

“Nourish to Flourish” – A community effort to end hunger on San Juan Island

In April 2018, several concerned citizens got together after learning that that 39% of the elementary school-age children on San Juan Island are either on free or reduced lunch support. In addition, 17% of children under age six in our County live in extreme poverty and 51% of single working mothers earn below the federal poverty level of \$24,600 a year. Data was shared showing direct relationships between poverty, poor nutrition and low math and reading scores. The first task was to understand the problem of hunger and need in the community. We met with community leaders, such as Dr. Frank James and Kristen Rezabek from the San Juan Health and Community Services and Jennifer Armstrong from the Family Resource Center who verified that poverty was rising, and they saw increasing numbers trying to feed families on stagnant wages and high grocery bills.

Our group started meeting regularly and included representatives from the school district, the Food Bank, the Food CO-OP, and the SJI Farmer’s Market. By May 2018, the group had a name: “Nourish to Flourish,” and a mission: “We will end hunger on San Juan Island.”

One of the partnerships is a backpack program that sends home nutritious food for kids who would otherwise go hungry over the weekend during the school year. Thanks to Rotary Club support, the “36 Weekends” program began at the start of the 2018-2019 school year for elementary students on San Juan Island.

An initiative proposed by the Nourish to Flourish group is the Fresh Bucks program. Helping low-income people increase access to fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Buying more fruits and vegetables also supports local growers and the local food system. Through this program, purchases on fruits and vegetables at the Food CO-OP and Farmer’s Market are matched up to \$20.00, doubling food dollars for produce for qualified applicants – those earning less than \$50,196 a year for a family of four. Fresh Bucks started in July and will continue as our funding allows.

For many folks of all ages, hunger remains a serious problem on San Juan Island despite the efforts of our local food assistance programs which in turn are supported by our local service clubs, grocers, churches, volunteers and donors. The Nourish to Flourish initiative seeks to end hunger on San Juan Island by offering additional support for existing programs and filling in the hunger nutrition gaps in our local community.

We welcome donations from the community to assist us in our continuing mission to end hunger on San Juan Island. The Family Resource Center collects donations for “Nourish to Flourish.” There are no administrative fees and every donation through this non –profit center is 100% for food. We can end hunger, promote healthy food habits, and support local growers.

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Volunteer and coordinator