

Ferndale Community Service Cooperative

2021 Annual Report to the Community



Our Story

The Ferndale Community Service Cooperative was established in 2001 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 2001, 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 grassroots, community and volunteer-based organization whose mission is to build community by strengthening individuals and families in Ferndale.

This year brought many successes and challenges. COVID-19 continued to stretch all of our programs, but it also brought opportunity. The Ferndale Community Utility Fund, established as a temporary program in 2020 due to COVID, continued through the entire year this year, allowing us to help Ferndale residents with their water and sewer bills. A generous community continued to give in support of many of our programs, in particular keeping our clothing bank stocked with beautiful, like new all-season clothing. Severe weather this year also brought about the establishment of a new program, the Severe Weather Shelter, which operates in partnership with two local area churches when weather gets dangerously cold.

There were two events that stand out in 2021. First, the flooding in November brought hardship to our community. Many families were negatively impacted, losing housing, belongings, precious memories, and creating a struggle to meet their own basic needs in the wake of the crisis. The Resource Center had the honor of supporting these families with direct assistance facilitated by a grant from the Whatcom Community Foundation. Our support was limited but helped many households until FEMA and other longer-term help arrived in Ferndale.

Also in November, the Ferndale City Council, through money provided from the Federal government through the American Recovery Plan Act, voted to approve a substantial grant to the Service Cooperative, totaling \$400,000. We are honored to have received this grant and the trust of our City Council and City staff. We have big plans to utilize these funds in a sustainable way, to help grow our presence in Ferndale and ensure our services are here for the long term. More details on that at the end of this report.

This report details the outcomes of the 10 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 ten programs of the Cooperative include:

- The Ferndale Community Resource Center
- The Ferndale Community Utilities Fund
- The Other Bank
- The Holiday Giving Store
- The Ferndale Friendship Community Garden
- Family Funds
- Connect Ferndale
- The Family Meals Project
- The Volunteer Mobilization Center
- The Severe Weather Shelter

We were supported in 2021 by the following generous donors:



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Outcomes and Impacts 2021



Over 3,000 community members served

108 volunteers donated time energy



Over 3,600 volunteer hours contributed

\$173,000 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, “shop” for clothing, apply for a job, or get help with accessing community resources. The facility is small but houses a clothing bank, a lobby, and an area for job search.



The Center continues to use rigid COVID safety protocols and was able to provide in-person services for the duration of 2021. The Resource Center provided over 2,121 instances of service for a variety of needs such as job search assistance, resource referral, housing, utility payments, health care and more, gas, bus, shower, and laundry vouchers, telephone and computer use, hygiene items, and snacks. Seventeen volunteers donated a total of 1,271 hours of service. The clothing bank distributed a total of 21,095 pieces of clothing. Additionally, we were able to donate over 33,000 items of clothing to the Ferndale Band Boosters for their fundraising efforts, in addition to donations to Homes Now, Serenity Outreach Services, and the Ferndale School District.

The Resource Center was supported by the incredible people of Ferndale, whose generosity with clothing, food, household and hygiene items, and cash donations went directly to the people who needed it. We were also supported by grants from the City of Ferndale, The Jerry H Walton Foundation, the Whatcom Community Foundation.

Flood Relief- a temporary service in 2021

Widespread flooding in Whatcom County brought destruction across North County in November of 2021. Flooding occurred two separate times, punctuated by extreme rain, winds, and cold weather. The impacts were high, and while Ferndale was spared major downtown flooding, areas east and west of downtown flooded, as well as many areas along the river to the north and south of Ferndale proper, including areas of the Lummi Nation. Many households were impacted, with some families being displaced from their homes, and many of our houseless neighbors having all their belongings swept away.

The Resource Center responded immediately to this crisis. During the flooding, we kept our doors open (except for voluntary evacuation days) so that residents could access the clothing bank and other resources. We staffed an emergency evacuation shelter at Ferndale High School on the west side of town and partnered with Good News Fellowship on the east side to offer shelter there. We managed an incredible amount of donated food, blankets, clothing, and more that community members brought to the high school in service of their neighbors.

In the two weeks following the flooding, we sent groups of volunteers out on foot to flood-impacted areas to go door to door to inform and connect people to resources. We compiled a list of impacted

areas to share with City officials. We supported debris removal efforts by connecting households to both Samaritan's Purse and Mennonite Disaster Recovery Services and paid for the installation of dumpsters in key areas (after City support for this service had ended). We worked closely with City and County officials to share information and make sure the impacted people we worked with were connected to all available resources.

On top of this, we were able to provide impacted households with a small grant to help cover basic necessities until FEMA and other help arrived. This was available in large part due to the fundraising work of the Whatcom Community Foundation and included donations from The Locker Room and generous Ferndale community members. Here's a look at what we accomplished:

- Total number of households assisted: 91
- Total dollars distributed for community support: \$93,883.69
 - Visa gift cards for basic needs- \$10,000
 - Laundry support- \$670.85
 - Garbage/Dumpster support- \$1740
 - Supplies (cleaning and other)- \$580.89
 - Direct support to households- \$80,891.95
 - 71 grants distributed
 - Typical grant size: \$1500 (depending on needs)
 - Paid for things like hotel stays, materials for repair, food and other basic necessities, cleaning supplies, reimbursement for repair work, and more
- A team of four volunteers donated 493 hours to this project. We are so grateful for their tireless work during the flood event and the months that followed.

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 help with City of Ferndale water/sewer bills for Ferndale families that were negatively impacted by COVID-19. Families can apply online or in-person for assistance. All payments are made directly to the City of Ferndale's Utility Billing Clerk.

The need for this assistance continued throughout 2021. What began as a short-term program has become a vital resource for families struggling to catch up after the impacts of the pandemic. This year, the Utility Fund raised an additional \$20,000 and served 100 Ferndale households, providing \$30,372.55 in assistance. The program has raised a total of \$76,000 since the start of COVID-19. This program wouldn't be possible without support from the City of Ferndale, the Whatcom Community Foundation, and generous donations from community members.

The Community Service Cooperative will continue to run the Utility Fund into 2022, until funding runs out. Our plan is to explore ways to make the program a permanent one, and to expand to other types of utility bills as well.

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, bar soap, feminine hygiene products, razors, diapers, and baby wipes on a weekly basis. Volunteers assemble bags with the items requested by families. The program is sustained by generous community support, including three separate faith communities that do regular supply drives and individuals who make donations of needed items.

Despite the impacts of COVID 19 during the school year, the Other Bank stayed open and served families. The Program continues to deal with the impacts of the loss of the Family Community Coordinators, including difficulty outreaching to new families. Even with these challenges, the Other Bank served 40 families in 2021, and over 6,800 items were distributed. Our team of 4 volunteers donated 205 hours to ensure services continued. The program was supported by grants from the City of Ferndale, funds from Christ Lutheran Church, and many generous individual donors.

Ferndale Family Fund

The Family Funds Program supports unhoused and low-income families with students enrolled in local schools by providing basic supplies like backpacks, clothing, transportation assistance, and other basic needs. Access to these basic items can make a real difference in a student's ability to succeed in school. Families work directly with the Program Coordinator to access these resources. In 2021, the Family Fund distributed school supplies, backpacks, water bottles, and other resources to over 150 Ferndale families, and helped families access important community resources like holiday meal and gift programs.



The Family Funds Program had several significant donors in 2021, including Metrie, a local manufacturing company, and the Whatcom County School Retiree's Association. The support of these and many other organizations, and individuals in the community, provided basic needs support to the students and families in Ferndale that need it the most.

Volunteer Spotlight- Kim Bunch

Kim loves building relationships with families, connecting families with resources, and ensuring students have the supports they need to help them succeed. For the last two years, Kim has served as the Volunteer Program Coordinator the Family Funds program. In her professional life, Kim is the Homeless Liaison for the Ferndale School district, and in the regular course of her work, assists families who need a little extra boost to get them where they need to be.



“I really enjoy collaborating with community partners to maximize access to and distribution of resources. We have some fantastic partners in Ferndale who are really generous and it’s an honor to steward the resource they provide for our most vulnerable families.”

In her spare time, she has done many other volunteer gigs as well. She helped with the Ferndale Community Meal, served as a shopper for the Other Bank, did outreach with Salt on the Street, and has taken nearly a dozen trips to Honduras in service of Orphanage Emmanuel.

Volunteers like Kim, with a mind and heart for community work, make our programs possible. We are so grateful to Kim for her time and talents, and for her willingness to serve her neighbors for the long-term.

The Severe Weather Shelter Pilot Program

In summer 2021, Ferndale Community Service Cooperative board members began exploring options for an emergency winter shelter closer to home, which led to the creation of the Ferndale Severe Weather Shelter Pilot Program. This program fills the critical need for a safe, warm place to sleep during severe weather events that could otherwise be life threatening. The Shelter partnered with two churches, United Church of Ferndale and Chris Lutheran Church and received \$3,000 in funding from the City of Ferndale to be able to run from November 2021 – March 2022.

The shelter’s doors opened in response to flooding on November 15th and supported flood efforts by operating an evacuation shelter at Ferndale High School for three nights before moving to its regular location. The winter of 2021 was unseasonably cold, and freezing weather and snow picked up in December and the Shelter was able to respond to the need. By the end of 2021 we had recruited nearly 40 volunteers who put in hundreds of hours at the shelter, staying open for 15 days, serving seven individuals. Several guests chose to stay regularly. The Shelter will remain on standby through the end of March, when we will reassess the pilot program, with the hopes of it becoming a staple program serving our most vulnerable neighbors when they have nowhere else to go.

The Holiday Giving Store

The Ferndale Holiday Giving Store began in 2003 to brighten the holidays for the children of low-income families in Ferndale. We believe that parents and guardians know best what their children would like most for the holidays and we provide them with the opportunity to choose gifts for them. The Holiday Giving Store is 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.

In 2021, with the help of our community, we were able to serve 434 children from 152 families. It was the second year of our very successful “Fill the Trailer” event in early December that allowed the community a COVID-safe outdoor drop-off opportunity for gifts. Several Giving Tree locations at businesses all around Ferndale were able to join us again in 2021 as they were able to be fully open. These businesses and their patrons really showed their generosity: Locker Room Fitness, Grocery Outlet, Woods Coffee, Gym Star, Ferndale WECU, The Mail Stop, Ferndale City Hall, Mt. Baker Lanes, and Star Rentals. Ferndale School District staff also helped the Store by collecting gifts, donating money, and making sure families in need were connected to our program. The Store is also supported by generous donations from the Ferndale Kiwanas, The Bedlington Family Foundation, SuperFeet, The Ferndale Turkey Trot, Billy Slesk Insurance, Workskiff Inc., St. Mary's Guild, and the many individuals who donated.

The Ferndale Holiday Giving Store relies on volunteers to run smoothly and begins every fall with a small core group who start with planning. During operation, volunteers set the Store up, and also serve as personal shoppers to parents, while keeping the Store organized and stocked. Finally, additional volunteers come in when the Store closes to pack up and clean the space that is donated to us. 70 volunteers donated 300 hours of time to make the Store a success.

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.

2021 Garden membership included 25 adults and 16 children. Dedicated volunteers contributed over 1200 hours of time to a variety of projects around the garden this year including painting and pressure washing the patio furniture, washing and staining the gazebo and display case, soil testing and analysis, establishing a new compost area, and adding a gravel border for the tool shed. Other volunteers completed basic gardening maintenance tasks like weeding, care of the herb garden, mowing and weed whacking.



Each year the garden hosts several shared growing patches where gardeners contribute labor and share harvests. This year's patches included garlic, pumpkins, and both winter and summer squash. Additionally, the Garden Hoop House got a major overhaul, with new framing, plastic sheeting, and a new door. Volunteers donated a total of 80 hours to this project.

The First Fruits Garden had a very successful year, donating 6,623 pounds of fresh produce to the Ferndale Food Bank. Manager of the First Fruits Garden, Greg Hart, and his team donated 500 hours of time sowing, weeding, maintaining, and harvesting.

The Garden was supported by a variety of community members and businesses. These donors include the Ferndale Food Bank, the City of Ferndale, Portal Way Farm and Garden and individuals in the community.

Volunteer Spotlight- Karen Nipges

Karen is a natural born project manager. Her skill for organizing tasks and people, taking things step by step, and being a dependable and dedicated worker served her well in her career. And she brought these skills to the Resource Center as well.

Karen started volunteering with the Other Bank in 2014, and while she was there she noticed the very small amount of clothing that was available in the Resource Center. “It breaks my heart to see people without proper clothing, and I knew we could do more.” She started following local garage sales and visiting on their last day to offer to take away whatever didn’t sell as a donation to the Resource Center. “It brought in more clothing but also let people know we were in the community.”



Donations started coming in more regularly, and Karen took over managing the Clothing Bank at the Resource Center. Soon, the Center needed a permanent clothing donation bin to handle the volume from the community. Now Karen manages a team of 3 who work each week to process, sort, fold, and organize thousands of pounds of clothing, accessories, housewares, and hygiene items.

“I have always felt blessed in my life, and I want to share whatever I can with people.” We thank Karen for her efforts to grow this valuable community resource, and the leadership she provides to keep it going.

Connect Ferndale



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 mission of Connect Ferndale is to cultivate community growth and connection through civic participation and community building to advance inclusion, honor diversity, and encourage participation for everyone in our community.

This year Connect Ferndale (CF) accomplished many of its goals:

- Creating an online community: With a website in place and a Facebook community of 863 followers, CF posts weekly to connect and inspire.

- Successful book club project: 8 community members participated in a book club studying the book *So You Want To Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo. The group discussions were facilitated by Christina Michele.
- Successful film screening project: In November of 2021, CF hosted a film screening of the film *Revitalizing Cultural Knowledge of the Nooksack River* by Lummi filmmaker Althea Wilson. A discussion with a panel of 12 distinguished members of Lummi Nation followed the screening, which was held virtually due to concerns of COVID 19 and severe weather.
- Growing membership: CF membership doubled from 21 to 43 in 2021.

Connect Ferndale continues to grow, and in 2022 plans several new projects and focus on four main areas: Community engagement, partnership with City government, policing, and education. In 2021, Connect Ferndale was supported by generous community donations and a grant from the City of Ferndale.

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. They also receive official Washington State Temporary Volunteer Worker cards.



This year the VMC supported not one but two emergencies. The November flooding required a massive community response. A team of 14 volunteers spent 130 hours processing a total of 1200 volunteers to support the efforts in Sumas and Everson. These volunteers helped with sandbagging, evacuation and rescue, debris removal and cleanup efforts and more.

COVID continued to be an emergency throughout 2021. Since being activated for this crisis in 2020, the VMC team has volunteered over 790 hours and processed 1,428 volunteers to help with COVID related needs.

A Note on The Family Meals Project

Just as important as growing, knowing when to make changes to reach better outcomes can have great impacts too. In 2021, we decided that a change would serve the Family Meals Program. Through a great connection with Miracle Food Network (MFN), a Ferndale based non-profit that provides weekly food boxes to anyone in Whatcom County, Family Meals Project will be moving their base of operations. The program will now operate as part of MFN, continuing to offer tips and tricks for eating well on a budget, and expanding to offer cooking demos and classes at MFNs facility. We support MFN and their efforts to feed Ferndale and Whatcom County and know that the Family Meals Project will thrive in this environment. To learn more about MFN and how to support their work, visit www.miraclefoodnetwork.org.

Looking Ahead: The Vision for 2022 and Beyond

The Ferndale Community Service Cooperative has served Ferndale and the surrounding area by being a place for community groups to connect, be supported, and grow their work. As a cooperative, we allowed for collaboration and mutual benefit that resulted in great impacts over the years. The incredible number of volunteers and number of hours dedicated to this work over the last 21 years speaks to the generosity, grit, and caring of this community.

2021 has been a year of reflection. Still slowed due to the pandemic, the Cooperative Board has had time to reflect on what we do and the ways we do it. Abundant funding resources due to the pandemic have also allowed us to stretch and consider new ways to serve. An incredibly significant investment in our programs by the City of Ferndale (\$400K approved in November 2021) gives us an opportunity to make substantive change.

In 2022, we will shift away from the Cooperative model. This model (separate programs coming together to work together) has served us well, but we feel that we have reached the limit of what we can achieve with all-volunteer energy and separate (though collaborative) efforts. Instead, we will adopt a Community Service Center model. All of our existing programs will continue to operate, but will join as one organization, supported by an Executive Director. We will continue to count on our amazing Volunteer Program Coordinators to lead each program, and the volunteers who support the work. These volunteers and Program Coordinators will have the support of an Executive Director and Board who will set the direction, provide clear structure, and fundraise to ensure programs continue and expand.

We will also revamp our mission, vision, and values, rebrand, and develop a strategic plan focused in the first year on solidifying our offerings and building a funding plan. In future years we will grow strategic services that support the most vulnerable in our community. We feel confident that we are already doing the right work. The task now is to create a structure that supports it and allows for room to grow.

We are excited about the opportunities before us. We feel obligated to keep bringing quality services and programs that enhance our community, and to be good stewards of the resources that have come to us. We value each donation, each pair of shoes, each shirt, each dollar, each hygiene item, and hour of service. We are humbled by the trust placed in us, and we are committed to delivering to, for, and with community.

Thank you for the continued opportunity to serve.