**Hope Street & Colville Community Church: Discerning a Calling**

The Hope Street Colville project grew out of the Called to the City Calling Community, a group formed on the conviction that the city and the church should be in partnership in serving the local community. In gatherings, group members focus on things like mapping the neighborhoods around their church buildings and forging relationships with the individuals who live in immediate proximity. Out of those practices have emerged new ministries and programs designed to fill unmet needs right on the church’s doorstep.

Hope Street Colville began with a BIG vision to construct a “mixed-income village” that included 154 homes, apartments and a common building to serve the homeless population. The project leaders, including Colville Community Church and the Hope Street organization, had already developed partnerships with the city of Colville, churches from across the denominational spectrum, local schools, and area businesses. Yet after a lot of excellent work and planning, the initial vision for the project felt too big – exceeding the capacity of the local community to deliver at the scale envisioned. In light of this, the churches in Colville and the leaders at Hope Street spent a significant amount of time discerning the path forward and made the decision to scale back the project and focus significant efforts on the homeless and housing insecure people in Colville, all of whom are known well by local aid organizations, including Hope Street.

Together with local churches and Hope Street, Whitworth’s Office of Church Engagement was able to provide $15,000 in addition to $10,000 in matching funds to donations from local churches, businesses and individuals. In total, the project received $35,000. To date the funds have been able to cover development costs for seven acres previously owned by Hope Street, including engineering, drafting, design and architectural work, and feasibility planning for an additional land swap (in partnership with the City of Colville). Funding also helped to complete the hookup costs, foundation, and final construction of a donated tiny home, which will provide one more family with shelter this year. Colville churches have also deepened their involvement with Hope Street and serving the homeless by donating hygiene kits, cleaning supplies, bottled water, and other much needed supplies.

In addition, the team was able to move forward with plans to build a 6-unit apartment which will go a long way to provide housing for the poor. Boris Borisov, coordinator for this Calling Community says, “This is an excellent example of the community dreaming big, identifying an ambitious goal to meet the need, and then discerning the small, incremental steps that can be taken today.” It can be easy to lose hope when trying to reconcile huge needs and a lack of resources in the city, but it is precisely these small tangible steps that can be the catalyst to spark additional partners from a broad spectrum of institutions to come forward and participate. The project has been visited by government, business and church leaders from around eastern Washington and north Idaho – all with the vision of replicating such a strong partnership between the city and the church to serve the local people.

**The Friendship Center: Grieving a Community’s Loss**

The Friendship Center began as a partnership between World Relief, Spokane, and a collection of local churches. The goal of the center was to create a space for refugees living in Spokane to find assistance with things like navigating bills and paperwork, learning English, studying for driver’s exams, etc., and deepen the commitment of local churches to connect with and serve refugees. In the first year, more than 200 refugees and immigrants were able to benefit from the services offered by the Friendship Center.

The Center was formed out of deep partnerships with eight key churches, First Free Methodist, Shadle Park Presbyterian, Colbert Presbyterian, Faith Bible, Christ the Redeemer, St. Aloysius, Southside and Life Center. With the financial commitment of these churches, the OCE’s Refugees & Immigrants Calling Community was able to provide matching funds to support their vision, and the Friendship Center was born. These churches also extended their sense of calling and sent volunteers from their congregations to staff the Center and provide a variety of services to those who visited. For many churches, their participation with the Friendship Center became deeply ingrained in the life of the church and fostered a deep commitment in its members. A leader at First Free Methodist said, “I wanted to get our church involved because it was evident that God was moving in this community in Spokane. I knew this experience would fulfill a call within me as a Christian, which it did, but event more it fulfilled a need I didn’t realize I had. These beautiful people have become dear friends who are now a part of me.” After the Friendship Center opened, five additional churches offered financial support to maintain the center and further its mission.

Unfortunately, the effects of COVID-19 and social distancing regulations in Washington State made running the Friendship Center nearly impossible. World Relief held onto the lease for the space for a few months, even negotiated a reduced rate for rent, but eventually the cost could no longer be justified. The funds have been repurposed to maintain the single staff person who is now helping World Relief offer these services at a distance. World Relief, the OCE, and the churches committed to this project all feel a deep sense of grief for the loss of this community space where a great many relationships had been forged.

On a brighter note, we know that the commitment of these churches to serve the refugee and immigrant community in Spokane has not been extinguished because of this set back. World Relief has maintained relationships with these churches and the personal connections between church volunteers and refugees have not been lost. There is hope that the Friendship Center will be revitalized when social distancing is no longer required. We are looking forward to that possibility!