

EISSC General Meeting 2/13/24, at St. Margarets in Factoria

Introduction, Mark Griffiths, St. Luke's Lutheran, Bellevue

Featured Presentation:

Rev. Jan Bolerjack, Riverton Park United Methodist Church in Tukwila, shared information via Zoom on housing refugees in the lowest income area in King County with highest crime rate. Rev. Bolerjack says it is a great opportunity for ministering. An original tent camp transformed into tiny house village some years ago. Then, Seattle Police started bringing immigrant families to them for help. Most immigrants are from Venezuela, Congo, and other African countries. They are currently using a four-burner stove to serve 800 people, with four bathrooms that always seem to be broken (current resident population is 400). Rev. Bolerjack expressed that it is the best thing that has ever happened to their church. She took us on a virtual walking tour of their church facilities and showed us some of their guests. They are always overwhelmed, but congregation members and volunteers love the work. When asked for ways to help, she said they always need financing, blankets, and need host families for immigrants moving out of residence at Riverton Park and transitioning to permanent housing. Most of their guests wait 8 to 12 months before being able to get a work permit. They also have a food bank onsite. More information is available at their website at rivertonparkumc.com. The City of Tukwila offered available resources, including legal help filling out forms. Daily healthcare is a major challenge. They try to use King County public health resources, but visiting doctors generally only see 10 people a day on an infrequent basis. Spanish, Portuguese, Tagalog, and French are the most common languages. Residents feel that Tukwila is the best place in the world, so distant housing is harder to utilize. Intake is 20 persons per week. At one point last year it was 10 per day. They have a tutoring program for after school help for kids who attend local schools. They encourage youth groups to come and play with kids, help with hobbies, and other activities.

Member Spotlights:

Nikki and Khizer Sherriff from Essentials First and MCRC spoke of their programs. MCRC is the social outreach for MAPS (Muslim Association of Puget Sound). MCRC offers a full portfolio of services for disadvantaged individuals and families. They reached 175,000 people during 2023, with 99,000 hours of volunteer work. Their food program served 7,500 families. They are facing a huge increase in needs, especially in the area of eviction notices. They offer motel nights as a stopgap measure. MCRC's medical clinics both virtual and physical visits as well as veterinary services. Last year, they provided 350 medical and dental appointments. Their furniture program provides material goods for those in transitional housing, along with personal self-sufficiency programs. They also helped 75 Afghan refugees to become more self-sufficient. There is also a program for senior women and men. Essentials First provides hygiene items that are not covered by SNAP benefits or food banks, such as soap, deodorant,

detergent, shampoo, feminine hygiene products, and other items. Essentials first currently has locations in Redmond, Bellevue, Kent, and Seattle. There are many opportunities for service, including packing events to fill kits. There is also an upcoming Ramadan food drive. Essentials first donates non-perishable food items, partnered with MCRC. Last year, they provided some 2,500 boxes of non-perishable foods during the month of Ramadan. Drive begins first week of March through the end of Ramadan. Cash donations preferred, \$70 will provide one box that will feed a family of 4 for one month,

Sherry Jacobson spotlighted Afghan Advantage, a team of female volunteers from Washington and Afghanistan, who help with new Afghan immigrant women. Sherry explained that 80% of Afghan women have no literacy skills and are inexperienced in anything outside their homes. 50% of Afghan Advantage clients have no education at all, and as a result can't attend community college literacy programs. They organize groups to help each other learn under the guidance of the volunteers. Their website is Afghanadvantage.org. Most classes are via Zoom on phones, as most clients do have phones. Among their services, they offer a two hour class, with the first hour in English, then second hour in Dari or Pashto languages. AA+ provides basic literacy skills so their clients can eventually move on to taking advantage of community college resources. They have a Facebook presence under Afghan Advantage. They have an 89% success level in getting clients to basic English literacy.

Faith Action Network: Elizabeth Dickinson offered the legislative report. Today is the last day for bills to advance from house or senate. They have been trying to move forward a bill that would provide state level funding for asylum seekers unable to qualify federal aid. HB2114 for capping rent increases and offering housing support got calendared today and will be taken up by the entire legislature.

Treasurer update, organizations need to renew membership dues for 2024. Eastside Baby Corner gave a brief report. 29% of the families they helped during 2023 were refugees, 28% were homeless.