VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
Diverse White Center neighborhood is growing stronger through Communities of Opportunity

POWERING CHANGE
Celebrating philanthropist Yvonne Belshaw
Committed to Equity and Opportunity

Seattle Foundation works to create greater equity and opportunity in all aspects of a healthy community. To advance this ideal, we work every day with our philanthropic and community partners, uniting passion and discipline to create lasting change.

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Our summer Heart & Science dives into one of the most pressing social issues of the 21st century and a critical issue in our community: affordable housing. Seattle leads the nation in home price increases and has a median home price of $820,000. We have a critical need for more housing units in the tens of thousands to meet the demand, and our homeless population is increasing faster than our affordable housing stock. When we lack affordable housing, we risk becoming a place that is not diverse and not truly thriving.

That’s why we’re sharing the efforts of organizations we’ve invested in to build, create and rehabilitate affordable housing so that our region is vibrant and equitable. Our investments seek to preserve affordable units and develop new ones in neighborhoods near transit and amenities. We also support community-led advocacy efforts to increase the choice and supply of affordable housing while avoiding displacement of low-income residents.

Our second feature story focuses on the dynamic community of White Center, where we invest through our Communities of Opportunity partnership with King County. A vibrant community is one where residents express their diversity and have power to influence the policies and systems that shape their lives and experiences. Our COO work in White Center and beyond seeks to improve health, strengthen connections and increase affordable housing and economic opportunity in the communities that experience the most disparities and need the greatest support.

We’re also delighted to share the stories of two philanthropists at the opposite ends of the age spectrum. At 97, Yvonne Belshaw is creating tremendous impact in White Center, while millennial Zoe Mesnik-Greene is passionate about doing good around the world.

In partnership,

Tony Mestres, President & CEO
Seattle Foundation’s GIVEBIG online day of giving raised $16.6 million this year. This was the eighth and final year for the Foundation to host the iconic giving day, which started in 2011 to help nonprofits grow their online fundraising, social media and marketing capabilities.

Seattle Foundation thanks our community for its deep generosity and our nonprofit partners for making GIVEBIG such a success in its eight years.

Superstars Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, Russell Wilson and Ciara came together with the Seattle Symphony on May 10 for an unprecedented concert to support greater equity and opportunities for youth and access to the arts.

Seattle Foundation served as a community sponsor for this one-night-only event that featured individual and collaborative performances from the music stars. The evening also highlighted youth performers from Seattle Symphony’s in-school programs and Macklemore & Ryan Lewis’s Residency Program with MoPOP that supports aspiring teen hip-hop artists and producers.

CLOSER LOOK: SCHOLARSHIPS

Through its philanthropic partners, Seattle Foundation is a major distributor of scholarships for kids going to college, with a strong focus on supporting low-income youth to earn a college degree.

In 2018, we awarded $1.3 million through 37 different scholarship funds to 150 students in King County. The awards, which range from $500 to full tuition, were presented at a special event on May 29.
Seattle Foundation is proud to be a partner for Pearl Jam’s Home Shows, two sold-out concerts in August that will benefit organizations working to end homelessness in our region. At a launch event on April 24 at Safeco Field, the band announced that in addition to the $1 million it has committed, other organizations including Starbucks, Raikes Foundation, Zillow Group, Seattle Mariners, Ethan Stowell Restaurants and many more, have invested in this important effort. The band has a goal to raise $10 million by August 10.

Seattle Foundation will advise the band on how to invest the funds for long-term systemic change that addresses homelessness, while United Way of King County will support them in funding direct services to meet immediate needs.

Seattle Foundation received a Civic Award from the Municipal League recognizing its leadership in the Communities of Opportunity partnership with King County. Tony Mestres, president and CEO, accepted the award for the Foundation on May 10, with Executive Dow Constantine representing the county.

Communities of Opportunity (COO) received the James R. Ellis Regional Leadership Award for contributing significant leadership to the region in finding regional public policy problems and solutions.

COO is a unique public-private and community-based partnership that aims to improve and increase health, affordable housing, economic opportunity and strengthened connections by supporting communities in system and policy changes that benefit communities.
Through a community-based partnership, the corner of 24th and Union in the Central District will become 115 affordable units at the former site of Liberty Bank.
Christina* never thought she would struggle to afford housing or become one of the nearly 12,000 Seattle-area people experiencing homelessness in 2017. Growing up as the daughter of a pastor in a well-known Seattle family, Christina attended Garfield High School and Highline Community College and was known for her longtime work as a cheerleading coach.

Yet like many women who experience homelessness, Christina says her ex was physically abusive to her and her children, once to the point of fracturing her son's jaw. The traumatized family found themselves on the path to homelessness.

Christina, her two younger kids and her teacup poodle ended up living in her car for two weeks, cleaning up in restrooms to maintain their feeling of dignity.

Then in August, she received help from Multi-Service Center (MSC) in South King County in the form of transitional housing and critical services like counseling and support from a social worker.

Today, Christina still suffers from fear and anxiety and keeps her shades tightly shut. With her time in transitional housing coming to a close soon, she faces the reality of market-rate housing on a minimum wage income.

* Last name withheld to protect her security.

BASIC NEEDS: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

As housing prices and rent continue to skyrocket in the Seattle metro area, affordable housing efforts are more important than ever.

Story and photos by Naomi Ishisaka
“Today, people’s backs are against the wall. Families are getting pushed to the margins by rising rents. They’re being forced into the south suburbs, onto their friend’s couch, into their cars and onto the streets. In this economic boom, there are winners and there are losers. That may be the natural result of our economic system, but it is not an effective or efficient means for creating strong communities where all individuals and families can succeed.”

- Ashwin Warrior, Capitol Hill Housing

“The cost of living is definitely high in Seattle ... It’s going to be hard to pay market rate as a single mom with three kids,” she says.

**BEHIND THE NUMBERS**

Families like Christina’s are the faces behind the grim statistics on housing affordability in our region. It seems like each week there is a new story that raises alarms about the crisis of finding stable housing out of reach.

A study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition finds that there are 29 affordable units available for every 100 extremely low income households here. A recent study by national consultant McKinsey & Company finds that King County needs at least 14,000 more affordable housing units to meet current needs.

Regional rent increased 48 percent over the last five years. **Average rents in Seattle now top $2,000, making it one of the most expensive rental markets in the country.**

For anyone making $25,000, a $2,000 a month apartment is more than half of their income, creating a ratio known as “rent burdened.” For a single parent like Christina making the state minimum wage
of $11.50 an hour, even the lower average rent in South King County of $1,380 a month amounts to 69 percent of her income, more than double the recommended amount dedicated to rent.

To qualify for most affordable housing, residents can only make 30 to 60 percent of the median area income. In this region, 30 percent is $20,000 a year and 60 percent translates to $40,000 a year.

There are many ideas and approaches for how to deal with these issues. While we are nowhere near the scaling up needed to ease the housing affordability crunch, here are three efforts by nonprofits and partnerships under way to put people in homes now.

**A NEW CHANCE FOR LIBERTY**

The Liberty Bank project in Seattle’s Central District is a unique affordable housing development that also aims to disrupt the forces of cultural displacement impacting the African American community there.

Through the advocacy of the Africatown Community Land Trust, in partnership with Black Community Impact Alliance, Byrd Barr Place, City of Seattle and Capitol Hill Housing, the former site of Liberty Bank at 24th and Union will become 115 affordable units.

Wyking Garrett, President of Africatown Community Land Trust and the visionary behind Africatown, says that apartments are just part of the equation.

"Our community and the black presence in Seattle is rapidly vanishing as if we were never here. We know that the housing crisis in Seattle crosses racial/ethnic groups. However, there is an old saying, 'When America has a cold, black folks have pneumonia.' In this case, it's more like stage 4 cancer," Garrett says.

"Historic, socially-engineered disparity from slavery to gentrification, and the ever-increasing wealth/income gap are compounding barriers to community sustainability and equitable growth. Given that African Americans have not participated equitably in the prosperity of the region, and have not been represented proportionally in those coming for the high wage jobs..."
that are driving rising housing costs, our community has been severely impacted by displacement."

The Liberty Bank project is a direct response to that displacement. Through a memorandum of understanding between Africatown community partners and nonprofit developer Capitol Hill Housing, its goals are to maximize empowerment to the black community, through community ownership, participation by black contractors and workers, and in affordable housing and commercial space that affirms the Central District as a center of black/Pan-African culture and identity, Garrett says.

Ashwin Warrior, the senior communications manager for Capitol Hill Housing, says this reflects the needs articulated by the community.

"Equity is a choice. The effects of displacement and gentrification do not fall evenly. In Seattle, people of color are disproportionately affected, locking them out of the opportunities the city offers. The diverse, welcoming Seattle we all want doesn’t just happen – it requires us to prioritize inclusion," Warrior says. "We believe it’s important to acknowledge this history and its continued legacy and actively work alongside black-led organizations to undo it."

In addition to the Liberty Bank project, set to open early next year, the partnership has also secured a 20 percent stake in the Midtown Center development across the street through the land conservancy group Forterra, to build Africatown Plaza, a heritage site with 5,000-8,000 square feet of commercial space and 130 units of affordable housing.

"We envision a vibrant community with quality education, healthy people, sustainable businesses, cultural and civic institutions, and a positive global presence."

-Wyking Garrett, president of Africatown Community Land Trust
“We envision Africatown as a model for how to build communities that encompass, reflect and facilitate the beauty, brilliance and best of the black experience and African diaspora. We envision a vibrant community with quality education, healthy people, sustainable businesses, cultural and civic institutions and a positive global presence,” Garrett says.

MOVING SOUTH

While much of the discussion around housing affordability centers on Seattle, the suburbs in South King County have seen increases in housing costs too, as lower-income Seattle residents seek out less expensive housing and move south.

Multi-Service Center (MSC), based in Federal Way, is an agency that has experienced this shift firsthand. Executive Director Robin Corak says even for those with steady employment, it’s difficult to keep up with increasing rental rates, since income isn’t rising in proportion.

Corak says the pressure on middle-income renters creates cascading pressure on low-income residents, leaving few housing options. To address these needs, MSC takes a multi-pronged approach.

Seattle leads the nation in home price increases, with a 12.7% increase in 2017 over the previous year.

Since 2012, average home prices in the city have risen an astounding 112%, 107% in King County. The median house in Seattle now costs nearly $820,000.
In addition to rehabilitating and preserving existing affordable housing, they also own 600 affordable units in South King and Pierce counties.

Coupled with their housing assistance, the MSC offers other services and supports to keep families stable, including food and clothing, energy bill assistance, employment assistance, education and transportation assistance.

A TALE OF TWO EASTSIDES

The Eastside is home to the region’s highest priced homes. In West Bellevue, for example, median home prices increased 93 percent to $2.72 million in 2017. Those kind of increases are taking a toll on housing affordability.

Imagine Housing is an affordable housing developer that is trying to fill the gap in affordable housing for the Eastside. Founded 30 years ago, Imagine Housing has 14 properties with affordable apartments housing more than 1,200 people. Thirty percent of their residents are exiting homelessness when they come to Imagine. The housing is permanent, and residents must pay rent.

Executive Director Villette Nolon says the need is great. In one example, 300 people applied for 91 units. At another, 453 applied for 53 units.

“I have been living on the Eastside for 25 years and I have seen definite changes here,” Nolon says. “It’s not as visible as it seems to be in Seattle, but there is definitely a homeless problem here and it’s growing faster.”

Imagine Housing is expanding its reach by building 63 affordable units with St. Luke’s Lutheran Church for low-income individuals.

In the third quarter of 2017, the Cost of Living Index reported that Seattle was the sixth most expensive place to live in the country, with its cost of living 52.8 percent higher than the average of 267 urban areas in the index.

1. Manhattan +142.9%
2. San Francisco +91.8%
3. Honolulu +88.4%
4. Brooklyn +81%
5. Washington, D.C. +57.4%
6. Seattle +52.8%
7. Orange County +50%
8. Oakland +47.7%
9. Los Angeles +47%
10. Queens +46.4%
Seattle Foundation’s affordable housing priorities are to preserve affordable units and develop new ones near transit and amenities. We support community-led advocacy efforts to increase affordable housing choices and avoid displacing low-income residents. The Foundation awarded general operating support to Multi-Service Center and Imagine Housing from our Basic Needs Healthy Community Fund this year. Capitol Hill Housing has been a Seattle Foundation grantee for several decades and Africatown’s Innovation Center received donor-directed dollars in 2016.

One resident of Imagine Housing’s Andrew’s Glen affordable development says it has kept her family from homelessness. After experiencing domestic violence, Mariel’s life began to collapse. She started thinking about moving her whole family into a car, but Imagine Housing came through with an apartment just in time.

“When I met them, it was almost like I was dreaming,” Mariel says. “The kind of dream that I never want to wake up from ever again.”

Mariel now has a positive outlook and her sons are doing better in school. That feeling that they are safe and have a future is possible because they have an affordable roof over their heads.

and families on land owned by the church. The project is expected to be finished in early 2019.

Mariel, her sons, A.J., right, and Angelo, in their apartment at Imagine Housing’s Andrew’s Glen in Bellevue.
IN OTHER WORDS

A conversation with Aaron Robertson

Aaron Robertson is Managing Director of Community Programs at Seattle Foundation. He guides Seattle Foundation’s advocacy and community investment strategies to achieve greater economic and racial equity in Greater Seattle. Aaron is a graduate of Seattle University and an alumnus of Harvard Business School’s Young America Leaders Program, the University of Washington’s Nonprofit Executive Leadership Institute, The Funders Network’s PLACES Fellowship and the Leadership Tomorrow program. Aaron led the design of the Vibrant Democracy Initiative and oversees its implementation.

Q. Why is having a vibrant community important and what does it mean?

A. In the aggregate, our region is one of the most vibrant in the country. But as you look closer at the data, you can see that communities of color, in particular, face much poorer outcomes. We want this to be a healthy community for everyone, and no matter how much the economy grows, we’re still seeing people left behind and seeing gaps widen along racial and geographic lines. If we truly want to have a vibrant community, it is not just about the average or median income, but ensuring that everyone has access to opportunity and is thriving.
**Q.** What is the Vibrant Democracy Initiative?

**A.** VDI launched in 2016 with a goal to increase voice and influence of underrepresented communities, particularly communities of color. We know historically, they’ve been disinvested in and they’re underrepresented. We want to see equitable voice and representation, but we acknowledged as a foundation, that we aren’t the ones with the most expertise to get there. We worked for nine months with a group of 17 different grantee organizations with on-the-ground experience including leadership development, organizing, civic engagement and coalition building – and that reflect racial and ethnic diversity within King County – to ensure our strategies fit all communities. They shared advice on the role philanthropy could play, tore our initial ideas to pieces, and then co-developed strategies from the ground up. That’s how we built the three programs of the VDI: Partnership Mobilization, Engagement Pipeline and the Voter Education Fund.

**Q.** What is exciting about this work so far?

**A.** The Voter Education Fund is particularly exciting because we developed a unique partnership with King County Elections. We use our organizations’ resources and unique skill sets, as well as their technical and training capacities, to increase voter participation in underrepresented communities. We’re helping organizations that have deep community relationships to develop technical experience in civic engagement work.

The best messengers on how our democracy works are people from their own community who understand the language, culture and history, and who can relate it in a way that’s relevant, as opposed to someone coming from the outside. That could include refugee communities who came here fleeing political persecution. These residents may be learning an entirely new process to speak out or engage civically. These trusted messengers are starting to change behavior and build a culture around voting and participation.

**Q.** And how does building a vibrant democracy connect to the systems change that will make our community more equitable?

**A.** It is inarguable that there is significant inequity in our community. We’ve done a lot of work documenting huge gaps in life expectancy, in employment, educational outcomes and all kinds of health rates. Those inequities are driven primarily by your zip code and the color of your skin.

We have really built our strategies around the acknowledgement that systems have failed these communities. Whether it’s government or funders, when people set policies, even well intended ones, on behalf of communities rather than with communities, those efforts are much less effective. Communities experiencing inequities are the ones with expertise on the challenges they face and the solutions that work. We need to fundamentally redesign our systems and policies to be inclusive of these voices if we hope to address the root causes of inequity, especially as the region and our demographics keep changing rapidly.

VDI is about how we prepare and propel voices that have been excluded to engage in decisionmaking and set policies. It is about changing the landscape to make our democracy more accessible.
Sili Savusa leads the team at White Center Community Development Association, a key partner in the Communities of Opportunity work to create better outcomes in the neighborhood.
hatami Chau, 17, lives with his family in White Center, an unincorporated pocket of King County with a racially and ethnically diverse population. With many immigrants like him and a mix of cultures, White Center is a vibrant place that is also gentrifying rapidly. It’s one key area where the Communities of Opportunity partnership between Seattle Foundation, King County and local partners is working to improve health, social, racial and economic outcomes and strengthen community connections.

Chau and his parents are Cham, a minority ethnic group of Muslims who have been persecuted in Southeast Asia. The family immigrated in 2007 from a rural area in South Vietnam where they faced economic hardship and feared for their safety. The family settled in White Center when Chau was in first grade. “We had family here, and it was really cheap,” he said.

Today, his father is a custodian for the Renton School District and his mother stays at home. They live in a subsidized home in Greenbridge, a mixed-income community spanning about 1,000 homes and 100 acres.

“We left Vietnam because it was our last resort,” said Chau. “My parents didn’t have much money for immigration, but they scraped enough together. We left everything behind — just to be in a better environment, even if it’s not always financially stable.”
As housing prices continue to soar in the Seattle area, Chau and his parents face an uncertain future — the danger of being priced out of the home they have lived in for a decade. “My parents can’t move even if they wanted to,” said Chau. “They are too scared to move.” As the area rapidly gentrifies, the fear of displacement is also growing. In a 2017 community survey of White Center, where about a quarter of the residents live in poverty, 61 percent said one of their top concerns is the cost of rent or a mortgage.

**A CHANGED LANDSCAPE**

In 1988, after graduating from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government with a Master in Public Administration, Steve Daschle became executive director of Southwest Youth and Family Services (SWYFS). SWYFS is a multi-service agency serving children and families with youth development and mental health, education and family support services. At the time, the organization’s annual budget was $300,000, it had 15 staff and the West Seattle bridge had opened only four years earlier.

Before the bridge went in, the only way into West Seattle and White Center was by a low-level drawbridge constructed in 1924. That left the two communities relatively isolated from Seattle due to frequent bridge openings for ships traversing the Duwamish Waterway. Those limited transportation options kept property values low, and the demographics were primarily white, working-class wage earners, many of whom worked for Boeing, the Port of Seattle or at the steel mill.

Today, average incomes in West Seattle have rocketed up and so have property values, putting pressure on nearby communities like White Center.

Daschle’s nonprofit now has an annual budget of $4.5 million and a staff of 70. It supports primarily immigrant and refugee families in White Center, South Park, Delridge, West Seattle, Burien and SeaTac.

Daschle said creating more affordable housing in White Center is critical to addressing the gentrification. SWYFS is redeveloping a King County public health building in White Center into an emergency shelter for homeless families, as well as a community hub. The County has made surplus property like this, currently home to the White Center Food Bank and some SWYFS offices, available for affordable housing.

“The real challenge is creating opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to stay in the communities,” said Daschle. “Mixed-income communities are a way to provide low-income families the opportunity to live in quality housing close to downtown Seattle and social services ... We’re creating conditions so that people who don’t have the means to keep up with rent increases can stay in their communities and continue to provide the wonderful diversity White Center has become known for in the last 50 years.”

One strategy the community has considered is incorporating into Seattle because that would bring
services and resources White Center now seeks, including increased transportation. It remains controversial as it may lead to a tax increase.

**COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY**

Helping White Center preserve its diversity and strengthen its vibrancy are two key goals of Communities of Opportunity (COO), an initiative launched by the Seattle Foundation and King County in 2014. This effort aims to improve outcomes through policy and systems changes that target areas of the county that currently suffer poor outcomes, including White Center, Rainier Valley and SeaTac/Tukwila, but that ultimately will benefit all of King County.

COO strives to shake up the traditional top-down relationship between funders and grantees, working instead in a collaborative partnership.

An early financial investment brought representatives from groups in White Center together to solidify community partnerships, asking these communities what they wanted to see happen in White Center, and creating strategies for optimal outcomes.

Andrea Akita, Director of COO, said the initiative focuses on community groups where there have been great disparities in health and well-being. “We often talk about these communities as ‘communities in need,’” but really, they have great assets and strengths — what they need is resources,” she said. “COO is working to improve results in four areas: safe, affordable housing, health, economic opportunity, and community connection.”

Akita, who has a background in planning and public administration, said her path to working in social justice stems from her own family’s experience. She grew up hearing stories from her father, who was one of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were forcibly relocated and incarcerated during World War II. She has more than 20 years of experience working to develop affordable housing, increase access to human services and shape
policy to improve health and social equity.

Akita said eight organizations in White Center have received COO funding and support to improve the health and well-being of the area. Projects include a collaborative vision to develop a community hub and increase affordable housing, as well as work by youth interns trained to facilitate conversations on displacement and annexation.

NEW FACES AT THE TABLE

One of the key COO partners is White Center Community Development Association (WCCDA), a nonprofit increasing community-driven action in White Center. WCCDA coordinates work by the community-based organizations involved in COO and is led by Executive Director Sili Savusa, whose family immigrated from American Samoa in the 1950s and was among the first Pacific Islanders in the area.

Savusa’s parents were active community leaders. She has vivid memories of people — relatives and new immigrants — coming and going from her house, sleeping everywhere there was space. “The notion of taking care of the community was just my experience growing up,” said Savusa, who has lived in White Center since 1996.

Savusa helped create the COO initiative and said residents have helped shape its course in White Center. “It’s so refreshing to see new faces and so many communities getting these grants,” she said. “I feel really good how funding is happening through COO. It could be a model you can take anywhere, as long as you put the right base together. That required conversations and establishing strong relationships between those of us doing the work. There has to be trust in the room to say what needs to be said.”

YOUTH AND THE FUTURE

Another organization participating in the COO initiative is the Food Empowerment Education and Sustainability Team (FEEST), a youth-led food justice group in White Center and Delridge founded in 2008. FEEST is known for weekly youth-led dinners at Chief Sealth High School and Evergreen High School, at which about 40 students cook dinner from scratch using healthy ingredients. Dinner includes discussions about health inequities, unsustainable food systems, and social and environmental justice.

The leaders of these weekly dinners are FEEST’s year-long high school interns, who also develop and implement local campaigns for food justice and engage in policy making processes. At Evergreen High School, 70 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, but only 30 percent actually eat school lunch. Most opt for nearby fast food options because they find school lunch unappealing. FEEST interns are hoping to change this.

Becca Meredith, FEEST Development and Operations Director, said the group plans to use COO funding for multi-generational workshops around healthy foods and good health for the White Center community.

Chau is one of FEEST’s interns. A senior at Evergreen, he was recently accepted to the University of Washington, where he plans to study public health.

The issue of gentrification and displacing families, including many immigrants and refugees, from their homes weighs on his mind, as it does for many who live in White Center. Chau sees change there as inevitable, but he has hope that it can preserve its diversity and vibrancy. “The thing I want White Center to keep is its many layers of diversity — people from different communities trying to start businesses and finding their home here.”
White Center is 46.4% white, including Hispanic Whites, 24.4% Latino or Hispanic, 14.5% Black or African American, 14.2% Asian, 9.1% two or more races, 7.6% Other and 6.4% Pacific Islander.

Source: 2016 American Community Survey

White Center by the numbers

**MEDIAN HOME VALUE**

**SEATTLE**

$772,729

**WHITE CENTER**

$452,038

Source: Zillow, March 2018

**WHITE CENTER YOUTH SURVEY 2017**

*July 21, 2017*

By White Center Community Development Association

194 respondents

What challenges will you have to overcome to graduate from high school?

- Not enough money: 34%
- Family commitments: 29%
- English language fluency: 17%
- Other: 16%
- Immigration issues: 14%
- Health issues: 7%
- Learning disability issues: 7%
- Other: 5%

**2017 COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT OF 505 INDIVIDUALS**

By White Center Community Development Association

Racial & Ethnic Diversity:

71% of adults reported speaking a language other than English at home.

57% of youth reported speaking a language other than English at home.

When asked what they like most about White Center, the top response was diversity and interactions with people from many cultures.

62% of adults reported they interact with someone of a different race at least once a day.

93% of adults reported they view the many different races and cultures of White Center as a strength.
YVONNE BELSHAW DOESN’T CONSIDER HERSELF A PHILANTHROPIST.

Now 97, and quick with a winsome smile, Yvonne thinks of herself as helpful. “I like to help people that are less fortunate than I am,” she says with modesty.

This despite the fact that in the summer of 2017, Belshaw made a substantial investment to increase equity and opportunity for children in White Center, a neighborhood close to her heart. The gift is more money than she imagined being able to have, much less give, in her lifetime.

Her gift will support a broad expansion of programs and offerings at the Southwest Boys & Girls Club, which serves local children with engaging activities, homework support, team sports, free weekday dinners and more. Located at a King County Housing Authority site, there is deep need for the Club’s services in the surrounding neighborhood.

“We were all completely stunned. We’ve never received a gift this big,” said Club Director Eric Watkins, who added that Belshaw had already paid for the Club to renovate its kitchen and purchase all new appliances. "Coming from Miss Yvonne, we’re beyond grateful and appreciative, but it’s in her nature. She’s so invested in this club, this community and these kids."

Jayme Hommer, Major Gifts Officer for Boys and Girls Club of King County, said the transformative gift will help the club enroll kids up to its maximum capacity of 180, from a current daily average of 140, for years to come.
The Club celebrated Belshaw’s gift by throwing her a 96.5 birthday party, with kids singing to her and cake all around. “I just got tears in my eyes, I was so impressed,” Yvonne said. “It can’t make you anything but happy to be there and see the kids studying and eating.”

What stays with everyone who meets Belshaw is that she is a dynamic lady whose zest for life and learning is infectious. At 93, she wrote and produced a play. At age 90, she was the president of a manufacturing company. She paints Japanese-style sumi-e ink paintings, makes art collages that have been displayed in local galleries, and has written a book for each of her seven great-grandchildren.

Yvonne spent many years working in the Rainier Valley neighborhood, where her husband managed Belshaw Brothers Inc., a family manufacturing company that made automated machines for commercial bakeries, including the “donut robot.” She hadn’t planned to work while raising two children, but when her husband got sick, she joined the company, heading its advertising department. In later years, she worked in White Center after her husband started a new company, Food Equipment Design Inc., that made automated pancake dispensers. She also volunteered for many years at the White Center Food Bank, Kiwanis Club and served on the White Center Chamber of Commerce, leading a beautification effort to clean up trash and graffiti.

Belshaw grew up during the Great Depression and remembers her father putting cards in the soles of his shoes to cover the bare patches. She remembers her grandmother offering a sandwich or stew to those in need on the back steps, saying, “Honey, when people are hungry, you feed them.” That sentiment carries over to her philanthropic support of Mary’s Place, which provides shelter for homeless women and children.

Yvonne’s giving also extends globally. She has funded the creation of wells in Africa and regularly supports Oxfam, Medical Teams International, Splash, WaterFirst and more.

She hopes her example and philosophy of leaving a legacy that will benefit others has been absorbed by the three generations of family. “After your needs are met, why do you need any more money?”

Yvonne Belshaw enjoys a party with kids at the Southwest Boys & Girls Club in White Center.
Zoe Mesnik-Greene was at a juncture in 2013 as a sophomore at the University of Washington. Would she continue as an elite pole vaulter, who had trained at the U.S. Olympic Training Center? Or would she put her considerable energy into the cause-based business she started in her dorm room to make high-quality lip balms that support global farmers and fund cleft palate surgeries for children in the developing world? Mesnik-Greene, 25, chose social entrepreneurship and never looked back. “I literally breathed, slept and lived this. It became my life.”

As the founder and CEO of Lasting Smiles, whose tagline is ‘Nourish Your Lips, Nurture the World,’ Mesnik-Greene wanted to create a philanthropic tool for change that is accessible, affordable and replenishable.

“For our generation, the word philanthropy can seem unapproachable. If I bring it up with friends, a lot of people think it’s for the very wealthy, and how can I be a philanthropist? But, of course, when you look it up, it means love of man. So anyone can be a philanthropist in their own life,” said Mesnik-Greene, who calls Lasting Smiles her life’s purpose.

Made with organic and fair trade ingredients like coconut oil from India and cocoa butter from Peru, Lasting Smiles is sold by national retailers including Whole Foods, Target and Nordstrom, and has been enjoyed by millions. Getting the product on shelves was entirely a result of Mesnik-Greene’s determination and single-minded focus.
With earnings saved from a Microsoft summer job and loans, she started Lasting Smiles to blend conscious consumerism and global good. Business was entirely new to her, so she taught herself all areas – supply chain, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, sales and more. Her scrappy marketing led to Lasting Smiles being featured at New York fashion week, by online influencers and in a New York Times article.

Mesnik-Greene's commitment to philanthropy can be traced back to joining Seattle Foundation's Youth Grantmaking Board as a high school freshman. "It was hands-down one of the most influential programs I was involved with in high school," she said. I appreciated how Seattle Foundation empowered youth and taught us real tools to succeed in grantmaking."

Her experience on the board developed skills that she uses today: how to develop key criteria, analyze processes and use site visits to evaluate a program. "It helped me connect the dots to see how grant money is really being used and leveraged to solve problems," said Mesnik-Greene, who also interned at nonprofits including Wellspring Family Services, the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle and the Olympic Training Center.

Through the Foundation, she also met Heide Felton, a mentor and philanthropist whose deep compassion had an impact on Mesnik-Greene. Felton recently passed away.

Her Lasting Smiles sales have funded surgeries for 250 children around the world, enabling them and their families to have better lives.

Although she’s received many accolades for her work, Mesnik-Greene wishes that she had had more champions and support as a budding young entrepreneur, including capital, partnerships or connections, so that she could increase her impact.

"I hope to get the business and philanthropic community invested in this opportunity to be a tool for change. Great impact can happen when even a small fraction of sales is donated to education, health, environment - any cause you can imagine," she said.

So Mesnik-Greene is thinking bigger and risking more. Her next plans are ambitious: to increase scale while disrupting the standard distribution and sales model by cutting out middle men and inefficiencies. That would translate into Lasting Smiles touching more consumers and doing more philanthropic good.

Bet on her.

Zoe Mesnik-Greene founded Lasting Smiles, a social good company that sells premium lip balms to create positive change in the developing world. A graduate of the University of Washington, Mesnik-Greene is an alumna of Seattle Foundation’s Youth Grantmaking Board.

www.lasting-smiles.com
Sofia Osuna, 18, is a senior at Lakeside High School and student at the Pacific Northwest Ballet School who is the chair of Seattle Foundation’s Youth Grantmaking Board. She will attend the University of Chicago in the fall.

"The Youth Grantmaking Board is an incredible opportunity for teens like me to learn about giving through grantmaking and to invest $20,000 from Seattle Foundation into community organizations."

"It’s been an ideal way for me to learn about the world of giving and philanthropy and to feel like I’m making a widespread difference in my community."

"I’ve been on the board for the past two years and I appreciated learning about so many nonprofit organizations in Seattle that I wasn’t familiar with before."
There are few better ways to ensure the future of Greater Seattle than by investing in the education of talented students. An investment in Seattle Foundation’s scholarship fund will unite your passion for education with the rewarding opportunity to create a lasting impact on a student’s life and future.

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