

ReFuel Washougal is a community-supported weekly free meal that demonstrates Washougal's commitment to residents who are experiencing hard times. The mission of ReFuel Washougal is this: "To comfort our community by providing a warm meal to those in need."

Since Jan. 2, 2015, churches, schools, community groups and individuals have provided a meal and fellowship in a welcoming setting. About 50 people attend each Friday, including people experiencing homelessness, teenagers, families, seniors and others who may be hungry, isolated or lonely. ReFuel Washougal volunteers supplement the meal with blankets, sack lunches, community resource information and "HUGS" (hats, underwear, gloves, socks/scarves).

The food, clothing and resource information are gratefully received by guests. They also appreciate the extraordinary spirit that characterizes Refuel Washougal: after preparing and serving the meal, the volunteers sit down and eat with the guests, engaging in friendly conversation and showing that they care.

ReFuel Washougal grew from community conversations about strategies for assisting Washougal residents who were struggling. Friends of Excelsior High School, the Washougal Lions Club and Mayor Sean Guard were involved in early discussions that resulted in a blanket drive. Dozens of people, churches and organizations made the blanket drive an immediate success, and the community-wide mobilization demonstrated Washougal's deep generosity when presented with an actionable request.

As the plan for weekly meals took shape, Washougal took action. Excelsior High School hosted a soup dinner fundraiser for kitchen supplies; the school district distributed information; Girl Scouts provided cookies and decorated the dining area for Valentine's Day; churches supplied volunteers and food; individuals and nonprofits stepped up with a range of supports; and a core group met regularly to work out efficient systems and to share equipment and other resources.

ReFuel Washougal is an ongoing program. ReFuel Washougal is nominated for the Nonprofit Network of Southwest Washington's Excellence in Collaboration Award, based on partnerships among churches, schools, government, service clubs, nonprofits and individuals.