

Nonprofit provides host of services



Oliver Lazenby

JoAnn Rushton

JoAnn Rushton holds a Help Us End Hunger bag at HopeSource in Cle Elum. Safeway teamed up with Northwest Harvest and KING5 to produce the \$10 bags that are packed with items for those less fortunate. The bags are available at Safeway. (Oliver Lazenby / Daily Record)

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By OLIVER LAZENBY staff writer |

HopeSource in Cle Elum provides a variety of services to Upper County residents, including a food bank, a transportation program, and an energy program that helps eligible recipients pay to heat their homes.

JoAnn Rushton has worked for HopeSource for 17 years. For most of that time, she has been the manager of the small office and storage room packed with food on Pennsylvania Avenue in Cle Elum.

Have the community's needs changed in the time you've worked with HopeSource?

Yes and no. There's an ebb and flow. You get a lot of people moving in, and then bad times come and a lot of people move back out. We used to see more seniors and young couples with maybe one or two children. In the last year or two we have had more families with four to seven children coming into HopeSource.

Is winter the busiest time for HopeSource?

Yes. Our energy program is jam-packed for five months in the winter. That and the food bank are our two biggest programs. The food bank is busy year-round.

What holiday items do you need more of at the food bank?

It's always nice to get a few actual holiday dinner types of things. Turkeys, hams, something like that. The Senior Center's Christmas Basket program of course provides for most of that. But we always get people who have just moved into town and didn't know about those. There's usually about 10 or 15 households which it would be nice to get turkey and holiday dinner items for.

If people want to help with HopeSource, what can they do?

Well, we recently lost a guy who used to come pick up all of our cardboard in his truck and take it to the dump. Now we have piles of cardboard. If anyone wants to help with that, it's just in between Cavallini's and Rent Me Rentals.

As far as specific items — salt, flour, sugar, pepper, small spices, anything like that that people can bake with or cook with. We can take potatoes, onions, anything like that. If someone has fresh or frozen vegetables, we have freezers. Also, we can always use extra hands to bag up all the bulk items, like beans and rice.

Has HopeSource had an increase in clients in the last few years?

We have had an increase in demand across the board for all our services. We used to serve about 40 to 70 households per month and now we're serving anywhere from 120 to 200. Most of that change happened about 2 1/2 years ago. I think it sort of plateaued after that.

Are you meeting demand?

Pretty much. Private donations have gone down from the heyday, that was when they were building Suncadia. We got some large donations during those few years. But the Upper County is still incredibly generous. Percentage-wise, we still receive about 50 percent more private donations than the Ellensburg HopeSource does. We have people come in once or twice a month with \$20 or \$30 to donate.

ARRF Animal Rescue does a wonderful job. They supply us with dog and cat food. People can access that up to once a week. Just come in and ask me for a bag.

Are you still dealing with the aftermath of the Taylor Bridge Fire?

No. We saw about two households up here that accessed the food bank for a couple weeks. Most people went to Ellensburg because it's bigger.

Are you planning on moving to a bigger space anytime soon?

I keep looking, but it's hard to beat the cost of this space. Moving to a larger space with ample parking and a walk-in cooler and freezer is a long-term goal. Hopefully we will do that in the next five to 10 years.

What has kept you doing this for 17 years?

Oh, I think a lot of it is the people. The variety too. Even though you would think it's sort of the same, it's not. And then my wonderful volunteers are just fantastic to work with. We have about eight long-term volunteers that come every week. We have fun.