

Stories from the Field

At Northwest Harvest, we know that a world without hunger is possible. We see progress towards this future every day – progress made possible by our committed staff and volunteers, our food bank, meal program and school partners, advocates working for positive policy change, and by our growing community of donors.

May 2021

Hunger isn't just the absence of food; it's the absence of justice

Building equity is fundamental to ending hunger. Northwest Harvest recognizes that poverty and hunger are rooted in systemic oppression, and we refuse to be complicit in perpetuating institutional injustices that sustain a racist society.

We also recognize that systemic inequities continue to exist because often the people who perpetuate them are unaware of the harm they are causing or have bought into the ideas and narratives about the world from the culture in which they were raised.

Our work starts with taking a long, hard look at ourselves. To this end, Northwest Harvest's equity team is leading us in consciousness-raising activities like all-staff trainings that are open to community partner organizations and staff-only Lunch + Learn events with equity experts and people with varied experiences and backgrounds. We have developed a

shared library of resources and created a cross-functional equity committee with representatives from each department to answer questions and trouble-shoot issues.

Our leadership is also undergoing training to ensure they understand the intricacies of power dynamics within our organization. We look forward to sharing more outcomes of this work from various departments in the future.

From a community partner who joined our Foundations of Equity training: "Please accept my deepest appreciation for bringing this resource to me and our community. It's incredible leadership and courage from your organization being shared and modeled for this community."

Read Northwest Harvest's [full equity statement on the About Us page](#) of our website.

“ We have to be historians by necessity [...] if we don't know where we came from, we don't know where we are going.



– EDWIN LINDO

Participating in History Being Created in Washington State

“ If we can create systemic, structural changes that move us toward a more equitable Washington, then people can move away from relying on food donations.

– MARY DOMBROWSKI



Mary Dombrowski, our new volunteer coordinator based in Spokane, was one of 160 folks who participated in Northwest Harvest’s Hunger Action Day on February 12—a day of advocacy and training for Northwest Harvest’s anti-hunger priorities.

Mary was energized by the event. “It was wonderful to gather with folks from every county. I got to hear what they’re passionate about and watch them get excited as they learn more about the legislative process.” She was especially enthusiastic to watch the free and reduced lunch program go to vote—and pass!—on the House floor. Subsequently, this program has been signed into law—representing a huge win for hunger advocates across the state.

The free and reduced lunch program now makes lunches free for more students, eliminating the copay that made this program inaccessible for many Washington families.

Mary calls out the connection between advocacy and providing food: “If we can create systemic, structural changes that move us toward a more equitable Washington, then people can move away from relying on food donations. Our goal is to ensure people aren’t hungry in Washington state. The best way to do that is to make sure people have enough to provide for themselves and their families.”

Want to hear more about our advocacy work and raise your voice to fight for food as a human right? Check out the [advocacy page of our website](#).

Treating Others More Like Family and the Planet More Like Home

Northwest Harvest partners with incredible organizations that are seeding food justice across Washington. One of those organizations is Growing Neighbors – a Spokane initiative of Shadle Park Presbyterian Church that brings local organizations together to grow food and community and encourage healthier lifestyles.

“Growing Neighbors collaborates with a variety of community partners to help neighbors grow healthy food and relationships,” explains John Edmondson, who started his work with Growing Neighbors about four years ago. John has since garnered the support of more than 100 organizations including Northwest Harvest, the local fire department, libraries, and the YWCA. “We’re cultivating environments where neighbors treat each other more like family and the planet more like home.”

Pushing through the difficulties presented by the pandemic, Growing Neighbors continues to grow their innovative activities in the community. They were recently awarded two grants from the Presbyterian Mission Agency and United Way Spokane to expand programming, and their Little Free Pantries program was [featured this March](#) by KHQ Local News. The Growing Neighbors team also [presented a new bicycle-powered food delivery and community composting program to the Spokane City Council](#).

“As we plant, grow, harvest, share, preserve, and compost local, organic food, we build a more healthy, sustainable, and equitable community and inspire neighborly associations beyond food,” says John. Learn more about [Growing Neighbors](#) and ways to get involved by visiting their [website](#).



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The Foundations of Community— Kitsap Credit Union

Eighty-seven years ago, seven blue-collar workers saw a need for a safe, trustworthy place for their co-workers, family members, and neighbors to save for their dreams. They took their \$34 to form a financial cooperative, now called Kitsap Credit Union (KCU). This not-for-profit financial cooperative serves more than 116,000 members from 16 branch offices in Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, and Pierce counties.

These determined founding members showed their commitment to the credit union philosophy of “People Helping People,” no matter their background or account balance. KCU carries on this tradition by helping to build stronger, healthier, more vibrant communities, and for powering life’s opportunities for those who live and work within them.

KCU has been a supporter of Northwest Harvest since October 2019, donating more than \$14,000! During the onset of the pandemic, KCU witnessed the economic hardship in their communities and saw how more people were relying on local food banks and food assistance programs for basic nutritional needs. So Kitsap Credit Union CEO Shawn Gilfedder reached out to Northwest Harvest to see what more KCU could do:

“We found it crucial to support our local food banks, including Northwest Harvest, in a much larger way during this challenging time. It is essential we help families struggling with food insecurity, and we knew this would be the area where we could make the most significant impact on our community.”

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the people of KCU and their continued support!



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– CEO SHAWN GILFEDDER

“Why I Give”— Meet donors Melinda and Dick

“I have a family member who was denied food in a different state because she made ‘too much money.’ Trust me, her income was at the poverty level. That made me sad and mad at the same time.”

Melinda and Dick live in the Seattle area. Before retirement, Melinda, who shared the story above, was in the fitness industry, working as the fitness director at Bellevue Athletic Club (now the Bellevue Club) before retiring.

A big reason why Melinda supports the mission of Northwest Harvest is the no-questions-asked policy for providing food, which ensures that people—like Melinda’s family member—are able to get the food they need without having to question whether they are deserving of assistance.

“We’ve supported Northwest Harvest on a smaller scale for years before I started volunteering in 2015. I enjoyed learning more about the services and working with other volunteers who sorted and packed food on a very grassroots level,” Melinda said.

Dick was also very impressed with Northwest Harvest’s ability to use food donations, volunteer support, and financial gifts to get food where it’s needed most. As a result, they decided to increase their financial support for Northwest Harvest during the pandemic. “We really appreciate the work that Northwest Harvest does and are happy to be part of it in a small, but meaningful way.”



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– DICK & MELINDA