



Ferndale Community Services

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

www.ferndalecs.org





Ferndale Community Services

ANNUAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **2023**

2,000

individuals served through
our programs

7,325

instances of service

171

volunteers donated their
time and talents

7,856

volunteer hours donated

\$663K

dollars raised for programs

Key Accomplishments

- Served 993 unique, in-person visitors at the Resource Center- 136 of which identified as being unhoused and from Ferndale or North Whatcom County.
- Provided 3,911 instances of service at the Resource Center, including clothing, hygiene items, transportation support, and 1:1 assistance with the Community Resource Navigator.
- Supported 53 Ferndale households with water bill assistance amounting to \$24,510.24 in direct bill payments.
- The Other Bank provided a monthly supply of hygiene items to 450 families, a 140% increase over the previous year.
- Added an unhoused mobile outreach program, Bridge 2 Services, and served 52 people with mobile navigation.
- Purchased a box truck and held 130 unhoused outreach events across Whatcom County.
- Provided shelter in severe weather for 58 individuals.
- Grew and donated just over 7,000 lbs of fresh produce for the Ferndale Food bank
- Provided Christmas gifts for 600 children from 235 families in Ferndale.

Our mission is to understand and alleviate unmet needs by providing resources and connection. We envision a thriving community where everyone is supported and valued, and their basic needs are met.



Fitting the Pieces Together

This year feels like puzzle pieces coming together. As an organization, we are refining our identity and learning more about who we are and what the community needs. We have learned that the Resource Center is truly a community hub for connection. People come to shop the clothing bank and pick up hygiene items, but they also come to get important social interaction, check in,

and hang out. We learned that homelessness is very prevalent and hidden in Ferndale and North Whatcom County. As we continue to be present at the Resource Center and continue to do outreach, we have learned just how many folks are struggling with housing and living unhoused. We have also learned about the financial need in our community. The struggle to make ends meet is real and impacting so many.

We also see things clicking. Community members are ready to help each other and show up for each other. We have learned that when we ask, Ferndale answers. Our incredible community is so generous, with both time and donations. We have witnessed strangers being present for those who are struggling and encouraging each other. We see a literal garden growing actual tons of fresh produce that gets donated to those in need. We have local business partners who donate funds for events and host boxes for drives. We see an army of volunteers, across all of our programs, who give their time and genuine care to the tasks at hand. We are honored to work in and maintain spaces in which people help people, caring energy is exchanged, and everyone walks away feeling valued and valuable.

Those are the pieces that fit the best. On the surface our work looks like it's about giving to people in need, but a deeper understanding of what we do is rooted in connection. It's rooted in seeing and validating each and every person, including ourselves. We are all worth a community of care and support. We are all worth time and focused attention. We are all worth shelter and having our basic needs met. These are the pieces that we have identified in 2023, and the pieces that seem to be fitting and locking together. And we can't do it all ourselves, so we find other organizations who contribute their pieces, and pretty soon the puzzle is becoming a clear picture.

We hope this report offers an opportunity for our readers to understand more about who Ferndale Community Services is, what we do, and how we do it. We also know that the numbers, statistics, and stories shared here are real people and our neighbors. And that the real value in the work represented here is the connections we make, the hope we tend, and the space we create to be in community together.



Sara O'Connor
Sara O'Connor
Executive Director

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We are thankful to the many businesses and organizations that support our work!



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The Ferndale Community Resource Center

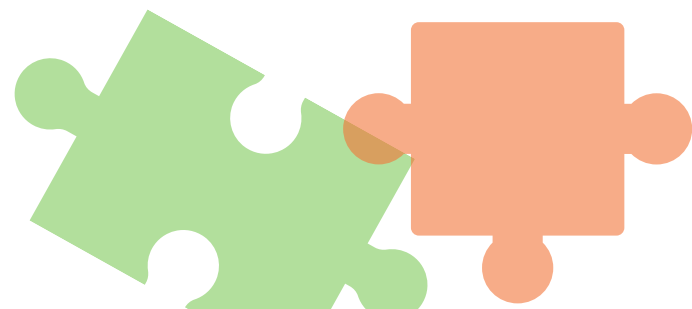
Located at 5694 Second Avenue, the Community Resource Center provides everyone with access and referrals to available assistance programs in the community, as well as direct services such as snacks, hygiene items, clothing and household goods, vouchers for showers, gas, and laundry, bus tickets, water bill assistance, and a warm cup of coffee. The Resource Center is staffed by the Program Coordinator, the Community Resource Navigator, and a team of caring 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 navigating community resources. The facility houses a clothing bank, a lobby, a kids area, and an area for job search.



In 2023, the Resource Center assisted 993 unique, in-person visitors and provided 3,911 instances of service. We provided a total of 948 bus passes, 278 gas cards, and 499 laundry vouchers to meet community needs. Through our continuing partnership with United Church of Ferndale, we referred just over 50 people in need of a shower to the church, where they can also do a load of laundry. In December, through a grant from the Whatcom Health and Community Services Department, we purchased a brand new commercial grade washer and dryer for the church, to ensure dependable availability of this valuable service.

It's important to note that of the 993 visitors we served, 159 identified as unhoused. Our definition of unhoused includes people who are sleeping outside, sheltering in a vehicle, or living in an RV without basic services like running water or consistent electricity. It also includes people who are unstably housed, meaning they aren't on the lease and could lose their housing at any moment (otherwise known as couch surfing). The majority of these unhoused individuals, 136, identified as being from Ferndale or North Whatcom County.

Our Clothing Bank clothed 2,298 people, and our volunteers sorted, sized and folded over 105,000 pieces of clothing. 100% of this clothing was donated by our generous community. We donated 27,700 items of clothing to the Ferndale Band Boosters, who used it to raise \$6,000 to support music programs. We shared surplus clothing with other partners, including the Ferndale School District and Lummi Community Services. Through donations of housewares, we were able to support 22 newly housed individuals with supplies they needed to set up their place.



The Ferndale Community Resource Center

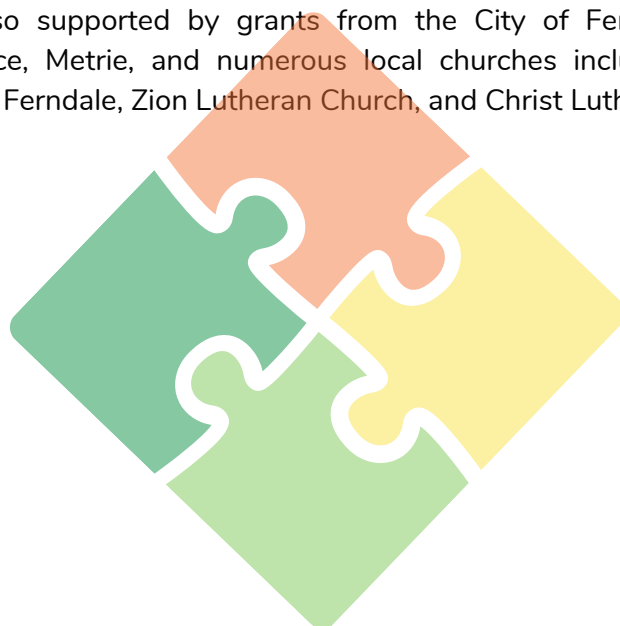
A total of 37 individuals worked directly with our Community Resource Navigator on issues including housing, transportation, applying for benefits, access to medical care, and more. The Navigator supports individuals in setting goals, finding resources, and practicing self-advocacy skills. Housing is the most frequent barrier people ask for assistance with, and it's one of the most challenging goals to achieve. In 2023, four clients we worked with found housing.

The Community Utility Fund provides assistance with City of Ferndale water and sewer bills. In 2023, we supported 53 Ferndale households, including 96 adults and 106 children, with \$24,510.24 in direct bill payments, in many instances averting or reversing shut off. The Utility Fund is funded by a generous grant from the City of Ferndale.

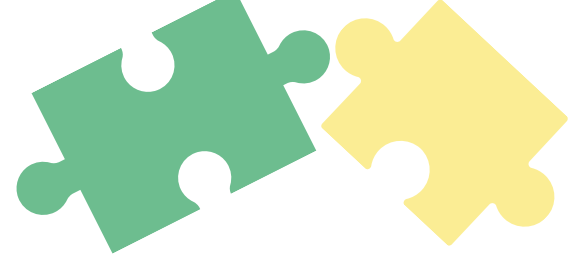
The Other Bank is our hygiene distribution program and it grew by over 200%, serving a total of 450 households and providing over 58,000 individual hygiene items. We served 822 adults, 61 of whom were seniors, and 582 children, ensuring these families had essential toiletries like shampoo, toilet paper, toothbrushes, diapers, and menstrual products. This program is open to anyone living in North Whatcom County.

A dedicated team of staff and volunteers keep the Resource Center clean, stocked, and open, and provide friendly, supportive service to each person who walks through the doors. Our 17 volunteers provided 1,740 hours of service to staff the front desk, sort clothing, and receive and distribute donations.

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, Washington State Department of Commerce, Metrie, and numerous local churches including St. Joseph Catholic Church, United Church of Ferndale, Zion Lutheran Church, and Christ Lutheran Church.



Bridge 2 Services

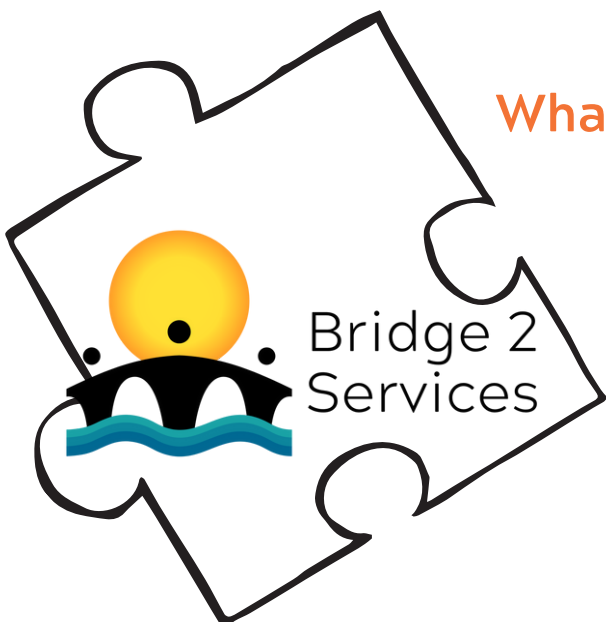


Bridge 2 Services is a direct outreach program that focuses on unhoused individuals and families. Launched in 2020 by an intrepid group of volunteers and led by Lorelei Bowers, B2S had already established itself as an effective and impactful outreach program, serving mostly camps in the Bellingham area. Early in 2023, B2S leadership approached FCS about fiscal sponsorship, and in July B2S became an official program of FCS. In a very short amount of time B2S grew and dramatically increased its ability to serve the unhoused community across Whatcom County.

Bridge 2 Services serves by establishing relationships with our community's most vulnerable residents, many of whom have given up on systemic help. Our staff and volunteers provide triage items like a sleeping bag or clothing to start building a relationship. Consistent contact with these individuals leads to strong relationships and a new willingness to engage in systems of support. Our role is to connect ready people to these systems so that they can work on changing their circumstances. This requires persistence and consistency, and a willingness to meet people where they are.

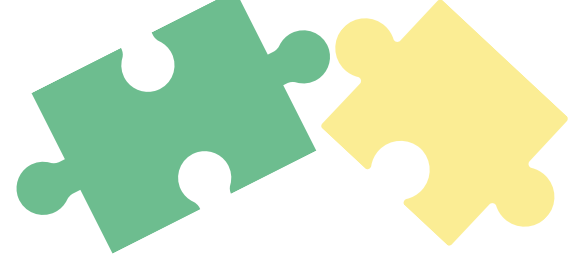
Here are some accomplishments from 2023:

- Received a \$80,000 grant from the Department of Commerce for youth focused outreach.
- Purchased a box truck to increase mobile service offerings.
- Hired a Youth Peer Outreach worker to work directly with unhoused youth.
- Increased the size and frequency of outreach events called Trailhead Markets, including other service providers and bringing more needed services directly to campers.
- Established regular outreach routes in Blaine, Ferndale, Everson, Sumas, and East county to connect with unhoused individuals and families in those areas.
- Added regular Trailhead Market events in Blaine, Kendall, and Everson, offering Other Bank from the truck to reach more families in North and East county.
- Partnered with Lighthouse Mission Ministries to bring the Shower Connect truck to campers in Bellingham.



What is Trailhead Market?

Trailhead Markets are events that provide a unique way to connect with unhoused and low-income individuals. They are “markets” where everything offered is free. Folks can get clothing, hygiene supplies, hand warmers, water, and-most importantly- connect with staff and volunteers so that when they are ready to engage in services, we can help them.



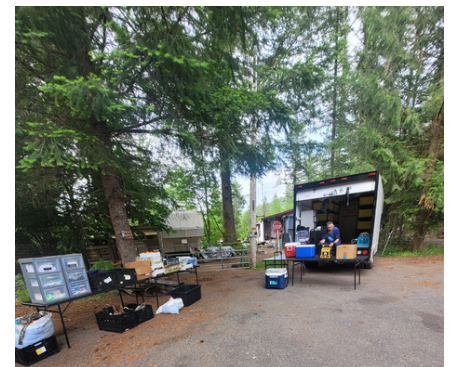
Bridge 2 Services

Additionally, Bridge 2 Services increased partnerships with other Whatcom County organizations. We are grateful to the following partners for working with us to bring needed service directly to unhoused individuals and families:

- Whatcom County Department of Health and Community Services, in particular the GRACE and LEAD programs
- Lummi Community Services
- Unity Care
- Community Assistance Program of Blaine
- A Watered Garden of Everson
- Opportunity Council in Bellingham and East County
- Project Hope of Lynden
- Immigrant Referral and Information Services (IRIS)
- The Bridge of Birch Bay
- And many others!

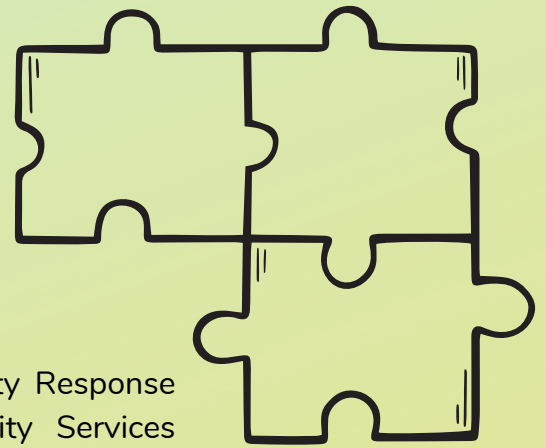
Bridge 2 Services is supported by the Washington State Department of Commerce and an army of generous donors who provide financial support, clothing, critical supplies, and their valuable time to partner in the outreach efforts. A group of 16 dedicated volunteers attend Trailhead Markets, make deliveries to grateful campers, and take time to connect with and provide messages of hope and love to our community's most vulnerable neighbors.

In 2023, we provided Navigation services to 52 individuals, 25 of whom were homeless youth. 27 individuals that we worked with moved from homelessness to housing, the majority of which, 25, were youth or young adults. We enrolled 50 households in Other Bank via mobile services, and provided 130 trailhead market events in 7 locations across Whatcom County serving approximately 265 people.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Whatcom County Response Systems Division



Bridge 2 Services has been partnering with the Whatcom County Response Systems Division, a department of the Health and Community Services Department, for the last 2 years. The partnership includes cooperation with several programs:

- The GRACE and LEAD programs- These programs provide intensive case management for individuals who are high utilizers of the hospital and emergency services (GRACE) and involved in the criminal justice system (LEAD).
- Syringe Services Program- SSP provides nurse-managed needle exchange and access to testing, counseling, medical care and referrals to detox and treatment.



“Partnering with Bridge 2 Services has allowed the Response Systems Division to provide care to vulnerable populations who may otherwise go unnoticed in small towns, rural areas, homeless encampments and in vehicles.

Their robust outreach program and ability to connect with these populations allows us that first contact with a person in need and provides continuity of care through coordination of our services. We deeply appreciate the work they do in Whatcom County and are fortunate to partner with them.”

- Lacey MCCarley, Response Systems Special Programs Manager

Staff from both the GRACE and LEAD programs regularly attend Trailhead Markets with B2S, connecting with established clients and making new connections. They also use the Resource Center as a meeting point to connect with Ferndale and North County clients. SSP partners with B2S monthly, to help ensure these harm reduction services get to unhoused neighbors in camps.

“In this past year, we have had a chance to partner closely with B2S to better serve our unhoused neighbors and build meaningful connections throughout the county,” said Malora Christensen, Response Systems manager. “Ferndale Community Services plays a critical role in connecting Whatcom County residents to support services and care coordination. We are incredibly grateful for the vision, creativity and grit that FCS brings to this work.”



The Ferndale Severe Weather Shelter

The Ferndale Severe Shelter opens when specific weather conditions are met and fills the critical need for a safe, warm place to sleep during weather that could otherwise be life threatening. FCS partners with two churches to host the Shelter, United Church of Ferndale, the primary location, and Christ Lutheran Church, which serves as a backup location in case of a power outage. The Shelter's main site offers several different spaces for sleeping, a kitchen, two restrooms, and access to showers and laundry facilities.

The Severe Weather Shelter operates from November to March each winter, so this report reflects that time period. In the 22-23 season, the Shelter served a total of 58 individuals, averaged 11 guests per night, and was open for a total of 42 nights. Thirty-five volunteers donated just over 1,100 hours of time to keep the doors open. The program received funding from the Whatcom County Health and Community Services Department and the Washington State Department of Commerce to hire seven on-call staff to coordinate and operate the Shelter.



We use tables to create individual space to give our guests some privacy. Each a space has a deluxe cot with bedding.



New washer and dryer we purchased in partnership with United Church of Ferndale and that Whatcom Health and Community Services Department.

The Ferndale Community Garden



The Ferndale Community Garden has been offering a place to grow food since 2008. The Garden provides 24 garden plots and ten 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.

2023 Garden membership included 14 households, the majority of which rented multiple plots. Dedicated volunteers contributed over 150 hours of time to a variety of projects around the Garden this year, including basic gardening maintenance tasks like weeding, care of the herb garden, mowing and weed whacking. At the start of the 2023 season, we welcomed a group of volunteers from Superfeet who helped us move an impressive 15 yards of soil into our beds. And later we welcomed another group from Seeking Health who helped us replace deer fencing on three sides of the garden. Additions to the Garden this year included three waist high, metal garden beds so that folks with mobility challenges have a plot to rent, and solar powered sonic mole deterrent spikes to help control this common garden pest.

The First Fruits Garden had a record year, donating just over 7,000 pounds of fresh produce to the Ferndale Food Bank. Manager of the First Fruits Garden, Greg Hart, and his team donated 700 hours of time sowing, weeding, maintaining, and harvesting.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

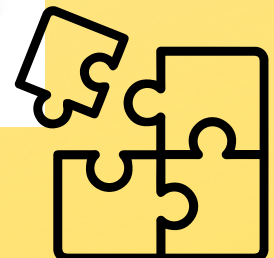
United Church of Ferndale

United Church of Ferndale has a long history of service to the community. Hosting the Community Meal and Interfaith Coat Drive and Distribution for many years, providing “Blessing Boxes.” publicly accessible boxes containing food and socks, and being a open and affirming congregation that is inclusive of all people, regardless of the gender expression, UCF’s congregation has demonstrated their commitment to community service for many years.



For the last three years, Ferndale Community Services has partnered with United Church of Ferndale closely to support neighbors in need in our city. The formal partnership began in 2020, when the church agreed to host the Severe Weather Shelter, as it has every year since. Additionally, in 2021 they converted a small closet into a shower and laundry room, which they opened to the public, allowing unhoused and low-income community members a place to take shower and do a load of laundry for free.

“United Church of Ferndale sees part of our mission as working together to build stronger communities and relationships. We don't always have to operate alone, or reinvent the wheel,” says Pastor Joel Aosved. “It's our pleasure to work alongside FCS to provide a space for folks to take a shower and do some laundry and to stay during Severe Weather.”





The Holiday Giving Store

The Ferndale Holiday Giving Store brightens 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, so 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 clothing items like hooded sweatshirts and pajamas. This year donations were used to purchase gifts for teenagers when our gift donations were not enough to provide for that age group.

In 2023, with our generous community's help, we served over 600 children from 235 families. Several local businesses supported the Store by hosting giving trees as collection points for their patrons to donate: Locker Room Fitness, Grocery Outlet, Capstone Physical Therapy, Ferndale WECU, The Mail Stop, Ferndale City Hall, Mt. Baker Lanes, Haggen's, Star Rentals and the CHS Northwest Store. Ferndale School District staff also helped the Store by collecting gifts, donating money, and ensuring families in need were connected to our program. Many church congregations around town also gathered gifts for the Store, and Ferndale Christ the King Church has donated their facility for many years. The Store is also supported by charitable donations from the Ferndale Kiwanis, The Bedlington Family Foundation, the Ferndale Police Association, The Ferndale Turkey Trot, Billy Slesk Insurance, Workskiff Inc., St. Mary's Guild, Murry Chiropractic, and many individual donors. In 2023, Haggen chose the Holiday Giving Store as one of their Holiday Toy Drive recipients. Customers could make donations at the register of the Ferndale store through the month and know they were helping a local organization. As a result, Holiday Giving Store will be receiving an incredible gift of \$15,000 from this partnership.

The Holiday Giving Store relies on volunteers to run smoothly and begins every fall with a small core group that starts with planning. During operation, volunteers set the Store up, serve as personal shoppers for parents while keeping the Store organized and stocked, and pack up and clean the space when the Store closes. This year local businesses sent volunteers to help, including Whatcom Land Title and Ferndale Capstone Physical Therapy.



Connect Ferndale

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.



In 2023, Connect Ferndale focused efforts on a variety of community projects to meet this mission. These projects included:

- Continuation of the Ferndale History Walk- This project, developed in partnership with Cece White, a WWU History student, took guests on a 1.7-mile loop of Ferndale, stopping along the way to talk about some of Ferndale’s lesser-known history, including the significant impacts of many populations of color. 32 guests participated in three walks over the summer.
- Chardi Kala Dinners- Connect Ferndale co-sponsored and co-hosted of two events in Whatcom County. The first was a special presentation at the Ferndale Multi-Cultural Fair at Ferndale High School. Guests were treated to presentation by Lummi Artists Swil Kanim and Dan Friday. The second was a dinner and presentation at Congregation Beth Israel in Bellingham. The event included an opportunity for Jewish and non-Jewish community members to connect and share a meal and traditions.
- Gathering for Peace and Support- This event created a space to intentionally grieve together for the many areas of suffering our community is experiencing, including the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and the local fentanyl crisis, particularly holding up Lummi Nation. The Gathering included music by Swil Kamin and JP Falcon Grady, poetry, and speakers.

The Volunteer Mobilization Center

The Volunteer Mobilization Center 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.



While there weren’t any disasters in 2023, the VMC was busy supporting our local community. We registered volunteers for Ski to Sea, recruited members and shared disaster preparedness materials at several Safety Fairs. In conjunction with CERT, we supported the Tri-Annual Airport Recertification by recruiting 51 volunteers to act as passengers and victims of a plane crash. In total this resulted in 272 volunteer hours.

The Road Ahead

We know that this is the right work, at the right time. And we also know that our focus on Ferndale and North Whatcom County is the right place. So what's next?

Our first priority is sustainability. We want Ferndale Community Services and our programs to be here for the long haul, so the Board and staff are working hard on developing a solid financial foundation. In the coming year, we will work on growing our influence in the community, so that anyone who wants to receive service, contribute, partner, or get involved knows who we are and what we do. We will also focus on building sustainable sources of funding, a challenge for any non-profit.

We will continue refining our existing programs, specifically by seeking and using community voice to help shape and hone our services. We are currently exploring a Safe Parking program, and continuing to research how we can have an impact on the need for housing in our community. We commit to critically reviewing our programs and policies on an annual basis, and letting community feedback guide our efforts.

Finally, we will continue to create opportunities for community members to connect. In 2024, we hope to host a free community event, and expand our partnership with other providers to increase community access to services beyond our own. Providing resources AND connection is part of our mission statement, and we intend to keep centering connection.

“All things are connected like the blood that unites us. We do not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.” ~Chief Si'ahl (Seattle)

