the effects of poverty – helping people survive and even helping people rise above it. In 2013, we actually helped over 2,500 struggling people. And while need is growing, resources are dwindling. We are disappointed that as a nation we are not doing better, but we are proud of our HopeSource team who work daily to provide meaningful help to those in need.

While our Community Action board, staff and volunteers are strongly committed and engaged, we need more of our neighbors to join us in lending a hand. We need more community builders.

Are you up to the challenge?

Over the next four weeks we will be sharing food for thought and stories of people helped. They contain nuggets of inspiration that just might motivate you to jump in and help strengthen the community. Yes, poverty is very real. My hope is that we can say together as neighbors, "In Kittitas County, we take care of our own."

| KITITAS COUNTY | |
|---|-------|
| Percent In Poverty* | 25.5% |
| People In Poverty* | 9,978 |
| Children In Poverty* | 1,571 |
| Unemployment Rate** | 6.5% |
| Unemployed Persons** | 1,351 |
| * 2011 Census | |
| ** Bureau of Labor & Statistics Nov. 2013 | |

Our thanks to Tim Hockett of Community Action of Ventura County for providing the framework for this story.

Could You Live on a Poverty Budget?

It's an interesting exercise to build for yourself an imaginary budget based on the federal poverty line (FPL). In 2013 the FPL for a family of four was \$23,550 annually or \$1,962.50 per month. Perhaps an easier way to grasp this is to imagine a person working full-time and earning about \$11.32 per hour. Now imagine that person supporting a household of four.

Let's construct a struggling family's monthly budget for, let's say, a mom and three kids. Let's try to find the cheapest way we can to survive on our own in Kittitas County.

Small home or apartment: \$700, Utilities: \$200, assuming again that the home is small. Meals should be modest so let's assume \$1.50 per meal, per person, with three meals per day for four: \$540. No car payment; let's assume she owns an older vehicle. Two tanks of gas, however at \$3.25 per gallon: \$97.25. Phone? \$40 for one of those limited cell phones. Childcare? This was difficult. Licensed care facilities cost a lot. If our struggling family has only one child that must have care while a parent is away working, and does not have a grandparent or other person to rely on, then it would cost on average \$600. Let's reduce that to \$400.

Summary Poverty Budget:

| | |
|-----------|--------|
| Rent | \$700 |
| Utilities | \$200 |
| Meals | \$540 |
| Fuel | \$97 |
| Phone | \$40 |
| Childcare | \$400 |
| Total | \$1977 |

Oops. We already exceeded our budget by \$14.50.

Let's ponder the list. Obviously we have lowballed the rent and child care. A quick internet search and you'll find few two-bedroom apartments for \$700. But notice also there is no money in our budget for healthcare, medicine, clothing, shoes, housewares, school supplies, or car repair...much less internet access, a computer, TV, movies or education. No vacation for this family. No savings either. And we didn't even consider that this family pays taxes.

Here's one more point to ponder. In the scenario above, if the person made a penny more per hour, her family wouldn't be considered in poverty by the federal government!

Could you live on this budget while supporting three kids in Kittitas County?

What would happen in this scenario if the family had a mortgage of, say, \$1,100 per month and a modest car payment of \$150? What would happen if mom were hospitalized?

This is precisely why we need food banks, charities, and faith based groups who extend kindness to people who are just trying to survive. Thank goodness for HopeSource and partner agencies diligently trying to keep our social safety net from breaking.



Krista Yusi is a Support Services Associate at HopeSource.

Community

(kuh-myoo-ni-tee)

n. Sharing, participation and fellowship. A group of neighbors who look out for each other's interests. A place to belong.

HopeSource manages a diversity of programs and enterprises encompassing shelter for the homeless, youth activity scholarships, food and nutrition, home improvement, and energy services. Our programs extend the length and breadth of the county.



Alicia Stoeckl is an Executive Assistant at HopeSource.

What does "community" mean to you? We suggest that it is a special place, that larger neighborhood that you call home. It's where you feel you belong. It's that place where you care for others and others care for you. It's a place where people are real neighbors.

HopeSource has worked hand in hand with the people of Kittitas County since 1966 to address problems of poverty among our neighbors. HopeSource manages a diversity of programs encompassing shelter for homeless persons, youth programs, food and nutrition, elderly and disabled supports, home improvement, and energy services. Our programs extend the length and breadth of the county.

About 10,000 of our neighbors live in poverty and qualify for our services. With our current funding we are only able to serve approximately 25% of that number. Our objective at HopeSource is to provide support when required and promote self-sufficiency where possible. Or as we like to say, "We have a moral imperative to protect those who cannot protect themselves, and empower those who can". Last year programs touched the lives of 1,454 households in Kittitas County addressing our community problems with community solutions and thousands more with our transportation programs. We have an outstanding team, both in the office and out in the field. They bring reality to our objective. But we do not presume to take full credit for these services. Without the assistance of many community partners, volunteers, donors and businesses, our good work would have less impact.

Fighting poverty is too big for one agency; it requires a strong network of partner agencies, indeed, it requires the engagement of the entire community.

For this reason we extend our appreciation to our many partners who help alleviate the pain of poverty. Many thanks to the United Way, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, FISH Food Bank, CareNet, ASPEN, Open Door Health Clinic, ADDS, and St. Vincent De Paul among many other service partners in the community as well as the larger faith community and the hundreds of people who volunteer to make others' lives a bit more comfortable. We are thankful to businesses who understand well that helping the community is good for business. We thank local, state and federal government agencies where they make provision for people in need.

In Kittitas County, let's not be satisfied with mere existence. We're not numbers on a page. We are human beings with families, hopes, dreams, and a common interest in leading safe, secure lives.

You can strengthen this community by being a great neighbor and lending a hand up to someone in need. Become a financial partner with HopeSource and help support the work we do in the community. Consider supporting our new Mobile Food Bank launching in February 2014.

Action

(ak.shun)

v. Organized activity to accomplish an objective.



John Raymond is the COO of HopeSource.

Action is part of our DNA. HopeSource is a Community Action agency, part of a nationwide network. With so many of our neighbors living in poverty, we would not have it any other way. HopeSource has organized a network of services to respond to issues facing the people of our county. Here's what we've been able to do with your help.

Our Hope University program provided Life Skills courses to nearly 700 individuals last year on topics ranging from Credit & Debt Basics to Energy Conservation to Developing Positive Work Habits. These courses challenge people to make positive choices with respect to their financial habits and become independent citizens in their community, while providing hope and planning tools for future decisions. Other courses offered through Hope University include; Tenant Prep, Saving Money When You Shop, Organization and Time Management, and Managing Your Money. Open to the public.

Recently we acquired and rehabbed 98 units of affordable housing in an effort to preserve the affordable housing stock of the community. We are in the process of completing a similar transaction for an additional 44 units in Ellensburg this year, with plans to build new developments in the next five years thereby increasing the overall stock in the community.

Our Housing programs provide a wide range of services from our Emergency Shelter to short term rent and essential needs provisions to longer term case managed transitional housing. In 2013 we served 88 individuals who were homeless or at risk of losing stable housing. In addition, through a partnership with the County, we offer a Senior Rent Assistance program which allows seniors over the age of 65 to maintain independent living.

Our Transportation program offers three distinct services. Dial-a-Ride which provides door to door service for medical and employment needs in Ellensburg, Cle Elum, and Kittitas; Central Transit a fixed route service throughout Ellensburg in partnership with CWU and the City of Ellensburg, open to the public and free of charge; and the Yakima Ellensburg Commuter offering 8 round trips daily between Ellensburg and Yakima at \$8/roundtrip or \$125/unlimited monthly pass.

Our Energy Assistance Team helped more than 1,454 families receive help with their power bills. Poor families pay a high portion of their income toward energy costs each year. Our energy assistance means they can stretch their limited income a bit further and address other basic needs. This means they do not have to make the choice between staying warm or putting food on the table. It's one service that helps stabilize families.

Our Home Weatherization program provided in home assessments to 54 households and weatherized 44 homes in 2013 implementing energy saving measures such as adding insulation, sealing ducts, and weather stripping doors saving an average of 20-30% in energy costs per household per year. Our weatherization team consistently receives recognition for their high quality work and are often cited as best practice in the industry. Most recently in an evaluation by the Department of Energy (DOE) HopeSource Weatherization was ranked number one in the State of Washington.

Our Food Bank in Cle Elum served 1,721 households and is in the process of launching a Mobile Food Van to serve the most remote areas of our county where families lack access to emergency services.

To learn more about what we do and how you can help, visit our website at www.hopesource.us.

Yes, Poverty is Real. So Let's Do Something!

As we close out this series on poverty and embark on the 50th anniversary of Community Action we leave you with a challenge.

We are HopeSource and we are as proud today as we were 47 years ago when we opened our doors and joined the newly formed Community Action network.

Because a number of our services are inter-related it would be tempting to characterize HopeSource as only a safety net. We are so much more. We are the helping hands actively reaching out to vulnerable neighbors when they stumble or fall and offer to come alongside them until they can get back on their feet.

At HopeSource we value a strong community. By our definition that means that every family is thriving and is so community minded that it draws upon their strength to help others when they need it. That willingness to help is the fundamental definition of being a good neighbor.

Will you be a good neighbor? Will you help us be your helping hand to your neighbors in Kittitas County?

Here are a few things you can do.

Be kind and resist blaming the poor. Be sensitive to what folks are going through and offer help if you can. Please resist the urge to judge people if they fall into financial difficulty. Many forces that contribute to poverty are outside of any individual's control. Remember, women, minorities, and children are much more likely to fall into poverty. HopeSource is convinced that the old fashioned notion of "neighbor helping neighbor" is what helps communities survive difficult times.

Be aware that help is available. United Way, FISH, CareNet, our local DSHS office, and yes, HopeSource, all have resources to help people. But there are others – too many to list here. An easy way to refer people is to encourage them to call 2-1-1. The number provides quick referral services to health and human service providers all over the country. There is also a directory of local resources on our website at www.hopesource.us under the Community Partners tab.

Be an ambassador. Let us know you stand with us. Advocate at all levels of government for basic human services, for measures that will help the poor become more self-sufficient and for Community Action. When you talk with friends and colleagues about the economy, speak up on behalf of those who do not have enough.

Be generous. Donate to food banks; volunteer at meals programs or shelters; support your favorite charity. Please consider helping us too as we begin our Mobile Food Van program. Be among the first to contribute to a service that helps provide that most basic of needs to those with the least access to it.



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