

ATTAIN NEWS

WINTER 2021 NEWSLETTER



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

7 Hills shifts gears again in May 2021

Rack up mileage for a chance to win prizes from local businesses while raising money for rental assistance for struggling families

In May 2020, we went VIRTUAL for a month-long 7 Hills fundraiser. Both devoted and casual Eastside cyclists tracked their miles on solo rides and stationary bikes alike and competed for prizes donated by local businesses, and got teams together via social media to raise money to help homeless families.

While we had high hopes for returning to our classic ride starting from Marina Park in downtown Kirkland on Memorial Day 2021, the state of the pandemic has other plans for us. So, once again, we are **shifting gears** for our 2021 7 Hills of Kirkland fundraising bike ride.

This major fundraiser generates funds critical to families in East King County struggling with rent during COVID and for other programs.

We are calling on you and all our cycling community to join us this May for a month long event celebrating the power of cycling!

We know our 7 Hills riders and community want to help at this time. Joining us this May is how you can ensure our neighbors stay housed during this difficult time. Riders of every skill level are welcome to participate, whether it be individual riders, with families, or with co-workers.

The event this year will build on the 2020 event, with mileage and elevation challenges, fundraising goals to reach, and prizes from local businesses.

Some key updates: We've eliminated the event registration fee entirely, added some more bicycling gear from Primal Wear for different fundraising goals reached, and are adding way more prizes and all variety of challenges to compete in during May.

Register online at 7hills.attainhousing.org.



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Holiday Giving Summary

Even in 2020, holiday wishes came true!

Attain Housing's caring community proved "We Got This!" as you ensured our client families received special meals, holiday presents, basic necessities, financial assistance and safe, supportive housing this past holiday season. Gifts provided by our donors brought great joy during the season of giving, even during a pandemic! From one client mom: "I just want to say thank you so much to everyone. The kids are going to be so happy Christmas morning!!!"

Families served live in Attain's transitional housing units in Bellevue and Kirkland. In 2020, our holiday program:

- Provided 234 meals for 118 people
- Gave presents to 40 children and their family members
- Contributed financial assistance to 78 people

Wish-list donations helped parents provide their children with holiday gifts and your support for financial assistance eased the stress families are enduring through this difficult economy. We'd like to send a huge thank you to all our Holiday donors—you made kids' wishes come true! Let's keep the momentum and generosity going in 2021.





A Message from our Executive Director



Welcome to 2021! I feel a sense of relief and hope as we leave 2020 behind. We can anticipate the end of the pandemic where we have lost so many, and have experienced a complete change of our lifestyles and our relationships. To me, as someone who is always looking on the bright side of things, I saw incredible generosity in the community and resiliency among our staff and clients. The past year required so much from

all of us. Giving grace to each other became a habit as we pivoted and innovated and at times, simply got through another day. The spirit of "We Got This" buoyed us when we were struggling. When we asked for help, you and so many in this community rallied. Companies partnered with caterers to make and help us deliver take-out food for our transitional housing families, churches supported our residents' rental burdens, and individuals stepped up with very large gifts to provide rental assistance for those less fortunate.

Attain Housing continues to do what we do best despite working remotely and having to react to numerous challenges throughout the year. Attain Housing has remained laser-focused on our mission of ensuring vulnerable families on the Eastside keep a roof over their heads and those transitioning from homelessness have case managers to walk alongside them on the journey to permanent housing.

Attain had a significant year in 2020, assisting more families and Eastside residents than ever before! While it was difficult for our transitional housing families to keep their employment and income during the lockdowns, none were at risk of losing their housing and all had their 2020 rental debt completely paid off through generous donations.

Rental Assistance is the topic that you continually hear about these days. We are facing a "rental cliff" when the eviction moratorium ends and tens of thousands of people who are behind on their rent may be evicted and end up homeless. This is against everything we believe in, and we have worked very hard to help as many Eastside households as possible pay off their rental debts. Not only did we have an expanded Stable Home program with extra support from the cities of Kirkland and Bellevue, but also we were the **ONLY** Eastside agency to support the distribution of Federal CARES Act rental assistance funds through King County in the 4th quarter of last year. To give you a window into the scope of this growth, **in 2018, Attain prevented 270 Eastside residents from losing their homes. In 2020, through both of our programs, we more than tripled that and helped 909 Eastside residents!**

As Attain continues to be a major player in Eastside rental assistance, we will look for more funding to help us serve more residents. **Please consider a donation to Stable Home and possibly help one of your neighbors.**

The caring community around Attain Housing is stronger than ever. We will get through this together!

Kathy

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IG: @AttainHousing



The outlook on Rental Assistance in 2021

Our Stable Home program helped 162 families keep their housing last year.

As pandemic conditions continue to affect the job market and economy with no clear end in sight, our Stable Home rental assistance program is already off to another busy start in 2021.

In 2020, Stable Home distributed \$170,000 to 162 Eastside families, consisting of 296 adults and 334 children. In addition, the King County Eviction Prevention Rent Assistance Program tapped our expertise to distribute \$523,000 to 120 Eastside families, made up of 90 adults and 140 children. We were able to pay off up to 6 months of back rent through this program and help landlords recoup some of the lost rents from non-payment during the year. Tenants were able to wipe out much of their past debt so that it won't follow them around for years, preventing them from being able to rent again.

Looking ahead for Stable Home in 2021, Attain's Program Services Manager Greg McLeod expects similar numbers at the very least, if not greater.

"Stable Home applications have been coming in steadily since the beginning of the year, with some spikes every few weeks it seems," Greg said. "Everyone is starting to get a bit nervous about if and when the moratorium is going to end."

Both the national and state eviction moratoria are scheduled to end on March 31, 2021, but there is a chance that one or both will be extended. Nevertheless, there is a growing sense of panic among Eastside renters who are still struggling financially due to the pandemic and our Stable Home advocates are working with applicants to help plan their next steps. It's important to note that when the moratorium ends, that

does not erase the rent debt that has accrued during the pandemic. By providing rental assistance to families, we can reduce their rental debt and keep cash flowing to landlords.

"We're about 12 months into this pandemic, and even those who planned well and had savings built up are needing help now," Greg said. "We're getting lots of applicants who have been making it work until now one way or another, but the savings have been spent and there's still no real end in sight."

What can renters do to help mitigate the future chances of eviction? Greg says payment plans go a long way in the dispute resolution process with landlords.

"We lean into payment plans for those who have debts that exceed our limits," Greg said. "It helps with the dispute resolution process with landlords if the tenant has attempted to enter into a payment plan, even if it's a small monthly amount. It lets the courts know they're not ignoring the debt and they're trying to make it work."

While it's anyone's guess what the year has in store for us, the Stable Home program is still going strong and helping struggling families avoid homelessness however they can.

"We are curious to see if we get lots of move-in assistance requests at the end of the moratorium," Greg said. "All the requests are still COVID-related, their hours at work were cut, or a parent needs to be home with their kid because school is closed or remote."

To read more on rent debt and the eviction moratorium, [click here](#).

New Staff Spotlight: Nasim Hessami

Starting a new job in a new region is never an easy task, but then throw in the fact that your new co-workers are mostly working remotely due to the pandemic! It's a big challenge, but we know our new Case Manager Nasim Hessami is up to the task. Born in Iran, her family emigrated to the United States and settled in Phoenix, Arizona, where Nasim grew up and lived until she recently moved to the Seattle area for both a change of scenery and for better job opportunities in the field of social work and case management. Nasim has a background in working with children with behavioral issues by providing animal therapy and other therapeutic interventions. She is enjoying her new home state and is hoping to continue growing her community here. Get to know Nasim a bit, in her own words:

What is your approach to case management and how does your previous experience influence that approach?

Through both my personal and professional experience I have learned that flexibility and going with the flow is the best approach to case management. Case manage-



ment can be unpredictable when unforeseen crisis situations rise so being able to be flexible with the events of the day is a must!

What drives you to try to help people?

I believe it's in my DNA as my grandfather would buy presents around the holidays every year and would personally hand to children in the hospital and children in foster care in Iran. I never had to 'try' to help people, it always came naturally and the universe aligned and led me down this career path.

What are some challenges so far to starting a new job in a new city during a pandemic?

Rain gear! I knew it rained here but I did not appreciate the value of rain gear! Another challenge would be resources because pre-pandemic you had the opportunity of meeting people out in the community and to be introduced to other organizations. There was an opportunity to grow a resource community, and while it's still happening through Zoom, it's a slower process.

Top 3 favorite things to do outside of work?

Exploring nature, baking, and retail therapy.

Donor Spotlight

Overlake Park Presbyterian Church

In the early-goings of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting statewide shutdown, we had some local groups and donors who really stepped up in providing COVID relief donations to Attain Housing. Few groups have been as consistently generous as Overlake Park Presbyterian Church in Bellevue.

OPPC Mission Committee Nancy Devine says the choice was easy once they realized how closely Attain's mission aligned with the church's core mission goals of assisting the local community with basic needs like housing.

"Our pastor, Becki Barrett, met with Kathy (Attain Executive Director) during the early days of the pandemic and Becki was so excited to learn about an organization that wanted to be a true partner with our small congregation," Nancy said. "We strongly agree and identify with Attain's model of providing support to their clients as they seek stable housing and ultimately stable lives."



OPPC Mission Elder Cindy Coleman says their church's by-line is "a Spiritual Home Where Everyone Belongs" and they want to help out folks in their neighborhood however they can.

"We continually ask ourselves 'Why we are on the corner of 156th and Northup?' And the answer is that we're here to help our community," Cindy said. "We appreciate Attain's approach in counseling and helping clients establish stability, and not just giving a handout."

Nancy encourages anyone who might be on the fence about supporting organizations like Attain Housing to just, "Go for it!" Cindy feels the same way.

"The cost of living is so expensive in our area and people need a boost to get a stable start," Cindy said. "This is what Attain Housing does, with their case managers, job assistance, resources referrals, and rental assistance. The more aid, financial or in-kind, they get, the more families they can help."

Attain Housing client families now have direct access to mental health counseling services



Image courtesy of Premera Blue Cross

The groundwork is complete and Attain Housing clients have begun meeting with our designated therapist, Victoria, whose position has been made possible by a generous grant from Premera Blue Cross.

Since receiving the grant in October 2020, Attain Housing has been working with partners at Catholic Community Services (CCS) and its CReW (Counseling, Recovery & Wellness) program to create the infrastructure for our joint mental-health support services pilot program. Adding direct access to mental health services has been a long-term goal for Attain Housing staff and board members and we are so excited to be able to include counseling as part of our Transitional Housing program.

The program's therapist has begun to start treatment with a handful of clients, and Attain Case Managers are working on getting more folks included.

"I'm really excited to have a therapist all set up for receiving referrals from our families and to be available for those who are up for it," Greg said. "It's not an automatic fix, though, because depending on your culture and what you've been through, there are still stigmas about seeing a mental health therapist. We're really trying to frame it in ways that will appeal to

clients, like talking about healthy parenting strategies or coping with pandemic-related issues in hopes of making it less stigmatized and more issue-specific."

The joint mental health team is also discussing ways to measure outcomes such as number of clients participating, number of clients maintaining a relationship with Victoria and pre- and post-assessments measuring depression, anxiety or PTSD.

We'd like to share some sobering results of a recent mental health survey conducted by Premera Blue Cross:

- 2/3rds of the workers surveyed report having higher levels of anxiety than before the pandemic; 27% describe their anxiety level as "much higher."
- Parents and teachers are significantly more likely to say their level of stress is much higher.
- 43% of the working women surveyed, and 42% of the teachers, said their mental health has declined during the pandemic.
- 31% of the people in the study are worrying about money. Those most concerned are parents, young workers and Latinx workers.





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