

Southwest charity raises funds for food bank, safety net services

By Jack Rubinger
The Southwest Portland Post

Jen Wills was struggling about a decade ago. She was in the process of going through a divorce and trying to finish her undergraduate degree at Portland State while working full-time to support her children.

Wills had been a stay-at-home mom for about 12 years and had never finished her degree which impacted her earning potential. While she was managing her education, she was worried about her twins, Jack and Lola.

Fortunately, she was able to enroll the youngsters in the Head Start program at Neighborhood House.

This program offered a high-quality pre-school and enabled Wills to attend classes at Portland State University without worrying about childcare.

Jack and Lola developed much-needed social and academic skills which prepared them for kindergarten.

Head Start gave Wills the freedom to focus on work and school and have the time to be with her kids after school and care for her home while finishing her undergraduate degree.

The kids made friends in the program that continued on with them to Maplewood Elementary School. Now they are in their last year at Maplewood before going off to middle school.

Both children are doing well in school. Lola was just invited to join the talented and gifted program at Maplewood School.

All these benefits would not have been possible without the financial support offered by Neighborhood House which has been helping families and neighbors in Southwest Portland for more than 100 years.

The support of the organization contributed significantly to Wills getting to where she is now, as the human resources director of Neighborhood House with a master's in business administration and two human resources certifications.

She was thrilled to be able to come back to work for an organization that had contributed so significantly to the wellness and success of her family.

Today, Oregonians are more likely to live in poverty than they were during the peak of the Great Recession.

Forty-eight percent of single mothers and their families in Oregon experience hunger, compared to 35 percent nationally. But there are ways community members can help make a difference in the lives of struggling neighbors.

For many like Wills, Neighborhood House was a lifesaver.

Now Neighborhood House is asking for help through its annual Partnership Campaign, asking the community to consider neighbors who are struggling at this time amidst ongoing poor economic conditions and the local affordable housing crisis.

The agency is the primary organization working to assist low-income children, families and seniors in Southwest Portland, and contributions

are needed to help raise \$215,000 to sustain the agency and its many safety net services.

Among these services are the emergency food box programs, transitional housing for homeless families, and the new SOS resource center which helps people get connected with needed services.

The Partnership Campaign is Neighborhood House's annual year-end fundraising effort aimed at raising funds needed to support the agency's work in the coming year.

Approximately \$1 million of Neighborhood House's \$7 million annual budget must be raised through private, non-governmental support.

The increased demand for assistance is most apparent in Neighborhood House's emergency food box program, which is the largest pantry on Portland's west side and the Southwest distribution site for the Oregon Food Bank.

Currently, the program serves approximately 700 adults and children every month. Oregon is the only state in the nation to experience an actual increase in hunger in the years after the Great Recession (increasing from 13.5 percent in the years 2010-2012 to



A client family that Neighborhood House helped to find affordable housing and access to nutritious meals. (courtesy photo)

16 percent in the years 2011-2015).

Neighborhood House is encouraging supporters to become "PowerHouse" donors by signing up to give monthly, or quarterly, to extend their support throughout the coming year. Community members may also support the Partnership Campaign by attending the annual "Sing Your Own Messiah" concert at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church at 9750 SW Terwilliger Blvd.

The event, scheduled for Monday, Dec. 19, 7-9 p.m., will collect food and cash contributions for Neighborhood House. The Hillsdale Food Front market will also be collecting cash donations for Neighborhood House throughout the month of December.

For more information about Neighborhood House, or the Partnership Campaign, contact Development Director Mari Yerger at 503-246-1663 x2119, or myerger@nhpdx.org.

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