
Generations Forward:

Progress Report

Generations Forward is a growing collaborative of over 100 Whatcom County partners whose purpose is to promote the well-being of all Whatcom County's youngest children and their families, and to close opportunity gaps associated with race, ethnicity, income, and family adversity.

**We
want a
future
where:**



Our guiding values:

- » Children and families are at the center of the work.
- » Families are idea generators, system designers, key collaborators, and strategy prioritizers.
- » Community building and nurturing relationships happen across the collaboration.

We commit to:

- » Coordinate the resources we have in our community and evaluate their effectiveness.
- » Use real numbers and community stories to guide and improve our work.
- » Practice shared leadership with equitable access to leadership development.
- » Focus on results.



Keeping Families at the **Center**

Meet Monica Koller

Generations Forward Family Champion

Starting as the Family Champion in October 2018, Monica Koller has been enjoying connecting with families and agencies in the Whatcom region. Over the past four months, she has made building relationships a priority, inviting families to be a part of our movement to create a truly beloved community for future generations.

As a Family Champion, Monica has coordinated three Family Fun events, gathering 43 adults and 62 children to build community and learn about the Generations Forward Collaborative. She has participated in various community events including monthly Families of Color gatherings and attended agency meetings such as the Perinatal Mental Health Task Force in an effort to encourage diverse involvement in our family-centered initiatives.

To support family engagement and encourage leadership development, the Collaborative commits to welcoming children of all ages into meetings. Stipends are available for unpaid community participants at meetings, including those of action teams. Meetings often include sharing a meal or snack. Since the Generations Forward launch in October 2017, we have given out 60 stipends totaling \$5,590, thanks to the generous support of the Whatcom Center for Philanthropy.

Building a Structure of Shared Leadership

Families are the primary voice driving Generations Forward, but voice alone cannot sustain a vision. That's why we are deliberately laying a foundation of shared leadership that values the wisdom of differing life experiences. While this work can be challenging, we are committed to the time and trust it takes to build a leadership structure that reflects our community.

Generations Forward is using the concept of Beloved Community to encourage a shared sense of belonging and connection within the collaborative and as a model for community change. This affirms our interdependence in building healthy communities.

Our leadership structure is taking shape, with the following groups now in place.

- » **Action Teams** are the collaborative's engine room—innovating, developing, and implementing strategies for child and family well-being. Self-governed action teams are made up of anyone in the community interested in the action team's committed focus: parents, community members, agency staff, elected officials etc.
- » The **Family Council** is under way! Supported by the Family Champion, this self-nominated council of parents and caregivers can share lived experiences to guide action team work and to approve annual priorities.
- » The **Coordinating Council** is a structure in progress and will be comprised of representatives of action teams, the Family Council and the sponsoring organizations. Responsibilities will include establishing results and outcomes, assuring the use of data and the stories to guide the work, developing a common agenda and work plan, creating policy positions, and seeking resources.
- » The **Opportunity Council** and the **Whatcom County Health Department** sponsor Generations Forward, providing backbone administrative support. This includes convening meetings, facilitating collaboration, and building a communication system within the collaborative and to the community.

Why Beloved Community?

“Beloved community means having the heartfelt inclination to support every child in every family as much as you would your very own.”

Though they are almost always imperfect, there are many data sources and indicators that describe, for better or for worse, changes in a community. Open your email, your favorite web site, the nightly news, a daily newspaper or one of a zillion blogs and “data” will be in ample supply. But real community change is far more reliant upon human change, and human change almost always grows from the depth and breadth of relationships. Data can convince our heads that change is needed, but unless our hearts are inspired to view all our brothers and sisters as worthy of positive change, to authentically welcome their voices in shaping that change, and to stay open and willing to have the difficult conversations with ourselves and others to reach in our core a new way of being together, data does us little good. Beloved community means having the heartfelt inclination to support every child in every family as much as you would your very own. There can be no “thems” or “others.” And that will mean doing good work within us and amongst us, even when the going isn't easy. As Dr. King said, “Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”

-David Webster, Opportunity Council

Networks of Opportunity for Child Well Being (NOW)

Being selected to be part of Project NOW provided the resources to hire two parents in our community for the roles of Family Champion and Program Coordinator. These two positions help support the commitment to empower families at the center of our purpose and strengthen the infrastructure.

Project NOW brings expertise in Trauma Informed Care, Equity, Human-Centered Design, and Family-Centered Processes. Being a part of Project NOW offers Generations Forward access to opportunities and networks all across the nation to address our challenges together and celebrate our success.

Tools such as the 90-Day Challenge are helping align our goals with action, and so far four Action teams have adopted this model to move their work forward.

NOW supports us through monthly meetings, technical assistance, peer mentoring and two national symposiums in 2019.

Accomplishments

Action Teams in Motion

Integrated-Coordinated Care

- Creating a centralized and family-centered hub to access resources and services, including the long-term feasibility of a physical center
- Identifying short-term goals, such as a virtual hub and community resource maps, to meet the immediate needs of the community

“As a single parent to four girls, our family fell through the cracks of almost every system in Whatcom County designed to help us. I began to participate in Generations Forward to understand why, because I knew if it was difficult for me, it would be harder for those experiencing more inequities than myself. As part of the Integrated and Coordinated Care Action Team, I have found a place where my experience can support working towards making it easier for families to know where to go in Whatcom County to get the support and resources they need.”

-parent

Economic Mobility

- Assisted community education on asset building
- Focusing on whole family approaches to employment services and financial case management

Community Building

- Created a solutions-focused infographic providing consistent messaging about connecting, building and engaging community
- Led community building exercises at quarterly Generations Forward meetings
- Implementing a survey tool to track Gen Forward participant community building experiences

Equity & Honoring Cultures

- Collaborated with community partners to explore racial truth, healing, and reconciliation by co-hosting screenings and discussions of Dawnland, a documentary about Maine’s systemic displacement of Native children through child welfare policies
- Setting the stage to have courageous conversations about race and ethnicity
- Developing an equity framework and tools for action teams

“Attending the Dawnland screening was a transformational moment for me. Since childhood, I’ve been told that I’m white and taught to be ashamed and confused about my Native identity. Seeing this film and talking with the hosts helped me realize that I can claim my Native identity with pride. In fact, to not do so would be to let historical policies like forced adoptions and boarding school attendance do their intended job of erasing my heritage. I don’t want to let that happen, this is a big part of who I am.”

-a community member

Child Care

- Held county-wide information sessions in English and Spanish about starting or expanding a child care business
- Educated the community on child care issues—cost, access, supply, demand, business impact— through newspaper articles, a business community survey, and published reports
- Working to raise education requirements for child care employees and increase access to scholarships for education so that both child care quality and employee compensation rise

Family Support & Parent Education

- Created a resource list of available parent supports
- Developing consistent positive parenting messaging and resources and the availability and use of peer supports and evidence-based programs for parents and caregivers
- Partnering to increase family-friendly places throughout the county

Sustainable Financing

- Identified best practices for creating community-wide commitment to funding which supports children
- Creating a fiscal map of current funding for young children and their families

Since October 2017, Generations Forward has met as a collaborative

7 times

with participation ranging from **45-90** people at each meeting.

We've distributed

60 stipends totaling **\$5,590.**

Evaluating Progress

We asked twelve Generations Forward Action Team leaders and members what their teams have focused on in the last 16 months, what has made them the most proud, what has challenged them, and how working collectively across many sectors has influenced their approach to the work. We gleaned additional information from Generations Forward quarterly meeting notes and visuals. Staff from sponsoring organizations added context to both past work and future efforts.

We acknowledge the preceding and existing work happening in agencies and communities across Whatcom County. Generations Forward commits to leveraging the impact of that work and opportunities for collaborations.

In addition to their accomplishments, action teams were proud of how they approached their work: keeping equity and inclusion at the forefront, persistently showing up, listening to each other, and unpacking difficult conversations. The following themes of strengths and challenges appeared throughout our conversations.

What Action Teams see as **STRENGTHS:**

- » Core commitment to parent/caregiver involvement
- » More numerous and deeper connections have been made across sectors
- » Connections contribute to organizations feeling supported and connected to a larger community
- » Freedom and willingness to innovate
- » Equity, diversity and inclusion are part of conversations about strategies and implementation
- » Being a learning community bringing in speakers, training and presentations to support our development
- » Support to align work is reducing duplication of efforts

What Action Teams see as **CHALLENGES:**

- » Insufficient clarity related to participant roles and responsibilities, decision-making process, and collaborative structure
- » Barriers to participation and the impact on sharing power, developing leaders, and remaining family-centered, whether involved as a parent, community member or paid professional
- » Inadequate backbone, structural support and resources to implement strategies
- » Action teams are self-governing and participation is not required, progress can stall

Looking forward in 2019 ...

The work of Generations Forward will continue to be made up of both decentralized actions and a shared agenda for change. Our top priorities for the initiative as a whole include:

- » Increasing family participation through continued Family Fun nights and outreach efforts.
- » Keeping people engaged and informed through the use of newsletters and family-oriented social media.
- » Developing a policy and advocacy agenda to use with local and state leaders.
- » Building a learning plan for our quarterly meetings that reflect the priorities of the participants with a focus on equity.
- » Collaborating with state partners to make the service delivery system more human-centered.
- » Sponsoring a leadership-development track for interested parents and community members.
- » Securing funding to support design plans that emerge from Action Teams.

About Generations Forward

The Generations Forward Children's Collaborative grew out of Whatcom County's first community health assessment and improvement planning process. This process highlighted health and social inequities within Whatcom County and drew attention to the role that childhood adversity plays in the development and perpetuation of those inequities. Leaders expressed a desire for all children to have an even start in life, which requires tackling toxic stress and closing opportunity gaps associated with race, ethnicity, income and family adversity. (Read more: [Whatcom Working Toward Well-being](#)).

To accelerate this desire, in October 2017 the Opportunity Council and Whatcom County Health Department convened a cross-section of 74 community stakeholders for 2½ days using the Future Search conference model, a task-focused planning process. The Future Search process relies on the lived experience and knowledge of individuals who are most closely involved in and affected by the conference topic, rather than "outside experts." Nearly 25% of participants attended as parents. Participants envisioned the essential components for a future in which all Whatcom County children thrive and determined what they were ready and willing to act on, individually and collectively, to get there. They formed action teams committed to meeting regularly to develop goals and implement strategic plans toward their shared vision. The vision includes economically stable families, access to affordable quality child care and early learning opportunities, access to affordable quality housing, support and education for parents/families, centralized and coordinated services, integrated health care services, intentional community building, and honoring cultures, diversity and equity.

The collaborative is co-sponsored by the Whatcom County Health Department and the Opportunity Council.

Generations Forward has turned to published frameworks to guide the development of our work. Research around the [Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework](#) has shown that five protective factors—parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children—nurture family strengths, optimize child development, and reduce the chance of child neglect and abuse. The Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework emphasizes that healthy, optimal development for children requires nurturing relationships between children and their caregivers in households that support basic needs.

Generations Forward has been built with the recognition of the profound impact adverse experiences can have on children and that these experiences occur at a family and a community level. The [Working Toward Well-being Framework](#) outlines a comprehensive community approach to addressing toxic stress embedded within a broader context of working toward healthy development. Multiple efforts across the system—caregivers, providers, policy makers—can and should work together to decrease the likelihood that children will experience toxic stress and increase the likelihood of appropriate supports when they do.