

# **Ferndale Community Service Cooperative**

2020 Annual Report to the Community



## Our Story

The Ferndale Community Service Cooperative was established in 2006 as an umbrella organization for a group of programs serving the community in Ferndale. The guiding idea then was that we are stronger together, and when we work together we can strengthen Ferndale families and build community. This idea still holds true today. Since 2006, the Cooperative has grown and changed, but it continues to provide leadership, support, and governance for 9 programs that provide vital community services and resources. We are a grassroots, community and volunteer based organization whose mission is to build community by strengthening individuals and families in Ferndale.

2020 was a challenging year. The COVID-19 crisis pushed all of our programs to their limits, and stretched us in new ways. Many of our programs had to completely re-tool the way services were delivered. But we rose to the challenge, even starting our eighth program, Connect Ferndale, and starting a 9<sup>th</sup>, temporary program, The Ferndale Community Utilities Fund, to support those struggling to pay their water bill due to COVID. Additionally fundraising in 2020 tripled from previous years, and allowed us to provide safer environments for our clients and volunteers, to provide critical PPE, and to launch the Ferndale Community Utilities Fund.

This report details the outcomes of the 9 programs of the Cooperative. It also provides a snapshot into the impacts they have within the community. The Cooperative and our programs exist to build community, strengthen families and individuals, and connect Ferndale residents to services and resources that build safety, health, and wellbeing. The nine programs of the Cooperative include:

- The Ferndale Community Resource Center
- The Ferndale Community Utilities Fund (a temporary additional program in 2020)
- The Other Bank
- The Holiday Giving Store
- The Ferndale Friendship Community Garden
- Family Funds
- Connect Ferndale
- The Family Meals Project
- The Volunteer Mobilization Center

We were supported in 2020 by the following generous donors:



## Outcomes and Impacts 2020



Over 3,500 community members served

295 volunteers contributing time energy



4,283 volunteer hours contributed

\$65,000 dollars raised to support programs



## The Ferndale Community Resource Center

Located at 5694 Second Avenue, the Resource Center provides community members with access and referrals to available assistance programs in the community, as well as direct services such as snacks, hygiene items, clothing and household goods, vouchers for showers, gas, and laundry, bus tickets, and a warm cup of coffee. Staffed entirely by volunteers, community members can come in to get assistance with a bill or basic need, get some clothing, apply for a job or get help with job search activities. The facility is small but houses a clothing bank, a lobby, and an area for job search.



2020 challenged our traditional ways of serving the community. The Resource Center is an in-person Center and COVID made that impossible during a 2 month closure, and kept things restricted even after reopening. The Center used rigid COVID safety protocols to reopen, including mandatory masking, Plexiglas dividers, and regular sanitization of all surfaces. Our schedule was reduced because several regular volunteers are in at-risk categories and couldn't come in.

Despite all of this the Resource Center provided over 1500 instances of service for a variety of needs such as job search assistance, resource referral for Veteran's Benefits, housing, utility payments, health care and more, gas, bus, shower, and laundry vouchers, telephone and computer use, hygiene items, and snacks. Twelve volunteers donated a total of 987 hours of service. The clothing bank distributed a total of 16,190 pieces of clothing to over 2900 individuals. Each person got an average of 5 items of needed clothing. Additionally, we were able to donate 14,075 items of clothing to the Ferndale Band Boosters for their fundraising efforts.

The Resource Center was supported by the incredible people of Ferndale this year, whose generosity reached new heights in the amount of clothing, food, household and hygiene items, and cash donated. We were also supported by a generous grant from the Mary H. Storer Foundation, several grants from the City of Ferndale, and a grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation.

## The Ferndale Community Utilities Fund

The Ferndale Community Utilities Fund (FCUF) began in April of 2020 as a temporary, emergency program in cooperation with the city of Ferndale. The purpose of the program is to provide assistance with City of Ferndale water/sewer bills for Ferndale families impacted by COVID. A small team of volunteers assembled to create the program, ensuring clear criteria for qualification and award amounts. Community members can apply for assistance via an online or paper form, and volunteers process applications. All payments are made via the Ferndale Community Service Cooperative directly to the City of Ferndale.

FCUF set out with an initial fundraising goal of \$10,000. The plan was to help as many neighbors as possible for as long as possible, and then close when the funds ran out. Within weeks of opening, the FCUF had met our goal through a grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation, a grant from the City of Ferndale, and generous community donations. Over the next couple of months, FCUF qualified for multiple grants funded by the CARES Act legislation, and received another grant from the Mary E. Storer Foundation. Community contributions also continued to come in. By the end of 2020, FCUF had raised over \$45,000.

By December of 2020, the FCUF had provided \$30,753.71 in payments for 73 Ferndale households that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. A team of 6 volunteers donated over 330 hours developing the program, processing applications, talking to residents about their bills, and making referrals to other services that families' can benefit from. The FCUF continues to operate into 2021 and will do so until funds are depleted.

### Volunteer Spotlight- Elaine Dorman

Elaine became a volunteer at the Resource Center by accident. Her church, St Joseph's Catholic Church, had just completed a Christmas giving program, and had extra items that they decided to donate to the Center. Elaine came down to drop them off, and ended up leaving with a volunteer position. "I asked if they needed help and they said yes." Elaine started by helping out in the Other Bank and eventually moved to the clothing bank. Elaine is an avid community volunteer, also serving as an umpire for girls' fast pitch in the summer months, and donating her time to do alterations for school band uniforms when her daughter was in school. "I knew the band and the Band Boosters, so that's how we got connected to their fundraising." The clothing bank donates excess and unusable textiles to the Boosters, who sells them to textile recyclers to raise money for band activities. Elaine is a graduate of Ferndale High School and says that she loves the idea that she is helping her own community. "It's what keeps me coming back. And the people I volunteer with. I love working with them."



## Family Funds

The Family Funds Program supports Ferndale School District families by providing a backpack, school supplies, and other critical supplies for families in need. We believe that a backpack and basic school supplies are an essential tool in a child's education and that they create a link between school and home.



Our goal is to have backpacks and essential supplies located at each elementary, middle, and high school in the Ferndale School District so that when a student is in need, we are ready. The Coordinator of the Family Fund works in tandem with the School District to support students' readiness to learn.

2020 brought two significant challenges. The failure of the school levy in February created significant impacts. Typically, the school district employs three Family Community Coordinators. These FCCs work in the school buildings and are an incredible resource to families and staff for any student that is struggling with a basic needs issue or a family emergency. For example, if the family experiences a house fire the FCC can help get them connected to resources for shelter, clothing, and other basic needs to get back on their feet and to ensure the students can continue in their studies. Staff in the buildings can refer families directly to the FCC when a student is struggling. FCCs could also provide triage counseling and support to students as needed. They also accessed the Family Funds Program, to ensure that a student's basic needs did not go unmet. Unfortunately, due to the levy failure these three positions were cut. A second levy passed in November but at a much lower rate, meaning the district is not fully funded and the positions were not reinstated. The consequences of this are significant. Without the FCCs, families' access to community support programs is sharply impacted. Existing district staff have filled in where they can. The current Coordinator of the Family Funds Program, a District employee, managed or co-coordinated 12 programs including the Family Funds Program this year.

COVID also impacted the Program. Traditional events and volunteer support were impossible as buildings were limiting in-person work and students were not in school. Despite these challenges the Family Fund distributed nearly \$1000 in school supplies and over 300 backpacks to students at all Ferndale elementary and secondary schools, nine in total. Approximately 150 Ferndale families were served by the program in 2020. Typically, these supplies are distributed at our annual "Back to School" event and in-person at schools, but this year most supplies were distributed via pick-ups at school offices.

The Family Funds Program had several significant donors in 2020. Metrie, a local manufacturing company, donated \$4000 through their community giving program. Nature's Path, a local food company, hosted an online fundraiser that raised \$500 in case and also

provided a large in-kind donation of food. Petro Gas donated 30 turkey baskets for family Thanksgivings, plus backpacks and water bottles. The support of these and many other organizations and individuals in the community provided basic needs support to families in Ferndale that need it the most.

### The Other Bank

For the last 10 years, the Other Bank has provided basic hygiene products for low income families with children enrolled in the Ferndale School District. Families can get items like laundry detergent, dish soap, shampoo and conditioner, soap, feminine hygiene, razors, diapers and baby wipes on a weekly basis. Volunteers assemble bags with the items families' request. The program is sustained by a lot of generous community support, including three separate faith communities that do regular supply drives and individuals who make donations of needed items.

COVID impacted the Other Bank by interrupting the in-person service delivery method and also interrupting outreach at the schools in the District. The Other Bank is traditionally closed when the schools are closed, so the initial shut down let families without support. Additionally, many of the program's volunteers are seniors, and some did not feel comfortable returning to do the work of distribution. The levy failure early in the year, mentioned previously, had a similar effect on the Other Bank, as the Family Community Coordinators were the main point of contact to qualify families for the services of the program. Outreach to families has been challenging and the result has been fewer families served.

In 2020, 7 volunteers donated 224 hours to staffing the Other Bank, and 42 hours to shopping for needed items. 53 families were served and over 5,300 individual items were given out. The Other Bank received financial support this year from the Mary E. Storer Foundation, the City of Ferndale, and many individual donors.

### The Holiday Giving Store

The Ferndale Holiday Giving Store began in 2003 to brighten the holidays for the children of low-income families in the Ferndale. It began with the idea that the parents and guardians of children know best what their children would like most for the holidays and would like the opportunity to choose gifts for them. The Holiday Giving Store set up just like a store but no money is exchanged and gifts are free to families that qualify. Volunteers stock the store with popular gifts donated through the generosity of Ferndale residents, local businesses, and churches. Monetary donations and grants help us stock the store with warm items of clothing like hooded sweatshirts and pajamas. With the help of our community, we were able to serve over 360 children in 2020.

2020 brought several challenges to the program, but with a few adjustments the program ran successfully. The first issue the program experienced was having to develop a new

online application process and to get that information out to those that would need the help of the Store. This change was needed because students were not physically at the schools and the school district lost the positions of Family Community Coordinators who in typical years helped publicize and distribute the applications to those looking for holiday help. (This loss is mentioned above in the Family Funds section as well.) This school district change also forced us to take over the scheduling of participating families.

Another challenge was our loss of several businesses due to COVID-19 shutdowns that normally host giving trees and toy collection boxes for the program. To counteract these losses an Amazon wish list was developed that allowed the community to shop from home and have donated gifts shipped directly to us. It was successful, and we will continue to offer this option again. Another successful first-time event was a toy and donation “Fill the Trailer” event that allowed the community to safely drop off their donations to us throughout a Saturday in December.

The Ferndale Holiday Giving Store relies on volunteers to run smoothly and begins every fall with a small core group who plans the store. During operation, the store has more volunteers who help set up the Store and others that help parents choose gifts and keep the store organized and stocked. Finally, others come in at the end to pack and clean the space that is donated to us. This year volunteers had to make sure social distancing, hand sanitizing and masks were all in use to help keep everyone safe. 36 volunteers donated 295 hours of time to make the store a success.

### Volunteer Spotlight- Kim de Koekkoek

Kim likes to have fun. After the passing of her mom and retiring from her cleaning business, Kim was looking for a way to give back. “I enjoy helping people,” she says. “I like to interact, to joke around and get to know people.” Kim started volunteering with the Resource Center in the clothing bank about two years ago. Years before, as a struggling single mom, she had come to the Resource Center and gotten assistance from the Other Bank for herself and her son. “I really appreciated it, but I was working and felt like there were probably other people that needed it more than me, so I didn’t go again. But I remembered the place.” When it was time for her to look for a volunteer position, she saw an ad saying that the Resource Center needed volunteers and she decided to try it out. Kim says that she enjoys getting to know community members who come in. “We don’t know their whole story,” she says. “We might make assumptions about people, but we need to give them the benefit of the doubt.” She says serving the community is rewarding, and its fun too. She really enjoys the people she volunteers with at the clothing bank. She enjoys laughing and talking with them as they process clothing donations, and she also uses her sense of humor to make guests who come for resources feel comfortable. “It’s humbling to be able to help others.”



## The Ferndale Friendship Community Garden

The Ferndale Friendship Community Garden opened in 2008 and provides 25 garden plots and 10 hoop house plots for rent to individuals and families to plant and harvest their own vegetables. In addition, the Garden hosts the First Fruits Garden, a space dedicated to growing fresh produce for the Ferndale Food Bank. The Garden offers a place to grow food, connect with neighbors, and learn about gardening and growing.

2020 Garden membership included 31 adults and 14 children. A total of 46 volunteers contributed over 1270 hours of time to a variety of projects around the garden this year. The tool shed underwent extensive repairs including new siding, paint, and a shelter to house the mower and other equipment. Frames on 11 of the 25 plots were replaced and upgraded to a cement and wood combination that is longer lasting. Other volunteers completed basic gardening maintenance tasks like weeding, care of the herb garden, mowing and weed whacking, and care for the strawberry and asparagus plots.



The Garden has five successful group patches this year. Individuals participated in preparing the soil, planting, weeding, and watering and at the end of the season they harvested and shared the crops. These patches grew pumpkins, winter and summer squash, and melons. Other shared crops included Scarlet Emperor beans, flowers, asparagus, and apples.

COVID protocols were in place in the garden this year and included maintaining proper social distancing and using masks. Masks and gloves were required when harvesting shared plots and gardeners and volunteers were staggered when working on projects to allow for social distancing.

The First Fruits garden had a very successful year, donating 6,701 pounds of fresh produce to the Ferndale Food Bank, along with an additional 149 pounds of apples. Manager of the First Fruits Garden, Greg Hart, donated 275 hours of time sowing, weeding, maintaining, and harvesting, along with an additional 225 hours of labor provided by other volunteers.

The Garden was supported by a variety of community members and businesses. These donors include the Ferndale Food Bank, the Mary H. Storer Foundation, Super Feet, the City of Ferndale, the Community Food Co-op Seed Grant program, Portal Way Farm and Garden and individuals in the community.

## Connect Ferndale



Connect Ferndale is the Cooperative's newest program and began officially at the beginning of 2020. Formed in 2019 by a group of neighbors who were motivated by acts of white supremacy in Ferndale, Connect Ferndale was created to help make our city a place where all feel welcome and safe. The program officially joined the Cooperative in 2020. The mission of Connect Ferndale is to cultivate community growth and connection through cultural events, conversations, and learning opportunities that build inclusion, honor diversity, and encourage participation for everyone in

our community.

COVID made many of the in-person events impossible, but the group reframed their work this year to focus on the following projects:

- Creation of a website and a Facebook presence to teach the community about Connect Ferndale and its mission and goals, and also share information related to various social justice topics. The website is complete and the Facebook community is growing with 618 followers at the end of 2020.
- Building a virtual book club for neighbors to connect and learn together. Connect Ferndale was awarded a \$1000 grant from the city of Ferndale, some of the funds are earmarked for purchasing books for the book club, which is slated to begin in 2021.
- Conducting a community survey about race and the experiences of people living in Ferndale. The survey was complete in December of 2020 with 81 responses collected. A complete report on the survey is due in early 2021.
- Forming a leadership team and membership group. The current membership team consists of 12 community members, many of whom originally formed the group. The leadership team created a survey for membership and has admitted 21 members so far. These members agree to attend quarterly meetings and take action on projects that support the mission of Connect Ferndale.
- Participating in training to develop skill at doing community organizing work around social justice. The leadership team participated in two trainings in 2020 that solidified the group and brought clarity and focus to the work.

Connect Ferndale was supported by a generous grant from the Mary E. Storer Foundation in 2020, in addition to donations from several community members.

## The Family Meals Project

The Family Meals Project (FMP) began in 2012 with the mission of engaging families and building health and wellness through food. Today the FMP is designed to help inspire families to get back to the kitchen and cook creative, healthy, budget friendly meals.

COVID-19 had a big impact on the FMP this year. Many in-person community activities were planned for 2020, including cooking demos that teach families how to eat healthy on a budget. With in-person events restricted, the FMP turned toward building an online community and sharing recipes and tips for healthy eating online. The website was completely redesigned and a Facebook page established. The Project Coordinator volunteered a total of 50 hours of time to accomplish this. The page following is growing, with recipes, tips and tricks for healthy eating, and other ways for community members to get involved. Planning for 2021 has begun and includes a return to in-person demos, but also strengthening and building the online community.

## The Volunteer Mobilization Center

The Volunteer Mobilization Center (VMC) is an Emergency Worker Program volunteer unit that is dedicated to being ready for disasters by recruiting spontaneous volunteers as temporary State emergency workers. These workers are processed, trained, and placed according to their skills to serve in supportive roles to first responders and other professional crisis workers.

2020 was a year of emergency, as the COVID-19 crisis required local and state health department officials to activate. The VMC was called up by Whatcom Unified Command to assist in the County's COVID response. In 2020, the VMC processed just over 1100 applications resulting in 173 registered volunteers. The VMC, like all programs in the Cooperative, is 100% volunteer run, and the team donated 1,132 hours to process and register volunteers, attend meetings, and stay up to date on critical disaster response operation in Whatcom County.