What a difference seven months can make! Early this year, most people went about their daily routines — work, school, social and recreational activities, planning for a wonderful Washington summer. All of that came to a screeching halt with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our lives have been seriously impacted in many ways, and each of our stories is unique. Many local residents have reached out to ICS for help in these trying times and there are very often two obvious similarities in their stories. There is an overwhelming feeling of having no control over how they will provide for themselves and their families and persistent feelings of worry and insecurity about what the future will hold.

The ups we have seen are the creative ways the community has come together to raise money to help those in need — Virtual Bingo, Salmon Days Golf Tournament, Run with the Fishes, to name a few. The Cities of Issaquah and Sammamish Human Resources have worked with City Councils to come up with extra funds to help residents pay late rent. Unfortunately, these funds have either been depleted or will be soon.

Living in this community is a blessing. It continues to pull together to help neighbors in need. This annual newsletter is our primary fund-raising effort. We at Issaquah Community Services are asking for your continued support to help our neighbors stay in their homes. 2021 will be another challenging year as many community organizations and churches have had to cancel fund-raising events which benefited ICS.

In 2019, your donations enabled us to support 414 households with late rent and utility bills, spending $176,615. These households consisted of 1522 residents (688 adults and 634 children). Through September of 2020, ICS has already spent $178,928.00. With your donations we will be able to continue helping our neighbors in 2021. Please read further to learn about some of the residents we help with your donations.

Thank you for your generous support.

A MESSAGE FROM BOARD PRESIDENT LORI BIRRELL

What a challenging year this has been for us all. Walking on the trail the other day, I saw a sign that said “RIP 2020.” I had to smile as I am sure we all feel the same. For ICS, 2020 has brought many ups and downs, mostly due to the impacts of COVID-19. We’re all familiar with the downs—lost jobs, work hours cut, child care and home learning challenges, health issues preventing normal work and activities. Many of our neighbors are hurting and need help to pay overdue rent or utility bills.

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LIFE TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN

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Working full-time and getting bills paid. Amy held a retail management position in downtown Seattle. They have two boys, Devin and Joshua in the 4th and 5th grades. Fourth grader Devin enjoys school and playing basketball. His older brother Joshua was diagnosed with autism and he was doing well. Amy felt strongly that this was a result of the autism support program at Seattle Children’s Hospital, where Joshua attended classes weekly. Amy’s employee medical benefits were critical because they covered Joshua’s program at Children’s Hospital.

Amy is one of those people, and the story of her journey is all too common these days. Her life was going well. She and husband Bill were

Continued on Page 5, Amy
Issaquah Community Services is undoubtedly a pillar in our community, supporting for 47 years our neighbors and friends who struggle with paying rent, security deposits, utility bills, or who need extra financial support to remain safely and securely in their homes.

It is the stability and adaptability proven over the years that make the organization a trusted partner to renters and landlords alike. Renters contact Issaquah Community Services when in need of financial support. Once an application is submitted, the compassionate volunteers that make up ICS, advocate on behalf of renters, and work directly with landlords to make payments, and ensure residents continue to have a stable living environment.

Beyond the professional and financial support provided to renters and landlords, what makes ICS unique is their caring and personal approach to each case and every story and their enthusiasm and flexibility in responding to the community needs. The many selfless volunteers who work with residents instill calm, care, and compassion when they need it most.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic earlier this year impacted greatly our communities, deepening the instability for those who were already struggling to make ends meet, and disrupting the balance for those who were managing well. As businesses had to close their doors, leaving many community members unemployed, Issaquah Community Services remained open to serve the community. Their ability to adapt swiftly to the changing environment, shifting to easy online and phone operations, and ensuring residents continue to have access to much needed supports, made a lifesaving difference for hundreds of households in our area.

With an estimated 15-20% of our community members behind in rent, and with much uncertainty on the horizon, this year, your contribution is needed more than ever before. Your support empowers the tireless volunteers at Issaquah Community Services to meet the increased needs in our community. Your donation can make the difference between keeping one’s roof over their head and homelessness. It takes all of us coming together to help overcome these challenging times. Please donate online at https://www.issaquahcommunityservices.org/donate/ or mail checks to ICS, P.O. Box 669, Issaquah WA 98027.

With much gratitude,
Monica Negrila, Human Services, City of Issaquah

ICS serves residents of the Issaquah School District which includes Issaquah and parts of Sammamish, Bellevue, Newcastle, Renton and Maple Valley. Learn more about us at www.issaquahcommunityservices.org
Veronica’s Story: Trials and Triumphs

“What lies behind you and what lies in front of you pales in comparison to what lies inside you.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Veronica’s life journey began in Georgia. She became a mother at a very young age and raised five children on her own. Even without a high school diploma, Veronica was determined to find a good, secure job that would allow her to use her innate skills. Her strong work ethic, caring positive attitude and self-confidence helped her to carve a successful career as a senior sales consultant in the automotive industry.

About 10 years ago, Veronica decided it was time for a change and moved to Washington. At that time some of her kids were still in college and she was extremely proud of their achievements.

Determined to grow and learn, Veronica felt strongly that getting an education was the next logical step in her own journey. She began at Bellevue College where she earned her high school diploma, and later her Associates degree. She really enjoyed the college experience and the opportunity to relate to what her kids were doing. She continued on to Washington State University and was thrilled to earn both her Bachelors and Masters degrees. She became a successful licensed insurance broker.

While taking on life’s challenges, Veronica has encountered many tragedies. She suffered the devastating loss of a child as well as her father, she coped with the pain of divorce and she cared for her ailing mother. Four years ago, another tragedy hit. Veronica was diagnosed with leukemia. As she had in the past, she faced this setback head-on, dealt with it as best as she could, and went back to work. When COVID-19 struck, her world was turned upside down again. Having leukemia puts her at extreme risk and it has been necessary to isolate at home since March. Although she has been receiving unemployment, it still does not cover her expenses, and that is the reason she called ICS. Veronica needed help paying her rent, and we were happy to be there for her.

Veronica’s courage, resilience and faith have carried her through this tumultuous and yet fulfilling journey. In spite of her diagnosis and the obstacles that COVID-19 have placed in her path, Veronica believes that she will emerge even stronger than before.

“My husband and I donate to ICS every year. I am a member of the Issaquah Rotary Club which also donates annually. We donate because ICS provides aid to families in financial crises. ICS is the critical safety net that helps families keep a roof over their heads by providing direct payment to landlords and utility companies.” Lesley Austin

RAPID RESPONSE

Hats off to our board and volunteers who transformed the ICS client process from an in-person interview to one conducted exclusively online and via telephone. Making this adjustment, we were able to keep ICS operational in a stressful and rapidly changing environment. During April, our busiest month to date, ICS provided rent or utility assistance for 417 residents in 127 households. That is nearly a fourfold increase over the number of residents helped each month in the first three months of the year. With the support of our partners and donors, we were able to respond to our neighbors when they needed it most.
Issaquah Community Services is an all-volunteer organization, and our rules and procedures are governed by our board of directors. Serving on our board can be a rewarding and impactful way to give back to your community and help your neighbors when they hit a rough patch in life.

**Hard Road Out of Homelessness**

Last year during the holidays, Jenna and her two young daughters were homeless, living in a motel. Jenna had a retail sales job, but she couldn’t afford both childcare and move-in expenses. Finally, in February, she was accepted for subsidized housing in Sammamish.

A huge burden was lifted only to be replaced by the weight of COVID. Jenna got very sick in March with flu-like symptoms and required a stay in the hospital. She thought it was COVID but tested negative. Her store remained open, but her hours were reduced, and she did not have paid sick leave to cover the hours she missed while hospitalized. At this point, Jenna contacted ICS for help because she was struggling again and worried about getting the bills paid. Fortunately, ICS has been able to help twice with rent during the pandemic and this has alleviated some of Jenna’s stress.

Jenna is back to full-time work, but always juggling childcare, work, and other responsibilities, always on the financial edge. She is very thankful for the help she has gotten from her community. It has kept her family afloat in these rough times.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**VOLUNTEER ON THE ICS BOARD**

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ICS is currently seeking new board members who are interested in helping to guide our organization into the future. No matter what your background, your perspective and counsel would be welcome on our board. People of color are especially encouraged to join us as 54% of our clients come from diverse cultures. Our ICS board meetings are held on the morning of the 1st Thursday of the month, currently via Zoom. Apply by sending a letter of interest to our office email at icsoffice180@gmail.com or contact us at 425-837-3125 and we will send you an application.

**DO YOU LOVE SOCIAL MEDIA? WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU**

ICS is looking for a volunteer who is skilled in social media to help us manage our social media platforms –Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. For more information or to apply, please call us at 425-837-3125.
A Property Manager's Perspective on ICS
by Judy Newman, Discovery Heights Community Manager

Issaquah Community Services is an incredible organization that has helped countless residents during a time of need. I find that it is all too often that residents are struggling financially and they can't seem to find a way out. All the while, they have no idea that there is someone out there willing to help. When my team and I explain that they can call upon ICS to provide rent assistance, we are often met with eyes filled with tears and our residents get an overwhelming sense of hope. There are so many that are experiencing a loss of their job, cut hours, or are struggling with home schooling during this pandemic and so many of our residents already operated paycheck to paycheck on a regular basis, pre-pandemic. Any disruption of income could be devastating.

Amy, continued from page 1

COVID-19 hit and everything changed for Amy and her family. Both Amy and Bill’s businesses closed, and both were temporarily laid off. Amy’s unemployment checks were on hold due to a fraud investigation and much of Bill’s income went to child support. The family depleted all of their savings. They quit using their car because they couldn’t afford gas. Thankfully, the Issaquah Food Bank was able to deliver food to them every other week.

Like so many other families in our community, the boys had to begin virtual learning, and it was a challenge. It was especially difficult for Joshua who needed a set routine. Amy and Bill worked diligently to create new structure and routines for him. Thankfully, Children’s Hospital provides coaching to guide the family through these challenges. Devin adapted well to online school, but missed his friends, his teachers and basketball. Both boys just want things to return to “normal.”

Recently, Amy was further devastated to learn that, like many other retail stores in downtown Seattle, her store was closing for good. She would now be without a job and her family is without medical benefits. In addition, her unemployment check is still on hold. It is a heartbreaking situation.

Keeping a roof over their heads was the main concern for Amy and Bill. They can’t be evicted under the current eviction moratorium, but their rent is accumulating and still needs to be paid. ICS has been able to help with that.

Sadly, we know that we will continue to hear stories like Amy’s over the next several months. Businesses and organizations throughout Washington will continue to struggle under the burden of this pandemic.

At ICS we feel so fortunate that we are able to help, and we would not be able to do that without our incredibly generous donors.
Donate online at: www.issaquahcommunityservices.org or mail your donation with this form to:
Issaquah Community Services, PO Box 669, Issaquah, WA 98027

NAME: _____________________________________________________
ADDRESS:___________________________________________________
CITY/STATE/ZIP: ______________________________________________
EMAIL ADDRESS: ______________________________________________

Enclosed is my onetime gift of $_________
I will provide a monthly donation of $______

My gift is in memory of ________________________________
May we acknowledge your gift on our website? Yes ____ No____

Please consider doubling the impact of your donation if you have a corporate match.
Letters to donors of more the $250 will be mailed in January 2021, as required by the IRS