

You are  
the key

GRATITUDE  
REPORT  
2017

Aleta moved into housing in 2017

# Dear Community

2017 was a year of change for The Sophia Way. We questioned, deliberated, and assessed the way we did our life-saving work. What is The Sophia Way? Are we effective, with our limited resources, at getting women into housing? Could there be a better way? The quest for improvement led us to the understanding that there is a better way that would make us effective in housing more women.

In 2017 we adopted Housing First, a long-time proven approach in which people experiencing homelessness are connected to permanent housing quickly. There are no preconditions, behavioral contingencies, or other barriers. We have let go of barriers in our programs that at the time seemed like a good idea, but in the end only made our jobs easier, and not necessarily contributing to getting more women into housing. The belief - "Everyone has a right to housing, everyone is housing ready" - now drives all of our work.

In 2017 we realized it was not just enough to house women, but to question why we are serving more women of color, more women who cannot work because of a disability or their advanced age, and more women with substance use disorder and/or mental illness.

In 2017 we understood that we have a responsibility and moral obligation to interrupt the decades of systematic oppression causing so much harm. We committed ourselves to an intentional racially equitable approach to homelessness and social justice in housing.

We are grateful to our staff for embracing Housing First to engage with and serve our women. We are grateful to our housing case managers who understood their job would become more complex as we aspired to house an increasingly challenging population with their individual barriers to housing.

We are grateful to our community - city and county governments, foundations, faith community, donors, housing service provider partners, low-income housing advocates, elected officials - who have given their support and made our transformation possible. We are grateful to the hundreds of volunteers who spoke out on behalf of people experiencing homelessness.

As we continue our commitment to Housing First and social justice, we are deeply appreciative of our community for their investment in our core and for sharing our commitment to alleviate the pain of the homelessness crisis.

In partnership,



**Aaron Hager**  
Board Chair



**Angela Murray**  
Executive Director

**Everyone has a right to housing, everyone is housing ready.**



## Meet Aleta



**Aleta Blakely came to The Sophia Way in 2016. Working with Dietra Clayton, her housing case manager, she found housing in 2017.**

*"My ask of you is the same as what I ask of myself."*

- *Be there for those who need you.*
- *Don't judge people.*
- *See people experiencing homelessness as neighbors, not criminals or worthless people.*
- *Remember that they have a powerful story to share that we all need to be willing to hear."*

I did not choose to be homeless.

I started working at age 11, went to college, got a degree, and had a successful career. I never thought I would be homeless. In fact, I was one of those people who thought of homelessness as someone unwilling to work.

Unfortunately, my personal life was not good. I had a very difficult childhood and suffered ongoing abuse from the relationships I had. At the age of 63, I was forced to make an impossible decision – risk the likelihood of homelessness to survive or stay and face the consequences. I chose to get out.

Initially, for several months, I leaned on the support of people in my safety net, couch surfing when needed. I knew that if I worked hard, I would be able to pull myself out, but in reality, my safety net ran out quicker than my ability to rebound. Emotionally, I felt scattered, defeated, and ashamed. I kept asking myself, "What am I doing here? How did this happen?"

My life changed when I came to The Sophia Way. They gave me a home base that helped me realign my life. They made me feel safe and warm, which helped in reversing the effects of sleep deprivation. I could go to work every day knowing that I had a supportive place to be and a secure place to keep my things, eat, shower, and sleep. As I began to heal and feel my foundation returning, amazing things began to happen.

The brilliance of The Sophia Way goes far beyond the things they provide. It is their people, who devote their lives to helping people like me, who are simply amazing. My case manager, Dietra Clayton, is one such person. She is like a triage nurse, an air traffic controller, a therapist, and a human bulldozer. At our first session, Dietra led me through a process where I began to understand how I became homeless and how I could prevent it from happening again. It was the greatest gift I could have received.

Getting housing was a long and difficult process. Do you know how challenging it is to get a house for anyone making less than \$30/hour? Do you know how many denials of applications you have to go through? It's such a frustrating process. I would get a call from Dietra about a possible rental unit and would have to run to get the application in. However, by the time I would get to the manager, the unit would have already been rented out. Every time I did this, I risked losing my job.

I would not be housed if it wasn't for Dietra's advocacy and tenacity. She gave me the strength and resilience to overcome all obstacles. She kept me going. I am now in school, studying to be a human resources manager. One day, soon, my subsidized apartment can go to another person in need.

# Voices of Our Supporters

*"When I was 44 years old, I was so depressed that I could not work or function for a year. I have always felt that I could've been living on the street had it not been for the support of my family and friends. I could also afford to get the medical help and counseling I needed. Since then, I have a place in my heart for all the people experiencing homelessness because I know that could have been me had it not been for the grace of God and the loving support I had. I truly believe homelessness can happen to anyone."*

## Christie Upjohn



*"We donate meals to The Sophia Way every month and we love it. It is the one time when my entire family comes together. It has now become a tradition and inculcates a sense of community giving in my kids. In fact, my daughter mentioned the meal-making process in one of her essays in school and I was so touched. Thank you, Sophia Way for giving me and my family an opportunity to come together and serve the community."*

## Anne

*"Volunteering at The Sophia Way is a wonderful opportunity for me to give something back to my community. No matter how large or small the task, volunteers consistently give what is called 'a true gift of self'. The results of our efforts shine through in the faces of individuals who find a job or secure a decent place to live. They take pride in their accomplishments and we, as volunteers, share in that pride knowing we help to make it happen. We are dedicated to reduce homelessness."*

## Sue Fazio



*"I reached a deeper understanding of women who are experiencing homelessness when I learned that they are always (day or night) worried about their safety, causing them to be continually exhausted. I have heard many women describe their first night at Sophia's Place shelter as the best night's sleep they have had in a long time."*

## Janet Olin

*"A few years ago, I delivered dinner, donated by a Newport Presbyterian Church woman's group, to The Sophia Way shelter. The shelter staff who greeted me warmly was very appreciative of the meal and explained how much it would mean to the women who would be arriving soon. I walked away thinking that what we had offered was so little, so inconsequential, yet so needed. I wondered why I never saw these women on the streets in Bellevue. I knew that I needed to learn more and to do more. Life isn't fair, but I know I'm helping make a positive difference in a small way for the women at the shelter."*

## Pat Landy

# The Impact of Your Support

(Comparing FY2016 with FY2017)



**400%**  
increase

**125** WOMEN MOVED  
INTO HOUSING



**62%**  
increase

**490** WOMEN SERVED AT  
OUR DAY CENTER

*"I became homeless when I lost my job and couldn't renew my lease. I had no family, and nowhere to go. When I came to The Sophia Way I was happy, grateful, and relieved at the same time because Daisy (my dog) and I had a warm place to sleep at night and food to eat. We had beds and showers. We had what we needed to survive."*

Having been homeless for a long time, Kelsey faced many barriers to get into housing. She did not have a birth certificate or a Social Security card. Her case manager first worked with her to get the documents she needed to get her ID, and then helped her find an affordable apartment. Finally, after 17 years of sleeping outdoors, Kelsey moved into her own place. She is now in the exciting stage of picking out dishes and furniture contributed by our generous donors.

*"I came to The Sophia Way from a hospital room. A failed suicide attempt after an eviction, relapse and the loss of my family support left me homeless and hopeless. The stability in Sophia's Place allowed me to recover from abuse, alcoholism, and major depression. During my stay, my case manager connected me to mental health resources and helped me find a job. Now I am in an apartment I can afford by myself."*



**22%**  
increase

**77** WOMEN FOUND A  
PLACE IN OUR NIGHT  
SHELTER PROGRAM



**70%**  
increase

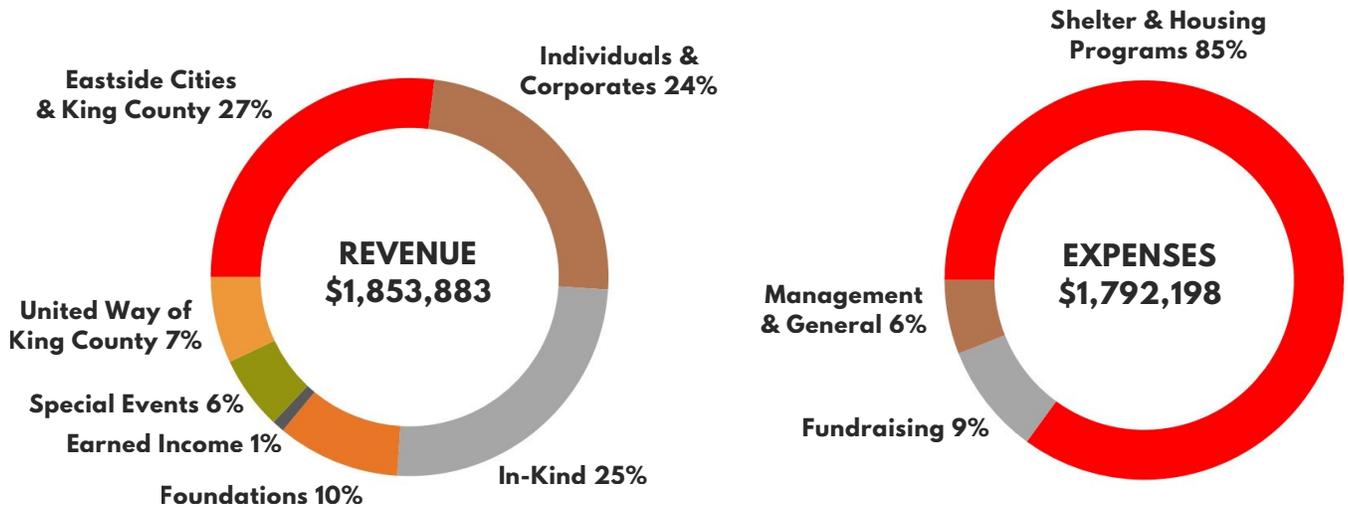
**232** WOMEN SERVED  
AT OUR  
EMERGENCY SHELTER



**50+**

**WOMEN REACHED  
THROUGH OUR NEW  
OUTREACH PROGRAM**

# Financials



## Our Mission

The Sophia Way is committed to helping end homelessness for single adult women in King County by providing shelter, social services, and permanent housing with support, offering a path from homelessness to stable and sustainable living.

## Our Programs

### Shelter



Day Center

Night Shelter Program

Emergency Shelter

### Housing



Transitional Housing

Rental Assistance Program

Section 8

Market-rate & Subsidized Rentals

### Support



Housing Case Managers

Outreach Program

Companion Program

**Our Office: The Sophia Way, 11061 NE 2nd Street, Suite 223, Bellevue, WA 98004**  
[www.sophiaway.org](http://www.sophiaway.org) | [info@sophiaway.org](mailto:info@sophiaway.org) | Ph: (425) 463-6285 ext. 102 | Fax: (425) 455-8607

**Our Shelter: Sophia's Place, St. Luke's Lutheran Church, 3030 Bellevue Way NE, Bellevue, WA 98004**  
 Ph: (425) 896-7385 | Day Center hours: 8am-3pm | Night Shelter hours: 6:45pm-7:30am