

Lydia
PLACE

every family deserves a home

AN OPPORTUNITY TO
THRIVE



DEAR NEIGHBOR



A LETTER FROM EMILY O'CONNOR, LYDIA PLACE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Last month I was summoned to jury duty for superior court and spent four hours in voir dire, the inefficiency of which, though tempting to address, I will not get into. The substance of the criminal case was a death threat made by a man, to a woman he was acquainted with, at a home in a residential neighborhood, so I was surprised when the defense attorney asked if anyone in the jury pool had “strong feelings about homelessness”. But of course, I thought to myself as I prepared to bite my tongue (not a strong suit of mine). She said her client was homeless and those feelings were therefore relevant to the pursuit of an impartial jury. I raised my hand

in obligatory response, along with half the jury pool. She called on each person to share their “strong feelings” and immediately the stereotypes began: “I live downtown and the homeless seem to all be mentally ill and doing drugs” said one, “I don’t know why they don’t just go get a job” said another, “we have so many services here, I just don’t understand why they don’t make better choices”, and so on it went. I clamped my jaw shut and focused on my breathing until it was my turn to share “strong feelings”.

This random sampling of 60 community members, some of whom eventually made up a “jury of his peers” are representative of widely held judgements, opinions, and stereotypes. They are assumptions made based on the very limited, but highly visible, aspect of the iceberg that is housing instability and homelessness. The hard truth is that it is easier to believe that we are all in complete control of our futures and our circumstances. We feel less guilty about the privileges we have when we believe that the hardships of others can be blamed on “bad choices.” But it is infinitely more complicated than that. In one form or another, homelessness impacts an unknown number of families in our community every year, well over a thousand. With hundreds or thousands more experiencing housing instability. If we knew the histories behind the individuals we see, if we heard their stories, if we knew the circumstances that brought them to a place of great need, perhaps we would understand it is not a matter of poor choices but a matter of no options. The housing shortage and its impacts have permeated virtually every corner in Whatcom County and today roughly 50% of our neighbors can’t actually afford to live here.

As Lydia Place hits its 30th anniversary, we are honoring the significant contributions that so many have made to the organization, making it possible for Lydia Place to be the dedicated and robust organization it is today. But we are also taking this opportunity to stare in the mirror, to reflect deeply on the history of Lydia Place, the history of our community, and the history of our country. We are taking this opportunity to ask hard questions. I wonder often about the infants and toddlers of those early Lydia Place years, who are now in their late 20s or early 30s. Where are they today? Are their children better off than they were as kids? Did we make a difference? Was it enough?

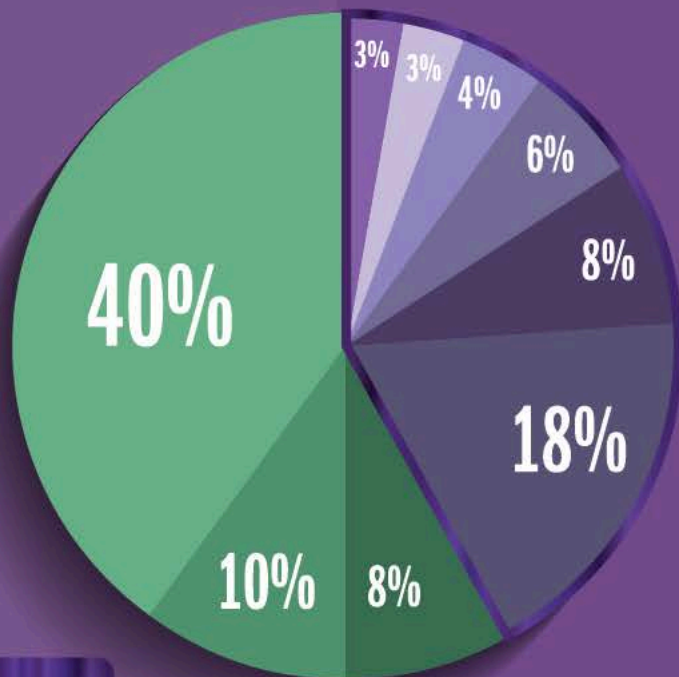
As we look forward to the future, we know that the only way out of the harsh reality of inequity we find ourselves rooted in is to lead with our values, to reimagine systems that work for the most vulnerable among us, and to redefine what it means to be a neighbor, to redefine what it means to be in community with one another. Our futures are intertwined. It is with you by our side, my fellow human, my neighbor, that we will build this future; a future worthy of all the children born to it. I remain optimistic about our ability to do this because I see the kindness and compassion of this community all around us. I see you, walking this path with us, learning with us, and leading with your heart. Together we can realize our vision of a community where everyone has a home and the opportunity to thrive.

With gratitude,

2020 OPERATIONAL BUDGET

INCOME

\$2,196,000



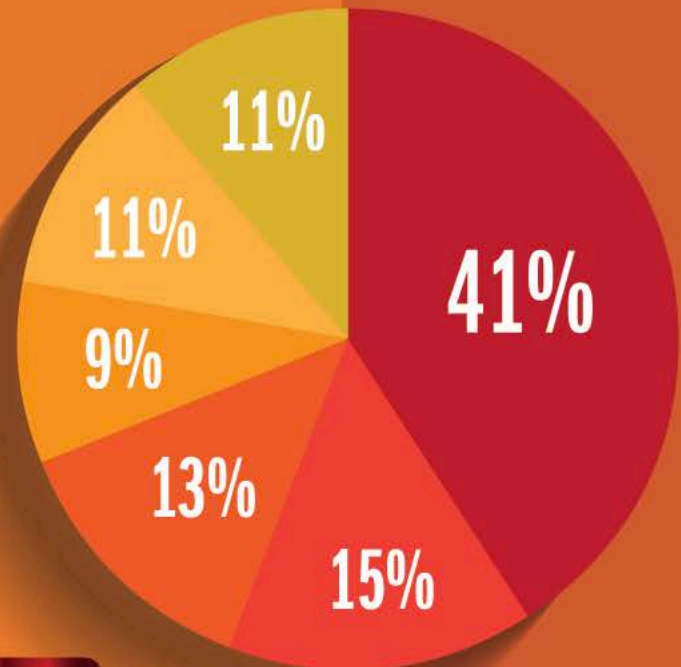
42%

of Lydia Place's budget comes from neighbors, like you!

UNITED WAY FOUNDATION GRANTS	+\$57,000
LOCAL FOUNDATION GRANTS	+\$65,000
RENTAL INCOME	+\$96,000
WISE BUYS THRIFT STORE	+\$130,000
COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS	+\$171,000
FUNDRAISING EVENTS	+\$398,000
BELLINGHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY	+\$175,000
NON-LOCAL FOUNDATION GRANTS	+\$235,000
GOVERNMENT (CITY, COUNTY & STATE)	+\$868,000

EXPENSE

\$2,196,000



4,600

emergency shelter bed nights and over \$85,000 in emergency motel stays for families in cars.

COUNSELING PROGRAM	-\$233,000
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	-\$245,000
RENT ASSISTANCE AND EMERGENCY FUNDS	-\$205,000
PARENT EDUCATION AND SUPPORT	-\$280,000
ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDRAISING	-\$330,000
HOUSING PROGRAMS	-\$903,000

“



Matthew Barrow,
LP Board Member

Knowing that over 40% of Lydia Place's support comes from individuals is a testament to Lydia Place's thoughtful and caring approach and shows they are responsible with their resources and have created sustainable ways to break the cycle of homelessness in our county.

“



I am grateful for the support I received from Lydia Place along with my landlord, because we were able to keep our family together. We can continue working, making progress, and connecting as a family. This will be the first time in years that we get to sit down, at a table, and have a meal together.

-Lydia Place Family

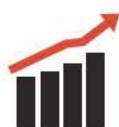
Lydia Place made me realize the community I am a part of does care, so much, that I was able to move my kids and myself into a safer environment. Now I have a safe place of my own where I can stand on my own two feet.

-Lydia Place Family

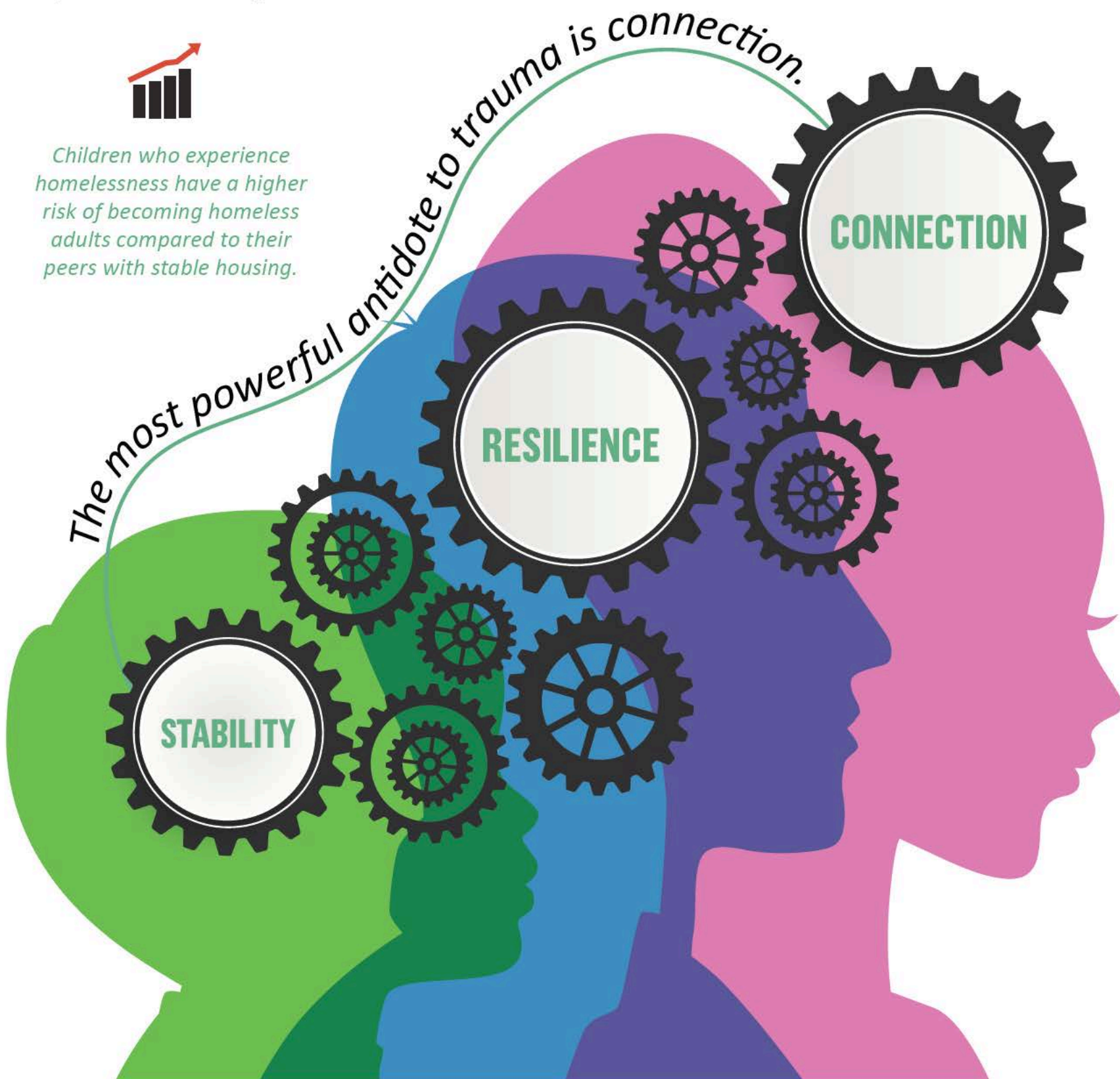
From **TRAUMA** to **RESILIENCE**

Connection strengthens resilience in the face of trauma

Among those who have experienced homelessness, the rates of trauma are significantly higher than the general population and often that trauma is complex and pervasive. Further, children who have experienced one or more traumatic events in their lives are at a much greater risk for negative lifelong outcomes related to health and opportunity. But with the right support, individuals and families can heal from these traumatic experiences. Connection is the most powerful antidote to trauma, and as a trauma-informed agency, Lydia Place programs center belonging and connection to promote resiliency.



Children who experience homelessness have a higher risk of becoming homeless adults compared to their peers with stable housing.



HOUSING PROGRAM

Safe, stable, and nurturing environments are essential for healing. In collaboration with our community partners, Lydia Place supports 150 housing placements at a time.

4300+ 

HOURS OF IN-HOME SUPPORT LAST YEAR

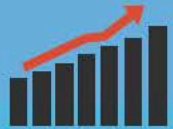


\$225K 
IN ANNUAL RENT SUPPORT

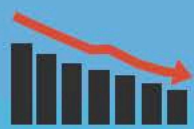
381 
CHILDREN HOUSED LAST YEAR

PARENTING SUPPORT PROGRAM

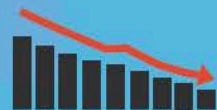
The most important ingredient in building resilience is connection. For children, this means healthy attachment with a caregiver. Our parent educators are able to walk alongside parents and provide tools and encouragement. This supportive and empathetic relationship builds the capacity of caregivers, leading to more supportive and empathetic relationships with their children.



PARENT CHILD CONNECTION



INSTANCES OF ABUSE/NEGLECT



RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS AS AN ADULT

628 IN-HOME PARENT EDUCATOR VISITS 



MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Lydia Place's Mental Health Program provides critical, in-home, clinical services to support families in moving from trauma to resilience.

473 THERAPY SESSIONS PROVIDED LAST YEAR



"I wish I knew how much of a difference therapy can make. My life might have turned out differently if I had the opportunity to get the mental health support I needed."

- Lydia Place Client



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

The services Lydia Place provides are critical, and they are just the start. Real and lasting healing cannot happen in a silo. It is the love of the wider community that brings it all together. Here are a few examples of how a tiny act of love can ripple, and build resilience throughout our community.



WHEN YOU BAKE CUPCAKES FOR THE CHILDREN IN OUR PROGRAMS, THE MESSAGE THEY HEAR IS "YOU DESERVE JOY AND HAPPINESS TOO."



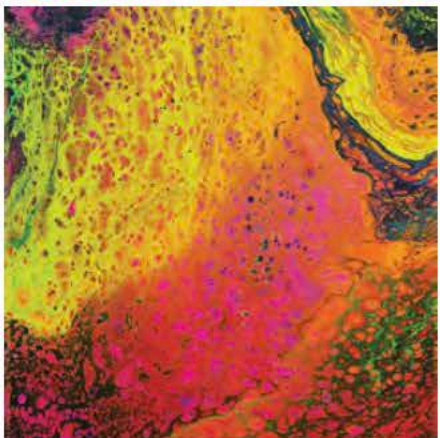
WHEN YOU VOLUNTEER TO HELP PLANT AND MAINTAIN LYDIA PLACE GARDENS, OUR FAMILIES HEAR "YOU DESERVE TO HAVE A BEAUTIFUL HOME TOO."

START 2020 OFF WITH A TINY ACT OF KINDNESS BY VOLUNTEERING WITH US!
LYDIAPLACE.ORG/VOLUNTEER



WHEN YOU PROVIDE VOLUNTEER CHILDCARE SO A PARENT CAN ATTEND THERAPY, THAT PARENT HEARS "YOU ARE MY NEIGHBOR, I SEE YOU, AND YOU MATTER."





POURING HER HEART OUT

Esmeralda's journey from surviving to thriving

Esmeralda's story begins 250 miles south in the small town of Toppenish in Yakima County. Known for its migrant and agricultural community, 75 percent of its 8,000 residents identify as Latinx and Hispanic. Esmeralda recalls what it was like growing up as a first generation Latina with her mother and three sisters, **"Growing up we had to learn how to do agriculture work so we could help my mother who was raising me and my three sisters on her own. We mostly kept to ourselves because my mom was very self-conscious of her English. She thought it made her appear unintelligent to our new community. As early as nine, I remember being her advocate by helping her translate and be the eyes and ears for our family."**

At the age of 18, Esmeralda became a mother with the birth of her eldest daughter, Mahlia. Six years later she was blessed with twin girls, Quetzali and Yaretzi. Feeling unsupported and trapped in a toxic environment, Esmeralda decided to move to Whatcom County in hopes of a brighter, and healthier future for her family.

Trying her best to move forward, she found herself in a new relationship and they decided to move in to a three-bedroom home together, with plenty of space for the girls to run and play. Three years into her new relationship she became pregnant with her youngest daughter, Azalea. It was not long after Azalea's birth, that Esmeralda noticed her relationship with her partner started to change. **"He began lying, being rude and disrespectful to the point where domestic violence was occurring, he went to jail, and I had to leave."** In order to flee as quickly as possible, she took what remaining money she had and paid off her lease and left for good. This was the second time Esmeralda found herself and her girls in a similar situation.

Though she managed to escape a dangerous situation, she was now faced with trying to find housing in a city with a vacancy rate less than 2%, as a single mother of four, with zero income or a mode of transportation. **"Trying to find housing was so stressful. I became extremely hard on myself, I blamed myself for being in this situation, and I told myself it was all my fault, my family didn't support my decision... I felt alone, and like a complete failure."**

Four years ago, Esmeralda was connected to Lydia Place in search of housing and hope, and today she is on a mission to tell her story. **"I want people to have hope in themselves. I've grown so much in four years, and if I hadn't had the moral support of Lydia Place where would I be right now? Homeless, with domestic violence, uneducated, and unable to give my kids that reassurance that everything is going to be okay. I was able to get through everything because Lydia Place changed my life."**

Extremely grateful for the housing support she received at Lydia Place, Esmeralda went on to attest her motivation to do better and be a better mother, community member, and overall person, came from the inner work she did through Lydia Place's Mental Health and Parent Support Programs.

Above: Acrylic Pours on Canvas by Esmeralda



As the twins transitioned into school-age Esmeralda sought support from Lydia Place's Parent Support Program. **"My parent educator came into my home and gave me little tips and tricks to try out when tantrums would arise. I never felt like they were stepping over boundaries or anything like that. They were so supportive. It made me realize that I needed to get myself a little more educated if I want to have a better relationship with my daughters."**

This whole new perspective opened Esmeralda eyes', and she recognized there was still a lot of anger, anxiety, and depression she was holding onto as a result of the traumatic experiences in her past. **"After having the twins, I stopped everything to be a mother. Now I was in a place of stability with my household, with work, but I wasn't doing anything for myself. So that affected me emotionally, physically, and spiritually, on top of everything we've been through together, as a family."**

Unsure of how to begin her journey to healing, Esmeralda elected to take an art therapy session provided by the Lydia Place Mental Health Program. Despite her reservations about not being good enough to be an "artist," her therapist handed her a blank piece of paper and said, "How do you know you're not good at it?" To Esmeralda, that is the moment everything "clicked." **"I want people to understand that art therapy is so powerful. It's something that helped me reconnect with myself, my children, and other women in need of healing."** Art therapy became a foundation for her to rebuild her self-esteem, a way to give back to others, and encouraged her to tackle other things she was afraid of, like cooking.

Today you can find Esmeralda teaching acrylic pouring to local Whatcom women cancer survivors, donating her paintings for auctions to raise funds for nonprofits, volunteering, and preparing nutritious meals as a prep cook at the Bellingham Senior Center where she works. **"I have love for all my seniors. On the days my girls don't have school I bring them to work with me. I want to show them how to be humble, respectful, and hardworking. It's important to me that they know you don't have to pay money to be kind, it's free."**

Working alongside her housing case managers, mental health clinicians, and parent educators, Esmeralda was able to paint a brighter future for her and her family. **"My life now is all about community, and I didn't know that before, to me community was my family, and that's it. Moving to Bellingham was such a culture shock at first. We weren't used to people being so open-minded and welcoming, it's like this is where my girls are meant to be raised. We love it here."**

"I've gotten so much judgement from my family all my life. My family was my only community and they didn't know how all that negativity can wound you as a child. There wasn't space in our day to day life to try new things, have hobbies, to get educated, or the awareness that it's important to work on yourself. It's not always about financial support, sometimes you just need someone to listen. That's what Lydia Place has done for me, and I try to do the same for anyone struggling. Sometimes that's all you need-somebody to believe in you so you can do the rest of the work."

You can read more stories from Lydia Place families by visiting:

lydiaplace.org/impactstories



Esmeralda with daughters Mahlia (16), Twins Quetzali & Yaretzi (10), and youngest, Azalea (5) volunteering for Meals on Wheels and More to help ensure none of our local seniors go hungry this winter.

THANK YOU

2018 YEAR END GIFT CONTRIBUTORS

THANK YOU to the following individuals and businesses for sharing our vision of a compassionate community where everyone has a home and the opportunity to thrive.

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVES FOR MAKING OUR 2019 END OF YEAR NEWSLETTER POSSIBLE

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PO Box 28487
Bellingham, WA 98228
Phone: 360.671.7663
Fax: 360.671.7038
WA Relay TTY: 711 or 800.833.6384

www.lydiaplace.org