

Family Support Center of South Sound  
2016 Community Foundation Grant Narrative

**1) Describe the history and purpose of your organization; include the population and geographic area your proposal serves.**

The Family Support Center of South Sound is a nonprofit 501c3 multi-service agency located in downtown Olympia, Washington, founded in 1992 to provide families with coordinated supportive services in one centralized location with the mission, “*Working Together to Strengthen All Families*”. The Family Support Center seeks to build strong, healthy, self-sufficient families through collaborative programs and services, with the goal to reduce the impacts of family and child poverty, homelessness, and family violence in the South Sound community. Utilizing a “one-stop-shop” model, families with children and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault are provided with access to multiple on-site services which promote safety, health and wellbeing. The Family Support Center offers six core programs which include: Homeless Family Services- comprehensive individualized case management, rapid re-housing, housing search and placement, and supportive services for homeless families; Pear Blossom Place- Thurston County’s largest 24 hour emergency homeless family shelter which includes 7 permanent affordable housing units with on-site supportive services; Parent & Child Education- free parent education classes, family engagement activities, early learning, and on-site childcare for workshops/support groups; Family Resource Services Navigator Program-providing families with clothing, food, coordinated entry services, shelter placement, hygiene supplies, holiday assistance, transportation, mainstream benefits assistance, employment support, financial education, and resource navigation; The Thurston County Family Justice Center Program-providing best practice collaborative and co-located community based and criminal justice services to domestic violence and sexual assault survivors; and Supervised Visitation -transportation and supervision of visitation between noncustodial parents, children, and siblings.

**2) Describe what you plan to do and how it aligns with the Foundation grant making objectives. Identify key personnel and partners.**

Housing plays a pivotal role in the health and well-being of children and families. The 2015 Thurston County Point in Time Count identified 2,859 homeless children. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 75% of homeless children have at least one major developmental delay and are disproportionately represented in the special education system. Homeless children experience higher toxic stress levels than their non-homeless peers. The Family Support Center is requesting support from the Community Foundation for Pear Blossom Place, Thurston County’s largest homeless family shelter. Pear Blossom Place is a critical resource, ensuring shelter and supportive services are available to families to mitigate the negative impacts of homelessness. Pear Blossom Place provides 36 of our community’s most vulnerable, chronically homeless, unsheltered families a warm place to sleep nightly, totaling more than 13,140 bed nights annually. Without Pear Blossom Place these families would remain sleeping in cars, tents, unheated garages, or other unsafe locations. Pear Blossom Place offers six suites, including a kitchen, bathroom, dining, and sleeping area. In serving the County’s most

vulnerable homeless families and children, the needs and intensity of services required has increased, while staffing levels have remained the same. In order to best serve families at Pear Blossom Place additional funding is needed to increase staffing and training. Onsite supportive services and resources include case management, a computer job/homework center, laundry facilities, parent and child engagement activities, community garden, play area, community meeting space, and more. Staff works with families on achieving their goals, including acquiring housing, increasing income, and family stabilization. Formal and informal parenting support is provided, including breastfeeding assistance, nutrition, child guidance, and life skills. Staff and volunteers help families' complete resumes, housing applications, school enrollment, and prep for interviews. AmeriCorps members work one on one with children, supporting their early learning, academic success and participation in enrichment activities. The Family Support Center is well connected with nonprofit and governmental agencies throughout Thurston County, and works diligently to strategically and thoughtfully partner with such agencies to support families in achieving long term housing and greater self-sufficiency. Partnering housing providers include the Housing Authority of Thurston County, Homes First, and Community Youth Services. Additional partner agencies supporting our work include the YWCA's Economic Empowerment Program, Childcare Action Council, Nurse Family Partnership, Enterprise for Equity, Thurston County Food Bank, local school districts, law enforcement agencies and faith based communities. Staff remains knowledgeable of resources so families are provided the correct referral the first time. Staff positions at the shelter include a full time Homeless Family Services Case Manager, Homeless Family Services Program Manager, AmeriCorps VISTA Member, AmeriCorps Youth in Service Member, and a part time Housing Stability/ Landlord Liaison. Pear Blossom Place directly aligns with the Community Foundation's objectives of contributing to the region's basic needs, building upon community strengths and addresses community issues, and improves the ability of people to help themselves. With support from the Community Foundation, Pear Blossom Place will continue to provide an environment where families can succeed.

### **3) Why is this work important for our community now?**

Today more than 70 highly vulnerable, homeless families with children are on the waiting list to access Pear Blossom Place. 125 children are sleeping in tents, the backseat of their parent's vehicle, in a family member's garage, or in a local park. As children prepare to go back to school they deserve a bed to sleep in, a place to take a bath and wash their clothes, and they deserve to not worry about where they're sleeping that night. Supportive services are critical to meeting families' needs, goal achievement, and reducing their length of stay at shelter. Pear Blossom Place provides a space where families can build social connections with one another, access the right services in their time of need, and increases the resiliency in both parents and adults. The shelter and supportive services reduce the trauma and adverse childhood experiences faced by families, and builds hope. Dr. Chan Hellman's studies find that the single best predictor of a client's ability to thrive is the presence of hope. Pear Blossom Place gives homeless families and children hope- hope they can get into stable housing, secure a job, and be self-sufficient. Trained, hope and trauma informed staff is needed daily to ensure our community's most vulnerable families and children have access to the services, resources, and supports needed to achieve housing and economic stability. Agency statistics find that 85% of the families exiting shelter

maintain their housing, which is directly correlated to the services offered on-site at Pear Blossom Place.

**4) Describe other current and potential funding sources for this proposal. How do you plan to support this work going forward?**

The Family Support Center has a wide funding stream to support the programming and operations of Pear Blossom Place, and is constantly seeking out new funding opportunities. Currently, Pear Blossom Place receives funding from United Way Community Investment Partnership, Thurston County, HUD McKinney Vento, United Way of Thurston County Women's Leadership Council, Nisqually Tribe, Saint Michael Parish, and other individual/faith based support. The Family Support Center will also apply to foundations such as Walmart, Weyerhaeuser, and Georgia Pacific. An AmeriCorps VISTA member supports the program in identifying additional resources through new funding opportunities as well as leveraging the support of more than 200 volunteers.

**5) Describe what you will measure and how you will evaluate your project/work.**

A critical focus of Pear Blossom Place is to provide temporary shelter and safety for homeless children and their parents, while offering comprehensive services and housing assistance to move families to stable housing. The program measures the number of shelter beds provided, number of individuals and families served annually, length of stay at shelter, and the family's increased financial and housing stability. Case management services are provided for families for up to one year following their entry into housing, or for as long as the family requests it. The Family Support Center utilizes Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and an internal database to collect data for this program and track progress. Internal databases, client files, intake/exit forms, assessments, and client surveys are utilized to regularly track progress, identify gaps, seek efficiencies and improvements. The Family Support Center values incorporating parents/clients in the evaluation process and provides opportunities for parent leadership and solicits feedback on program design/development and suggested improvements. The Family Support Center participates in state, national, and local trainings to ensure the latest, most effective best practices are utilized in programming and are responsive to changing trends and emerging needs. Staff actively assist in the annual Thurston County Homeless Census as a lead agency, and utilizes data from that report as well as other community reports available to evaluate how well the community is performing on expected outcomes and what impact this program had on the results.

**6) Is there anything else you would like us to know?**

The Family Support Center of South Sound is actively engaged in our community's various initiatives to best support families with children, including Thurston Asset Building Coalition, Thurston Early Childhood Coalition, and Women's Health Coalition. Pear Blossom Place and the supportive services offered are designed around the best practice Protective Factors Framework, which include building parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. All families are welcome at Pear Blossom Place, which includes single

fathers, LGBTQ families, grandparents, and any self-defined family. We believe that families are their own best assets, and shelter and programming are offered in a way to provide each an opportunity to successfully access housing. Support from the Community Foundation will help to ensure staff and volunteers are trained in best practice service delivery, and are available to meet the needs of families, including weekend and overnight times. Volunteers are critical to the shelter remaining open nightly, and with increased training opportunities they will have more skills, comfort, and success managing the needs of highly vulnerable families. Additional staffing will also help support the families and children who are experiencing crisis. We believe that with support from the Community Foundation our shelter will be more successful in supporting families and children, quality of services will increase, our volunteer and staff retention will be higher, and families will be more successful in achieving stable housing more quickly.