2014 Annual Report:
The difference your dollars make

This year, like most, held both good news and bad. There have been tough times: a recent fire at one of our vet's houses (pg. 3); loss of crucial funding that crippled Crosswalk North Idaho's drop-center (pg. 2) and closed Flaherty House (pg. 3). But if our work has taught us anything, it is this: tough times and bad news aren't the end.

You can be sure, the overwhelming majority of our news is good. Just a few of the highlights? We are pleased to report Crosswalk received a three-year federal grant that, combined with your support, will offer more comprehensive services to homeless youth (pg. 2).

Your dollars went further than ever before as we reduced costs and prevented suffering by finding new ways to intervene quickly: we helped people stay in housing rather than waiting until they showed up at our shelters; we relied on nurses to keep our clients out of the hospitals and provided respite and housing for those who had already been there, lowering their chances of returning (pg. 4).

The impact of your support is clearer than ever before thanks to new data collection technology (gifted to us by the Volunteers of America national office) that increased our ability to track the outcomes of our work and to report back to you with the results of your giving.

We worked to make your support do more good than ever before, as our staff—across all our programs—put more focus on collaboration. Our programs worked both with each other and with government, nonprofit and community agencies to find more effective, creative and sustainable ways to serve those in need.

The best news is that we continue to enjoy your support. Individual donors and volunteers, support from corporations, small businesses and community not only give money to fund this work, but also offer daily acts of charity and compassion—from big renovations to the smallest pair of used shoes—that give hope to our clients and remind us why we do what we do.

What it comes down to is this: your support in the past year has fed the hungry, employed the poor, healed the sick, housed the homeless, clothed the naked, kept the heat on, comforted the lonely and given hope to the hopeless. You haven't just created miracles—to us, you are a miracle. To us, you are the best news of all.
Annual Report: the difference your dollars make

Services for Kids
HELPING YOUTH FIND THEIR WAY TO A BETTER LIFE

Nearly 30 years ago, when the community asked for help with street kids, Volunteers of America stepped up to open the Crosswalk teen shelter. We’ve been helping our community’s most vulnerable children and teens ever since.

Crosswalk shelter, school & multi-service center for homeless teens

Thanks to your support, our teen shelter and its support services helped more than 800 youth in the past year—many of whom are very young. With more than two-thirds of them citing “family conflict” as a reason for their homelessness, we work hard to facilitate reconciliation. We are happy to report that more than half the kids that left the shelter this year are living in safe environments with family members.

“Helping a kid go from sleeping under an overpass or living in the woods to a stable life can be a long journey,” says director Bridget Cannon. “That journey has to begin with the basics and that happens with support from our community. Volunteers served almost 10,000 meals this year. We gave out almost 5,000 articles of donated clothing. People came in and shared their skills—therapeutic art, health education, financial advice, résumé workshops and so much more. You do so much for our kids.”

Crosswalk North Idaho services for at-risk youth

Our drop-in center, serving at-risk Kootenai County youth (ages 13-17), lost a major grant this year, but was able to stay open three days a week and serve 100 youth (compared to 123 last year) despite having lost 80% of its annual budget and most of its staff. We are working hard to secure funding to return to full operation.

The Work Ready program had a successful and exciting year. The program was able to launch its small business, the Farmer’s Grill food truck, and secured five acres of land where they provide agricultural training and grow produce for use in the food truck.

“We are thrilled about the land and the food truck,” says director Brandi Smitherman. “Both get Work Ready one step closer to being financially self-sustaining, which is really exciting.”

Alexandria’s House for pregnant or parenting teens & their babies

We served 13 pregnant young women (and 10 babies) this year. All came to us homeles. Most of them also faced physical abuse, family conflict and depression. We welcomed each mother into a safe, nurturing environment where she could develop parenting skills and learn how to live independently.

“Part of our work is to help them be successful parents when they leave our program,” says manager Jill Staples. “We are proud that, in the past year, one young woman finished her GED, another young mom will graduate from high school this fall and another found a good full-time job. All the other young women are working toward graduation.”

Aston-Bleck Apartments for young women with children

Tenants of the Aston-Bleck transitional apartments worked with case managers to strengthen their young families and develop skills to live successfully on their own. Most came from Alexandria’s House and stayed about 10 months as they transitioned to living independently. The apartments served 11 young women and 11 children this year.

“Rather than putting all the families into one apartment complex, we help each client find an apartment in the community,” says director Bridget Cannon. “We help her get in the door with support from a case manager, assistance with security deposit and rent, and helping to furnish the place. But—and this is the big advantage—when she’s ready to stand on her own, she can just take over the lease and keep her young family in the apartment they’ve started to make their home.”

Our community’s most vulnerable kids?
* homeless youth
* foster kids
* impoverished youth
* pregnant & parenting teens
Our two houses for formerly homeless male veterans—Rest & Recoup House and the Eagles’ Rest—served 30 veterans in the past fiscal year. Fifteen of these vets “graduated” into apartments of their own in our 22 community-based housing units (see back page) reserved for veterans.

“A highlight this year was when Home Depot came to the Rest & Recoup House with 70 volunteers. They gave the landscaping a complete makeover and constructed a brand new greenhouse on the property,” says director Jon Carollo.

The biggest change this year was the addition of our Support Services for Veteran Families program—a three-year collaboration between Volunteers of America, Goodwill and Transitions. The program connects veterans and their families to housing, benefits and vocational training.

In the first year of this massive partnership we helped more than 200 veteran households to find or stay in housing—quite a milestone.

“This is a really efficient and effective program for moving veterans out of homelessness,” explains Carollo. “And, because this first year of the partnership has been so successful, we were able to secure a second grant to bring this program to homeless veterans living in the core of downtown Spokane.”

FIRE DAMAGES “EAGLES’ REST”: Your help urgently needed

We urgently need your help to rebuild our Eagles’ Rest home for homeless veterans, which suffered a significant fire damage this September. We are most in need of linens, kitchen furnishings (pots, pans, etc.) and nonperishable pantry items. For more information call Kay at 509.624.2378.

Services for Veterans
ENSURING EVERY VETERAN HAS A PLACE TO CALL HOME

No one who fought to protect our homes should be sleeping on the street. No one who sacrificed to protect our families should be living in a car with theirs. That’s why we are committed to ending homelessness for veterans on the street and preventing others from becoming homeless.

In the past year, Flaherty House served nine formerly-homeless young men—helping them to gain and maintain a sense that success, independence and self-sufficiency are possible as they transition into adulthood. However, we are sad to report that Flaherty House closed in April when the program lost a crucial grant that funded the majority of its budget.

“It is heartbreaking to let this program go,” says director Bridget Cannon. “Flaherty House has been an important home for so many young guys who needed some hope and some help to hang onto while they figured out adulthood. I’m grateful that we were able to help all the guys in the program find stable, permanent housing before the program officially closed.”

Foster Youth Programs
preparing youth for life after foster care

We served nearly 200 foster kids through our Independent Living programs—helping them get ready to “age out” of the foster care system by offering skills, resources and support from age 15 to 21. In addition to providing dozens of classes each year—from budgeting and communication skills to career planning and help applying for college and financial aid—Independent Living offers programs that support youth as they live in their first apartment, prepare for college and learn to advocate for themselves in the real world.

“These programs do more than just provide classes and help,” explains manager Sara Mack. “They facilitate dreams and help them see that things like their own apartment or a college degree are actually within their reach.”
Services for Adults
ON THE FRONT LINES OF IMPROVING LIVES

The chronically homeless. The mentally ill. The disabled. These are people most of society wants to forget. We welcome them inside. We offer safe shelter, affordable housing, vital support services. We give them our respect. We offer a return to dignity.

Community-Based Housing for disabled, chronically homeless adults

Our program offering permanent, supportive housing to chronically-homeless, disabled adults now includes 97 apartments scattered throughout Spokane in addition to the 25 on-site units at Hope House (see far right column).

This year we put additional focus on building “care teams” for our clients. These teams, led by case a manager, are made up of family, shelter staff, medical practitioners or anyone who the client sees as a positive support. Care teams provide ongoing wraparound support that gives our residents their best chance to succeed as they transition from the streets to stability.

“I think the coolest thing happening in this area is that we continue to work very hard to partner with other agencies,” says program director Jon Carollo. “Chronic homelessness is a community issue. We are working to take it on as a community.”

Hope House emergency shelter & long-term housing for single women

The Hope House shelter served 308 different women and provided a bed for someone 11,484 times this year, with the shelter at capacity nearly every night.

Women continued to report mental health, substance abuse, chronic health problems and domestic violence among the primary causes of their homelessness. For the first time in the Hope House’s history we had to turn away more women than we could serve (384, up from just 87 two years ago) because all our beds were full. But we were able to help 32 shelter guests find housing either in the community or in one of our 25 on-site apartments. And our on-site nurse saw 251 women (up from 96 last year).

In-Person Assister helping families & individuals find healthcare

Last year we added an “In-Person Assister” to our program offerings. This new position allowed us to help 516 individuals enroll in healthcare programs in the past year. We were especially glad to have the opportunity to canvas food banks, the needle exchange and methadone clinic to seek out the most vulnerable people in need of healthcare to make sure they received the opportunity to enroll.

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Homeless Housing & Health ensuring individuals released from the hospital have a place to go home

For the homeless, being discharged from the hospital or other health care institutions can mean returning to the streets in a weakened and vulnerable state. Our “H3” program ensures that patients released from care have a place to go home along with ongoing support that reduces the chances of returning to the hospital. This program is a collaboration with the City of Spokane and a new partner—Empire Health Foundation.

“There’s a massive need,” says director Jon Carollo. “The addition of Empire Health to the partnership has been wonderful. They have infused the project with new vision, new partnerships and increased funding.”

Emergency Services rent & energy assistance to prevent homelessness among low-income families

We offered emergency assistance to almost 1000 people in 295 households this year. It’s more than just help to pay the rent, keep the heat on, fill the gas tank, pick up a prescription, or get a bus pass. For many, these simple favors actually prevent homelessness.

Sometimes just a little help is enough to keep people from falling into financial disaster,” explains Tracey Hirt, who administers the program. “You might not realize it, but a dose of an important prescription can keep someone out of the hospital or off the street and helping someone with a utility bill can free up just enough to repair the car that lets them take their child to daycare and keep a job.”

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Working Wonders is a quarterly publication of Volunteers of America of Eastern Washington & Northern Idaho. All news and articles are presented strictly for informational purposes. Please send article suggestions, contributions or mailing address changes to:

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