



# Welcome Home Skagit Newsletter

## Creating Pathways to Community

### Rising Strong

We are Welcome Home Skagit. We are your friends and neighbors who live on the streets. Most of us grew up in Skagit County. We are deeply invested in our community and committed to doing our part to make our neighborhoods the best they can be.

We want our neighbors to look through our eyes and see what great people we are. We have many good ideas to contribute. What passion and respect we have for each other! Come out and stay with us awhile. You will see greatness before your eyes. Come see what unique ideas we have. This is our city too, and we want it to be the best! All we ask for is the opportunity to contribute to society. With a stable and comforting place to stay and be together, we will make this community proud to know us. We are Welcome Home Skagit!  
We are rising strong!

By Keith Johnson

### Beauty



Beauty bursting up  
through the ashes of our lives.  
  
Tender shoots  
reaching for the sky!  
  
Pedals unfolding  
lush green energy,  
enveloping buds of expectation!  
  
Pregnant with the promise  
of delight!

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Marvin Yates



Lisa Johnson



Jeffery Hill

Manning the Welcome Home Community Co-op Booth at Project Homeless Connect



Back Row: Leonardo Rivas, Curtis Steinhauer, Arlene Salt, Keith Johnson, Lisa Johnson  
Front Row: Lisette Drake, Cora Steinhauer, Jackie Crawford, Keith Anderson, Jasmine Harris, Katrina Dukepe

### Welcome Home Skagit Newsletter

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## How Can We Give Back?

I glanced his direction, passing him by to enter the Library. Checking in all the possible places, I determined that the person I was scheduled to meet had not arrived yet. Looking through the glass doorway, I could see him, still standing there, as if he was waiting for someone as well. Being a somewhat timid person, I hesitated to go talk with him. I wasn't sure, but I thought I had seen him at the cold weather shelter, recently hosted by our church. Summoning up all of my courage, I went back outside and greeted him, asking if we had met. That is where it all began!

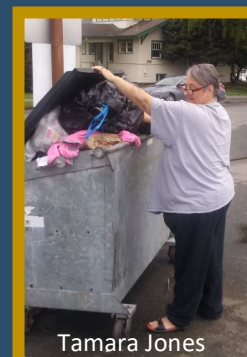
My new friend was Keith Johnson, known on the streets as Pops. He seemed eager to talk and delighted that I had approached him. As we conversed I recognized him as one of the guests who had greeted me at the shelter, expressing deep, heartfelt gratitude for a warm, dry place to sleep. I listened to his story, enjoying his ready smile and deep, resonant chuckle. In spite of his lack of housing, an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving lit up his countenance. I knew I had made a friend for life!

A few weeks after my encounter with Keith, I was sitting with him and a few other guests at a round table in the gym that was serving as a shelter. I had been reading a book about a self-managed community of people experiencing homelessness in California that was a huge success. A question was burning in my mind, but before I could ask it, Sarah Hinman and Shelly Kjos from the County came in, gathering the guests around our table. Since the County was funding the shelter, they wanted to know how they could best utilize the money that was allotted to them for the purpose of supporting those experiencing homelessness. A heated discussion ensued, with varying opinions about what was needed most. The air was crackling with a sense of excitement as guests began to realize their voices were being heard and valued. Catching my eye inquisitively, they asked, "Are these ladies for real?" I assured them that my friends from the County were absolutely for real and that the shelter guest's viewpoints were vitally important in this discussion. After all, they were the experts. They were the ones with lived experience. They knew what was most needed.

At some point, during a break in the discussion, I asked Keith my burning question. "What comes to your mind when you hear the term 'self governing?'" I was startled and amazed by his response, which was quickly echoed and built upon by the rest of the group. I would have expected them to seize upon the notion that they could make their own rules. After all, they were adults being required to follow the relatively strict guidelines established by Friendship House, the organization managing the shelter. There was none of that. Instead, within seconds after I asked the question, my friends were talking excitedly about how they could give back to the community. Visions of "Adopt a Highway" signs with the words "The Homeless" boldly printed for all to see brought giggles of delight. Eyes lit up with eager anticipation as they discussed multiple ways they could get involved in the community, making it a better place to live.

True to their vision, Keith and friends are picking up trash all over town. Multiple garbage bags have been filled and disposed of by a group of big-hearted citizens who live on the streets. Their only compensation is your gratitude. If you happen to see them on the job, take the time to stop and thank them for making our community a better place to live.

By Arlene Salt





Jeff Nelson

Sarah Vogt

# Old Friends, New Vision

Jeff Nelson was born and raised in Skagit County. He has good memories of fishing from his Dad's boat in the Puget Sound. Though he was an average student in school, he attended Skagit Valley College with a focus on Parks and Recreation. He worked in that field for five years, then spent eight years in road construction as a tester and inspector. He purchased a home and settled in. Life seemed to be going well for him.

Though Jeff appeared to be stable and secure, a growing addiction problem eventually caught up with him. With pain and regret in his voice, he sighed, "Due to my addiction with drugs, I've lost two state jobs, a house, vehicles, relationships. Today I am starting to get those things back. It's keeping me going in a better and better situation. I see myself making growth in a positive direction. If it wasn't for the shelter, I wouldn't be doing this."

Sarah Vogt walked off the streets into the shelter part-way through the season last year. Recently free from her own addictions, Sarah found her family and her purpose as she interacted with other shelter guests. With a clear vision of what is needed most, she developed and implemented a peer mentorship program. She now spends most of her waking hours interviewing her peers as part of a three step process. The first step is to identify the root cause of the housing instability each person is experiencing. Once that cause is identified, a mutually agreed upon individual plan is established. Finally, peer mentor support is made available.

With an air of decisive confidence, Sarah works with her peers to assess needs, schedule appointments, make connections, and implement the plan. Working closely with SeaMar, she sees to it that every person has a primary care physician. Many of her peers have completed, are now in, or will soon be in recovery programs, including Jeff. Others are on track to enter college. She is a virtual resource guide, connecting people with the services and organizations they need most. With a calendar of appointments and a log of actions taken, Sarah gives people the extra boost they need to stay on track with their plan. The most amazing part is that Sarah is doing all of this on a volunteer basis because she cares and knows what is needed. Watching her in action is a phenomenal experience.

The third step of Sarah's three step plan will take longer to implement. Her goal is to develop a whole team of peer mentors and support specialists who will coordinate and develop various components of the program. She is currently looking for volunteers who will coordinate employment support, transportation, appointments, recovery, and laundry.

Jeff has found the encouragement and support he needs through Sarah's program. With a satisfied smile he says, "Sarah and I have known each other for a long time on and off the streets. When I walked into the shelter and saw Sarah, I knew everything would be alright. The shelter was a safe place for me. I wasn't out there with my old friends on the streets, sofa surfing. When I got to the shelter and my friend Sarah put me into her mentorship program and did an intake interview with me, I became aware of how much my addiction was destroying my life. Even though I was clean, it was the root cause of some of my problems."

Due to the support and freedom Jeff is experiencing, he is taking a variety of positive steps to improve his life. Thanks to Sarah's friendship and Catholic Community Services, he has graduated from an in-house rehab program and is residing in an Oxford house. Like many who have gone before him, Jeff is expressing a deep sense of gratitude and a desire to give back to his community.

This is only one of many stories you, our readers, can anticipate in future volumes of this periodical. Welcome Home Skagit was formed because of people connecting with each other at a deep, heartfelt level. Our family has grown exponentially this year as we have welcomed new members, found amazing community support, and embraced the unique beauty of each individual in our midst. As we work to encourage and support each other, the resiliency and community building that strengthens all of us is bringing courage, hope and restoration to our lives. Truly when the most vulnerable among us thrive, we all thrive.

By Arlene Salt

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For more information about the Mentorship program contact Sarah Vogt:  
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## Hope

Always struggling...

Trying to reach for hope is a continuous battle,  
but hope is there if we can believe.

So never give up  
because hope can happen!

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### Upcoming Events:

#### Friday Morning Conversations:

Please join us for a community conversation where solutions are discussed and plans developed to truly create pathways to community for people experiencing housing insecurity. We meet every Friday morning from 8:30-9:30 at the Mount Vernon SDA Church, 4520 East College Way, Mt Vernon, WA

#### Sports Challenge

Basketball, Baseball, Volleyball, Soccer, you name it, we love to play. Challenge us to a match!

#### Project Dignity Banquet:

The Second Annual Project Dignity Banquet is important to us. We want it to be an enriching and momentous occasion. Therefore, the Welcome Home Skagit Board of Directors has voted to postpone this event until spring to allow more time for quality preparation and to give us the ability to focus our energy on the details involved in establishing a new organization. Stay tuned for more details at a later date.

Postage

Gratitude Corner: We, at Welcome Home Skagit, owe a huge debt of gratitude to so many amazing organizations and individuals who have contributed their time, money, support, encouragement and resources to help bring dignity, stability and value to our lives and to our community. You have repeatedly and lavishly lived out the golden rule in radiant color as you invest yourselves in us, looking beyond status and position to see us as real people with valuable contributions to make in our community.

As you have walked beside us, bringing us the encouragement, resources, and tools we need to help us stabilize and thrive, you have truly embraced us as your neighbors and loved us as you love yourselves. We cannot possibly thank you enough!

Rather than listing the multiple individuals and groups who have blessed us with their generosity, we will be featuring one or two organizations or individuals in the gratitude corner of each newsletter. You can look forward with eager anticipation as we highlight this amazing group of people. Knowing that this community is capable of such love has opened our eyes to what community truly is. Thank you for making that possible by embracing us as your family, friends and neighbors. We will be forever grateful!

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