Over the last few months, as I’ve been wrapping my arms around the many aspects of the job of Upper Valley MEND executive director, I’ve encountered many of you, the caring community members that make MEND what it is. People have approached me with congratulations in the checkout line at Dan’s Food Market, with questions about MEND on the Ski Hill bike trails, with words of encouragement at the Leavenworth Farmers Market, and with many hugs at places in between.

This level of curiosity, compassion and support is entirely consistent with what I’ve experienced since I started working with MEND in 2014. We serve the Cascade School District region, an area of about 9,000 people. Between volunteers, donors and program clients, we estimate that at least one third of the Upper Valley community uses or supports MEND services every year. We are able to have that kind of impact because this community cares.

MEND has been a community-based organization for almost 30 years. We are not alone in meeting needs, but a bridge so community members have an avenue to support each other in times of need. With that in mind, we take community input very seriously, and want to hear from you.

Our board of directors is currently working on a strategic plan for MEND, which will give us a clear direction for the future. While parts of the plan are still being explored, we know a big focus over the next few years will be a new home for the Community Cupboard by 2020. (See Bob Mark’s article on page six for more information.)

The last page of this newsletter is a survey. We want to know which community needs you believe MEND should focus on meeting, and about your hopes and dreams for the future of the Community Cupboard. Whether you are a MEND volunteer, donor, Cupboard shopper, SHARE homeowner, food bank client or an Upper Valley resident who has never heard of MEND, we want to hear from you.

As part of the Upper Valley community, you are the reason MEND exists, and your input is critically important to our future. Please take a moment to fill out the survey, either here or online at uvmend.org.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support, questions, input, time, ideas and high fives. We couldn’t do it without you.

Sincerely,
Kaylin Bettinger
Upper Valley MEND Executive Director
Jubilee celebrates one year at 900 Front Street

by Mary Rossing
Jubilee Program Manager

In June Jubilee Global Gifts celebrated one year at our new location. We are delighted at the number of returning customers and new visitors discovering Jubilee at our more-visible location. Stepping inside is akin to taking a trip around the world with the vivid colors, displays, and world market feel. Jubilee is well stocked with handmade items from around the developing world, representing more than 30 countries and thousands of artisans. Besides better visibility and accessibility, our new space has allowed us to expand lines and more creatively display our unique handmade goods.

One of the most frequently asked questions shoppers have is “how do you acquire your merchandise?” The answer is twofold. First, members of our staff are able to buy directly from artisans on a couple of buying trips per year. These are usually to Guatemala and Mexico, but also once included Nepal. These are opportunities for us to meet weavers, carvers, and jewelry makers and learn about their craft first hand. When we return, we can share these personal stories with our customers, bringing them that much closer to the artisans they are supporting.

Since we cannot travel to 30 countries regularly we also depend on Fair Trade importers working directly with artisan co-ops. Many of these dedicated business owners started their careers volunteering overseas with the Peace Corps or a faith-based foundation organization. Their desire to continue to help people has taken the form of marketing artisans’ goods in the United States. As members of the Fair Trade Federation, these businesses have been fully vetted and we can trust that artisans are treated fairly, paid well, have access to education, and that they use sustainable materials.

As always, we continue to offer a 10% discount for locals and our sales are an important source of income for Upper Valley MEND. Stop in and see us soon!

Jubilee's summer adventure
Silverwood Theme Park

by Carl Florea
Cornerstone Community Resident Manager

It is hard to believe that this summer we are celebrating our fifth anniversary at Cornerstone Community! Five years of providing a safe and loving home for our six residents. Five years of blending our residents into a surrogate family where each of us looks out for one another, each of us gives assistance and support to one another, and, like any true family, each of us enjoys and, at times, irritates one another. It has been great to see how the bonding has grown over the years. It is also a celebration of community and family in the broader sense. We believe that the residents of Cornerstone have enriched our Wenatchee community – with our work and volunteering, with our attendance at community events, our participation in local churches, and also by opening up our home to others in our community. It has been a wonderful time of growth, made all the more special by the way we have been embraced and supported by so many who have enabled Cornerstone to offer a very enriching and fulfilling life to our residents.

Each year we try to go on a special overnight outing to experience another aspect of this great world of ours, and in particular, some of what the great northwest has to offer. This summer our grand outing was to Silverwood, the amusement and waterslide park north of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. We piled in our van and headed down the road, stopping in Cashmere to pick up friends from Cornerstone, Jennifer, and her aunt Donna who came along with us. We slid down long waterslides, held on for dear life on the roller coasters, and jumped the waves in the wave pool. We spent two nights in a nearby resort with all kinds of activities, from putt-putt golf, to billiards, to swimming, to basketball. It was a wonderful experience; everyone came home excited and exhausted. This kind of special outing is a tribute to the support of the community, because it is with the support of community donations that these kinds of experiences, and many more activities throughout the year, are possible. Thank you!

New dentist finds “simple joy” in volunteering

by Dr. Ryan Busk
Free Clinic volunteer dentist

They say, “You don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone,” and I found that wisdom to be very true as I transitioned into my career in 2013. I had spent my first six years after dental school practicing public health in Okanogan, WA, working with a patient population well below the poverty line. Suddenly, working in my own private practice in Cashmere, I found myself missing the simple joy of sharing my skills with the world expecting nothing in return. So when Patty Hebert, the Upper Valley Free Clinic program manager, called and said the clinic was in need of a dentist to provide free dental evaluations I jumped at the chance.

Every month we are able to help several patients who otherwise may not have been able to access dental care. Recently we helped a young single mother who have painful impacted wisdom teeth extracted locally. With a 10-month-old baby and a full time job, she had been putting off care because the closest dental provider that accepted her insurance was located in Yakima. With the free clinic’s help, we were able to get her access to care locally so she can now attend to the important things in her life without the distraction of painful teeth. Another reason I enjoy volunteering at the clinic is the interactions I get to have with the amazing group of people that come together every week to make the clinic happen! It is inspiring and rejuvenating to be around the group of individuals who donate time and skills to improve the health of the Upper Valley’s most at-risk residents. I feel honored to be included on their team once a month and look forward to seeing all the ways we can continue to help in the Wenatchee Valley.
The future for the Meadowlark property

by Chuck Reppas past Executive Director
Upper Valley MEND board member

It has now been four months since the decision was made to shut down Meadowlark and many people have asked what will happen with the land. First, a little history: MEND purchased the property between Titus Road and Chumstick Highway in 2001, with generous donations, community loans and grant funding. In 2006 we built the 10 homes of Aldea Village on part of the land. MEND owns the rest of the undeveloped land, however there is also debt owed on the property that we must pay back. This debt includes loans and grant funding. In 2006 we received calls every week from folks looking for rentals, homeownership opportunities, or simply a place to live. These families and individuals are not always low income, but simply cannot find a place – any place – to rent or buy in Leavenworth. Development of the 23-acre Meadowlark property will help fill the extreme lack of available housing in Leavenworth even if it is not meeting the definition of “affordable”.

Thank you to the many community members who have helped push for more affordable housing in the Upper Valley. For those of you desperately hoping to see more affordable housing built in Leavenworth, please know that it remains a significant part of our mission and we will not give up working to create more.

SHARE CLT homeowners reach citizenship milestone

by Oliver Crain
SHARE Program Manager

This past year has demonstrated that home truly is the ground upon which families can put down strong roots and grow. From this solid foundation, several homeowners born in other countries have finally realized the dream of citizenship.

2016 saw three SHARE homeowners – Irma Alvarez, Ana Rosario and Maria Graciela Vizcaino – achieve their goal of becoming United States citizens. These women are originally from Mexico, but came to America seeking opportunity for themselves and their children. Irma Alvarez was naturalized in June, in ceremonies one week apart. At the naturalization ceremony held at Snowy Owl Theater on June 16, Ana and 56 other individuals, including her daughter, Becky, took the oath of citizenship. Though many did not speak English as their first language, each person taking the oath enthusiastically repeated the words that echoed off the walls of the packed theater. As the new citizens received their official certificates of naturalization, Ana was surrounded by family with tears of joy in her eyes, her goal achieved.

“I wanted to ensure that I would always be there for my family. I did not want there to be any chance that we could be separated,” Ana said when asked why she decided to become a citizen, even though she already had legal permanent resident status.

Graciela Vizcaino took the oath of citizenship barely a week after Ana. She attended a citizenship ceremony with 26 other individuals in Yakima the week following the Leavenworth ceremony.

“I feel so secure now that I’m a citizen,” she said reflecting on the event. “It was very powerful to have my mother and daughter there with me.”

As SHARE Community Land Trust homeowners, all three of these women were able to rely on the stability of their homes and their proximity to Leavenworth to secure good employment, raise their families, find time to study for the citizenship exam, and pass it. Congratulations!

Food bank clients excited by produce variety

by Oliver Crain
Community Harvest Gleaning Coordinator

“What kind of apples are those?”

A food bank patron inquired earlier this summer as a bin was deposited on the counter. The woman’s eyes widened and she spoke with audible excitement when a volunteer told her they were Gravensteins.

“Gravensteins you say? Those are great for pies and cobblers!” From there her joy exploded in a list of possible ways to eat the apples.

Farmers’ markets, roadside stands and grocery stores are bursting with fresh, local produce this time of year. But fresh fruit, though not entirely absent, is rare in food banks, even during the busy summer growing season.

To combat this, Community Harvest organizes gleans throughout the summer and fall to gather excess or unmarketable produce, and to bring it into our local food banks. These volunteer-powered events are fun opportunities for families and individuals to connect with local growers and provide a valuable service to some of our most vulnerable households. Whether it’s a backyard plum tree yielding 10 pounds of fruit, or a visit to Spencer Farms in Malaga yielding 40 pounds of chard and 450 pounds of peaches, apricots, apples and cherries, Community Harvest seeks to bring as much produce as possible into local food pantries.

At the Community Cupboard we serve over 250 local households each month with the essentials they need. They receive vital staples such as beans, rice, canned goods and pastas. Every week between May and the middle of November, Community Harvest partners with local farms and volunteers to harvest crops that would otherwise go to waste, supplementing these non-perishables with fresh produce. This year we plan to provide over 20,000 pounds of fresh produce to the food banks of Chelan and Douglas counties through our partnership with the Chelan Douglas Community Action Council.

There are many reasons farmers may choose not to harvest the produce, often because of cost or lack of labor. Community Action Council stores perishable produce until it can be distributed to 13 regional food banks. This means that Rock Island and Entiat can enjoy fresh greens from Malaga, and blueberries from Monitor can go to Plain or East Wenatchee. Last year, of the 20,000 pounds of produce gleaned, 7,000 pounds was distributed through the Community Cupboard food bank.

The rest was split between food banks around Chelan and Douglas counties.

As the growing season accelerates through the summer and on into the fall you can find us at the local farmers markets and out in the field, working hard to make sure everyone has access to fresh, local produce. Come join us!

Seven volunteer glean 300 pounds of apricots at Jamie and Polly Taskman’s orchard in East Wenatchee in July 2016.

Above: After her naturalization ceremony, Ana Rosario celebrates with friends from Cornerstone Community, where she works. Top left: Ana and husband Francisco Rosario.
by Kelly Hassinger
Client and Community Support Specialist
You know how much home matters! It is the place from which we stabilize our health, our education, our safety, even our safety. Did you know, though, that every week there are local families that struggle with issues that threaten their homes? The Community Cupboard is like having to choose between paying the power bill so the lights won’t get turned off and paying rent so they don’t get evicted? Or that there are families that can’t afford to go to the doctor because they only have enough money left in the month to pay the rent? If this foundation of home is threatened, the ability to focus on these core societal values is in turn compromised. This is when things at home can become unstable.

Emergency assistance program works to end homelessness

Upper Valley MEND helps local residents who find themselves in financial tight spots. We can assist with utility payments, rent, transportation, even shelter if a situation warrants that kind of support. And along with this financial support, we provide a service that is often times even more valuable: threatening their housing. Our interview sessions that help clients make a plan, or get back on track with a plan. That way, they many not continue to need emergency assistance down the road.

These services are possible through a homelessness prevention grant from Chelan and Douglas counties. As a grant recipient, we are members of a greater Wenatchee Valley Homeless Task Force, which has a goal to end homelessness through prevention assistance and housing. In this last year, with funding from this grant, coupled with donations from local churches and community members, 160 families have been assisted with some form of financial stabilization by MEND. That equates to 61 children and 322 total individuals, our neighbors, school kids, employees and friends - all vital members of our community, members that have a better chance to thrive because other people care.

The Upper Wenatchee Valley is a great place to call home. Thank you to our whole community for caring and supporting each other. And remember if you need it, we can help keep the lights on for you!

How often do you currently visit the Community Cupboard?
[ ] daily [ ] weekly [ ] monthly [ ] yearly [ ] other: ______________________
Yes or no? What is the purpose of your visit?
[ ] shopping [ ] donating second-hand goods [ ] donating food [ ] volunteering [ ] utilizing food bank services [ ] utilizing emergency assistance services
How likely would you be to visit the Community Cupboard if it were located outside Leavenworth city limits?
[ ] very likely [ ] likely [ ] not likely [ ] very unlikely
How important is it to you if the food bank or thrift store is located in town?
[ ] very important [ ] somewhat important [ ] not important

Please give us feedback on our current thrift store:
[ ] location & accessibility
[ ] store hours
[ ] parking
[ ] prices/specials
[ ] space (amount, how it’s used, cleanliness, etc)
[ ] quality & selection of items
[ ] donation criteria (ie 2 bags per day limit)
[ ] customer service
[ ] quality of your experience

Comments:
[ ] What I like most about the Cupboard is: __________________________
[ ] What I think could be improved is: __________________________
[ ] Is there anything else you would like to add? __________________________

**As you answer the survey above, please select up to nine of our current services that you believe are most critical for MEND to provide.**

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Upper Valley MEND Summer 2016

MEND engages our community in transforming lives through actions based in faith, hope and love.

In June and July 2016, Community Harvest gleaning program volunteers picked 650 pounds of excess blueberries, distributing them at the Community Cupboard and 13 other regional food banks. Read more about gleaning efforts on page 5.