

ATTAIN NEWS

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER



Bringing our community together to partner with homeless families by providing affordable housing and empowering them with practical case management and hope.

Comfort & Joy!

How to get into the holiday spirit with Attain Housing

We all deserve some holiday cheer at the end of a year like no other, and that especially applies to the families in our transitional housing program. They have been so resilient in the face of the pandemic and have worked so hard to overcome the economic challenges of 2020. We are simply in awe of their strength. Families like Madoro and her 3 sons and Lena and her 5 children, who were all featured in one of our Week of Giving videos. Madoro, who suffers from sickle cell disease and had to close her hair braiding business last year as a result of it, is healthy enough to work again and recently got a job at a hair salon. Lena continues to do admin and front desk work for a glass repair company. These families are working hard and refusing to give up hope for a better future for their children.

Holiday donors, NOW is your time to shine. Every year, we count on your giving spirit to ensure vulnerable families get through this challenging

time and allow parents to give their children the holiday cheer they so deserve. Plus, your holiday donations are the gift that keeps on giving year-round to our client families.

Holiday Giving Drive

Our Holiday Giving Drive kicks off on Giving Tuesday, which falls on December 1 this year. Make a gift online to help cover food, gifts, and more for one child. Your gift of \$25 will buy one gift for one child. \$50 will buy holiday meals for a family of 2 or 3 and \$100 covers holiday meals for families of 4 or larger. Our case managers will ensure delivery of the gift and food cards to the 37 families living in our transitional housing apartments in Kirkland and Bellevue.

Many of our client families are struggling this year with basic needs—covering costs to repair a car heater before the winter cold takes hold, a table and chair for homework, or making this month's rent. Your online donation will go

Continued on page 2



COMFORT & JOY

HOLIDAY GIVING

Join our Adopt-a-Family program or give a Year-End gift today!



Inside this issue

Holiday Giving	p1 - 2
Message from the Director	p3
Week of Giving Recap	p4
Donor Spotlight	p5
Mental Health	p6-7
Volunteer Spotlight	p7
Rental Assistance Update	p8

directly to assist these families with their financial needs.

Adopt-a-Family Program

Thanks to so many generous donors who already stepped up to shop for a family's "wish list," all of those wish lists are in the process of being fulfilled. Meanwhile, it's not too late for your online donations.

We can't thank you, our donors and supporters, enough for your incredible and stalwart support throughout this difficult year. We are excited and thankful to hopefully end the year on a positive note by providing a happy holiday season to the vulnerable homeless families we serve.



Scenes from the 2019 Adopt-a-Family gift drive. Front page and top: local donors dropping off gifts from family wish lists. Above: A volunteer sorts the gifts and labeling them for each family.



A Message from our Executive Director



Grateful.

As 2020 winds down and we enter the Holiday season, the word that keeps coming to mind is grateful. Yes, Thanksgiving usually brings that to mind so I'm not being original, and yet it is more than that. While we could focus on what a difficult year it has been and how we would normally be gathering with friends and family for the holiday, I am also feeling a sense of relief and gratitude.

When I look back to the earlier part of this year, I recall the panic and despair I felt as the world as we knew it started to crumble. Working remotely, client families and staff exposed to COVID, clients losing their jobs, and fundraising events that just weren't making the money we needed to pay our staff and continue operations. This was only 6 months ago, which somehow seems like a decade. Since then, I have seen amazing things that truly inspire my gratitude.

I have seen a staff pull together and figure out how to continue to provide compassionate and purposeful service to local families in need. I have seen individual donors and foundations and companies increase their giving to cover the gaps in our normal fundraising. I have seen our Board members experience their own hardships as their businesses struggled, and yet they stayed committed to supporting Attain. I have watched our client families, who were the hardest hit in this pandemic, find new jobs, educate their children at home, and re-pay past rent

that they owed even when their housing was not at risk. As this year closes out and we again have to endure another shut-down and an increase in COVID cases, I stay focused on how far we have come and know that soon we will come out of this. And I am grateful.

As you will read in this newsletter, we have had some incredible successes in the last 6 months. Our donors really stepped up for our Week of Giving and helped us reach our goal, which was quite aggressive to begin with. We were honored with a large grant from Premera which will allow us to partner with Catholic Community Services and fund a part-time mental health therapist for our transitional housing families. This is a longtime dream coming true for us! We were selected to be the only Eastside agency to support King County in their distribution of over \$41 million in CARES act funding for rental assistance. This is in addition to our normal Stable Home program which is also hitting records in the number of families served. Our staff and Board has started a journey exploring our role in addressing racial inequalities in our systems and it is informing our approaches for 2021. And financially, Attain will leave 2020 in a stronger financial position than when we entered it, despite ALL of the challenges.

Yes, I am grateful. I want to thank you for your support, both emotional and financial. Thank you for believing in us and our work to support vulnerable families who have been hardest hit during this year. I wish y'all (my Southern roots coming out!) a Happy Thanksgiving and holiday season. I hope you too can find gratitude in small things and enjoy the peace that it brings.

Happy Holidays!

Kathy

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Week of Giving 2020

Thank you!

You helped us raise over \$171,000 to help us continue to provide vulnerable homeless families with housing and healing case management services, as well as provide rental assistance to hundreds of Eastside families in danger of losing their homes

All of you, our donors and supporters, showed up for Attain Housing in a huge way for our Week of Giving in September. Even without an in-person luncheon, your support made our annual Fall Fundraiser a rousing success. Pre-COVID, we had set a fundraising goal for our 2020 Fundraiser of \$180,000 and we got SO CLOSE! We were truly blown away by our donors this year, who raised over \$171,000 to go directly toward our transitional housing and Stable Home rental assistance programs. Even in a pandemic, you made sure that Attain Housing will still be helping Eastside families break out of the cycle of homelessness or prevent becoming homeless in the first place. We are so grateful to you all.

In case you missed it, we also announced our annual volunteer awards during the



Week of Giving. Our hats are off to these devoted friends of Attain Housing!

Volunteer of the Year – Kim Convertino

Kim started volunteering with us over a year ago handling front-desk calls and her role soon evolved into being a crucial part of the Stable Home rental assistance team. When she isn't swamped with calls, follow-ups, and documentation, Kim becomes our data analyst. With a background in accounting, Kim is a whiz with Excel. We assisted 241 households with Stable Home funds last year and we could not have done it without her. Thank you, Kim!

Bill Petter Housing Homeless Advocate Award - Karen & Troy Thiel

Over the past several years, the Thiels have worked tirelessly, not only for Attain, but for affordable housing in general. Troy is involved in government affairs as he has worked on condo reform and has started a local convening group called Community for Affordable Housing. Using their vast real estate experience, both Karen and Troy worked for months on a pro-bono basis to help Attain locate and negotiate a deal with our Angel Investor to purchase a four-plex, renamed Totem Lane, which is now fully occupied with client families. Both of the Thiels were very active in creating and producing engaging and comical videos for the 7 Hills Shifting Gears fundraiser this year and have been members of the 7 Hills Committee for several years. Karen joined our Board of Directors in 2019 and serves as the Board Secretary. Thank you, Thiels, for all you do for Attain Housing!



We don't know yet what form our 2021 Fall Fundraiser will take, but we want to make sure it's something special and memorable for all. If you missed any of our Week of Giving videos, you can find them on our website or search for Attain Housing on YouTube.

We'd like to give one more round of thanks to our incredible 2020 sponsors!



Donor Spotlight

Don & Susan Adams

Longtime Eastside residents Don and Susan Adams wanted to make a bigger impact to help those in need in his local community, but didn't know how to go about it in the most effective way. A friend referred Don to Attain Housing and he helped organize a group from his LDS church to do a service project at one of our housing properties in April 2019.

"We painted a unit, worked on the yard, and rented a 28-foot truck to take a load to the dump," Don said. "Being able to help with that kind of maintenance project so that another homeless family could move in faster was very fulfilling because I could see that kind of measurable impact first-hand."

As Don learned more about Attain Housing, he was encouraged by the over 90% success rates for families moving onto permanent housing from our program.

"I like to be able to see something actually happening here," Don said. "You have trustworthy staff on the front end who are able to direct the



money from donations directly to the services that help homeless people locally and that feels good to see."

Another aspect of Attain's approach that Don finds to be so crucial is the case management element.

"I really do love the slogan that it's a 'hand up and not a hand out' because throwing money at a problem like homelessness doesn't fix it," Don said. "You need those case managers to help them along and stay focused, and it gets results. I have multiple family members that have experienced homelessness, and money alone can't fix the problems they have. There needs to be more to it than that."

We're very happy and honored to have people like Don and Susan in our corner. If Don's story strikes a chord with you, please don't hesitate to reach out to us and we can help find the best way to get you and your family involved with our approach to helping families recover from and avoid the trauma of homelessness.

The Role of Mental Health in Finding Housing Stability in 2020 and Beyond

A grant award from Premera Blue Cross will help Attain Housing Case Managers give client families better access to therapy services



Image copyright: Shutterstock

In a year of shutdowns and Stay Home orders, mental health has been a hot topic on many people's minds. For families living in our transitional housing program who are recovering from the trauma of homelessness, 2020 has posed unique challenges as they seek to find stability and work toward finding permanent housing. Strangely enough, how recently a family was experiencing homelessness has an impact on how they've responded to the ongoing pandemic.

"The life of a homeless family before they find housing is so stressful," said Attain Housing Case Manager Meghan Gililand. "They are very much in fight or flight mode, so in some ways, the constant changes of 2020 haven't phased some folks who are new to the program.

However, Megan says, it's been a more difficult year for families who were more settled into our housing program.

"Some of these families were just starting to get more stable again and then every thing shut down and changed on them again."

Both Megan and Program Services Greg McLeod agree that the major barrier right now for client families seeking therapy to work on mental health issues is childcare and school closures.

"As case managers, we always encourage our families to plug into therapy and we provide counseling referrals and resources, but since these folks are all parents, it comes down to childcare," Greg said. "How can they juggle therapy with working or job-searching, helping their school-age kids with their online classes, and taking care of any small children? That said, we are here to point them in the right direction, but without adding more pressure on top of everything else."

With a goal of reducing some of that pressure and lowering barriers to counseling, Attain Housing applied for and has been awarded a large grant from Premera Blue Cross to provide client families with direct access to a dedicated therapist.

"The Premera grant will make a big difference in terms of lowering barriers to therapy for our client families," Greg said. "It will eliminate that extra step of making an outside referral and hopefully make counseling less of an imposition for folks to get into a routine."

Unfortunately, even telehealth sessions during the pandemic are not without barriers.

"Telehealth and Zoom calls have their perks, but it's still hard to find time and space to talk about pain and trauma," Megan said. "For many parents, it's hard to talk about that stuff in front of their kids, or they might

not feel like they can be totally open if their kids are right there with them.”

Megan has seen the positive impacts that mental health work can have on clients, most recently with a single mother who started doing art therapy at the recommendation of the student counselor she was referred to.

“She has been doing these sessions regularly now,” Megan said. “Art therapy seems to be really good for her so far.”

The relentless challenges of 2020 continue to be felt hardest by the most vulnerable in our society. Attain Housing aims to continue to provide our client families with the tools they need to rebuild their lives, work on their trauma, and end up in a better place mentally and physically after spending two years in our transitional housing program. Your donations and support allow our case managers to do this vital work that can create a true turning point in the lives of so many parents and children.

Mental Health Resources for Low-Income Families

- **Sound (formerly known as Sound Mental Health) - 206-302-2300 - www.sound.health**
- **Evergreen Behavioral Health Services - 425-899-6300 - www.evergreenhealth.com/in-home-behavioral-health**
- **SeaMar Behavioral Health - 206-764-4714 - www.seamar.org**

Volunteer Spotlight: Meg Wallis

Meg Wallis began her intern work with Attain Housing in mid-2019 and quickly became an invaluable member of the Stable Home program team. Meg is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Social Work from Boise State University and has used her time to gain direct experience helping client families.

“The clients who utilize Attains services are from all different backgrounds, though resiliency is a strength they all have in common,” Meg said. “It’s certainly inspiring to see people who are empowered to reach goals they have for themselves and for their families.”

Meg said she feels inspired by seeing the Attain staff in action and getting to have a



hand in making a difference in the lives of homeless and at-risk families.

“It’s a tight knit group with wide-ranging expertise,” Meg said. “The staff is committed to the work they do and demonstrate a lot of passion for the communities they serve.”

Looking to her future, Meg hopes to continue her career in social work with community-minded organizations.

“Working at Attain has taught me the importance of both stewardship and helping with purpose,” Meg said. “I have come to realize that this is a careful dance, but if done correctly, it will add to an agency’s sustainability and provide assistance that can lead to a person’s long-term success.”

Rental Assistance Update

We've partnered with the King County Eviction Prevention and Rent Assistance program to assist even more families in 2020

Stable Home Program

For families months behind on rent due to the pandemic, paying off that debt can lift a huge burden and relieve untold stress. Attain Housing is playing a key role in making that happen through its own Stable Home rental assistance program and as a partner with King County.

Though eviction rates are down in King County because of the ongoing eviction moratorium, set to expire Dec. 31, accumulated rent debt will have to be paid at some point. That's where Attain Housing has stepped in.

"With Stable Home, we increased the max amount of funds per household in order to be more adaptable and make a bigger difference with each household," Program Services Manager Greg McLeod said. "We're firing on all cylinders to help more people in 2020."

King County Eviction Prevention and Rent Assistance Program

In addition to the Stable Home program, Attain Housing in September became the first and only Eastside partner for distributing funds from the King County Eviction Prevention and Rent Assistance Program (KC-EPRAP). Working with several other organizations, the goal of KC-EPRAP is to distribute \$41 million in rent assistance funds from the CARES Act by



the end of 2020 to households with anywhere up to six months of rent debt.

This temporary partnership utilizes our staff to communicate with renters and negotiate with landlords. We've been able to assist 49 households with a total of \$150,000 of rent assistance as of November 20.

"There are over 56,000 households who are behind on rent by at least one month in King County right now," Greg said. "By partnering with KC-EPRAP, we're able to help 30% more households than with just our Stable Home program alone and we'll end up distributing 120% more actual funds to people than we'd projected with Stable Home alone."

Our Resource Coordinator Jesse Perrell became our point person for connecting families with KC-EPRAP assistance. He received this very appreciative message from one family who was able to pay off their rent debt thanks

to the program:

"Thank you so much for the effort and the help you put in my case. I highly appreciate it so much to all, for helping me and my family during this period of hardship. All of my family felt so relieved, and finally I see a smile on their faces. With you and your organization, you make us look ahead and be positive and enthusiastic to get through this hard time."



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