



Helping Hand House

Media Kit



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Helping Hand House

Dedicated to preventing and ending family homelessness

Background

Mission: *Helping Hand House is dedicated to preventing and ending family homelessness.*

Helping Hand House fulfills the mission to families through our five programs: Homelessness Prevention, Emergency Housing, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Affordable Housing. We supplement these programs with an intensive focus on Financial Literacy and Employment Preparation.

Helping Hand House offers not only housing and other basic needs to families, but an opportunity to change their lives so that they can gain the skills to find and keep a living wage job, secure the well-being of their children, find and keep their own housing, and contribute to their communities.

Helping Hand House fills a gap in community housing services by providing services in eastern Pierce County. Although access is not limited to residents in a particular area, the location of our housing does provide a unique opportunity for families to remain in their communities of origin, rather than being forced into urban centers such as Tacoma and Lakewood. Our service model reflects research showing that families can recover their lives more quickly when they are able to stay in their home communities with familiar environment and services, reducing trauma, particularly for the children. The majority of the families who come to Helping Hand House are young single-mothers with two children. Many of these families became homeless due to divorce or fleeing domestic violence.

During the nearly 30 years of service in the community, we have assisted more than 5,000 homeless and nearly homeless families with children in Pierce County to recover their lives. We serve over 200 families per year.

The overarching goal of the Helping Hand House mission is to ensure that families who complete our programs receive the services, training, and experiences to stabilize their families and housing and never become homeless again.



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Organization History

Helping Hand House was founded in 1984 by a Puyallup woman who believed that no family in her community should be without a home. Together with members of her church, she developed a few temporary homes for homeless families. The founding members believed that within a few years they could “solve” the problem of homelessness, and their work would be done. For the first four years, Helping Hand House was run entirely by volunteers with money received from local service clubs, churches, and individual donors.

When it became apparent that homelessness was increasing, not decreasing, and that the causes were more complex than they’d thought, the founders decided to expand the program and to do more to address the *causes* of homelessness in their client families. The organization began to offer case management services to all program families.

Nola Renz joined the organization in 1997, as the second Executive Director hired by the small organization in its history. In addition to administration, she wrote all the grants, maintained the houses with the help of dedicated volunteers, and provided case management to a growing number of families who had come out of the cold into Helping Hand House. The number of homes and families served continued to steadily grow as the reputation for this young, effective organization became known in the community and with funders, both locally and on a national scale.

Today, with a staff of 14, Helping Hand House welcomes homeless families into one of five programs: Homeless Prevention, Emergency Housing, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and Affordable Housing.

Helping Hand House case management has evolved over the years into the nationally recognized model offered today, which implements the use of motivational interviewing techniques, a best practices model. A strong focus on financial literacy and increased education and employment helps families stabilize their immediate housing situation while building skills for long-term financial stability. The goal for all families in all programs is their exit to permanent housing with an income sufficient to support the household.

This approach has been successful in moving thousands of families from abject poverty and homelessness to financial independence and stable housing in the years of the organization’s existence.



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Programs & Services

Helping Hand House provides basic needs (housing, clothing, food, health) and supportive services (case management, life skills, mainstream services, education, and employment progression training) in a continuum of care from short-term emergency housing and rental assistance to long term permanent supportive housing. We sincerely believe that every individual deserves respect and an opportunity to gain the personal and fiscal assets they need to succeed.

Homelessness Prevention | Once a year rent and utility assistance for families with eviction or utility shut-off notice. Mandatory budgeting and energy savings class.
Services provided to 130-150 families a year.

Emergency Housing | Fully equipped and furnished housing and basic needs for up to 90 days with case management and life-skills classes.
Services provided to 36-43 families a year.

Transitional Housing | Fully equipped and furnished housing and case management for up to 2 years emphasizing financial literacy, education and employment.
Services provided to 26-32 families a year.

Permanent Supportive Housing | Permanent housing, furnishings as needed, tailored services, and case management that decreases gradually as financial resources and skills improve to result in self-sufficiency.
Services provided to 13 families a year.

Affordable Housing | Permanent housing for families at 30% or below area median income. Voucher assistance provided by Pierce County Housing Authority, until such time as they exceed income guidelines and they are transitioned into market-rate housing.
Services provided for up to 2 families a year.

Families work closely with case managers to create a stability plan with goals and benchmarks that they track and troubleshoot during weekly in-home meetings. Children are required to attend school regularly, adults are required to budget, save money, work and/or attend school, attend life skills training, and take care of their temporary home. Helping Hand house fully furnishes and stocks each home with supplies and staple foods. We assist with transportation, school clothes and supplies, childcare costs, counseling and tutoring costs, tuition, work tools and clothes, and other needs that will support a family's progress and success.



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Staff Interview Resources & Bios

Nola Renz | Executive Director

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Executive Director for Helping Hand House since 1997. Personal experience of homelessness both as child and DV victim with 3 children. Appointed to Governors State Advisory Council on Homelessness, former board president of Washington State Coalition for the Homeless. Honored with Woman of Influence Award (2004), Rotary International Non Profit Leader of the Year (2003), and Distinguished Citizen of the Year – Tacoma/Pierce County (2001).

Expert Interview/Resource Areas:

Regional perspective on homeless issues, daily challenges faced by homeless families, structural solutions for homelessness, Pierce County as a lab for development of new best practices, front-line perspectives from those successfully helping homeless families reach stability.

Martha Myers | Program Director

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Formerly a high school teacher in New Mexico, Martha has served as a case manager with homeless families at Helping Hand House since 2000. Highly successful in meaningful transitioning of families from poverty to family stability, living wage employment, and increased classroom outcomes for school-aged children.

Expert Interview/Resource Areas:

Impact of homelessness on children, navigating the challenges of government systems, unique challenges of homelessness on families, front-line perspectives from those successfully helping homeless families reach stability.



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Fast Facts: Organization

- Originated in Puyallup in 1984 with volunteers.
- Served over 5,000 homeless and nearly homeless families (12,544 family members in first 25 yrs).
- Serve an average of 200+ families a year in 5 programs.
- Have a staff of 14 and over 250 volunteers (over 1,800 volunteer hours in 2011)
- Because we provide housing in both the metropolitan and rural areas of Pierce County, families do not need to re-locate. Staying local can reduce the trauma of being homeless for the parents, but especially for the children who can attend the same schools, day care, and keep their friends.

Fast Facts: Population Served

- Pierce County families with children age 17 or younger who are homeless or nearly homeless.
- All families are at or below 30% of area median income.
- Most likely to consist of single mothers in their early 30s with two or more children
- Ethnicity: Primarily Caucasian (60-65%) and African American (20-25%), with lesser percentages of those identifying themselves as being of two or more races (8-10%), Asian (1-2%), Native American (2-4%), Hispanic (2%) and Pacific Islander (1-2%). Consistent with county-wide demographics.

A loss of personal dignity, lack of self-esteem, and hopelessness are characteristics of homeless families with children. The disruption of not having a home affects every segment of each family member's life. Employment is difficult for parents to maintain, and applications without a phone number or address are discarded. Frequent moves between family members, shelters, and the streets often damage the physical and emotional health of all family members. Children are disengaged from educational and developmental opportunities, and instead focus on surviving these threatening surroundings. As the trauma of homelessness continues, these families become increasingly isolated, both unable and afraid to reach out and search for a connection that would help stabilize the family and support them in returning to self-sufficiency. Often children become either withdrawn and fearful or angry as a direct result of their loss of security. Each of these homeless families represents a complicated maze of personalized and painful experiences and situations. These different backgrounds require a varied response with individualized resources and services. Helping Hand House maintains a vast and ever growing number of area resources and referrals that are available to assist these participating families, while we provide safe, single-family housing, basic needs, and intensive case management to make a new life possible.



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Fast Facts: Need

- The risk and incidence of homelessness has never been greater.
- Over 12% of the 790,500 Pierce County citizens (31% of single mothers) live below the federal poverty standard (U.S. American Communities Survey – 2007).
- Nearly 75% percent of households with incomes below the federal poverty line spend 50% or more on housing. A job loss (frequent in this economy), divorce, serious illness, or other crisis can quickly lead to homelessness. (National Alliance to End Homelessness - 2011)
- According to 2010 Helping Hand House intake data, the organization was forced to turn away over 4,000 qualified families, providing assistance to 1 in 15 of those who requested services.
- According to the Pierce County Homeless Housing Plan (2008) the current need for affordable housing exceeds the existing stock by 30,000 units in Pierce County
- In the County 2008 Community Low Income Needs Assessment Report of the 1,524 households reporting, 29% had to share housing with another household, 53% had utility services disconnected, and 21% moved in the last year because they could not afford the rent.
- Hundreds of thousands of households simply do not earn enough to afford housing. According to the most recent Out of Reach research, Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a 2-bedroom unit in the Pierce County, WA is \$968. Without spending more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn \$19.10 to afford a 2-bedroom. The typical renter wage is just \$13.96. At minimum wage, a worker would need to work 88 hours a week, 52 weeks per year. Families earning minimum wage who need three bedrooms must work 125 hours. Even two people working at minimum-wage jobs wouldn't earn enough to make that apartment affordable to them. Even though Washington State has one of the highest minimum wages in the country, it is still not enough to afford adequate market rate housing in many parts of Washington. Families are being forced to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table.



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Media Contact Details

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