



WASHINGTON COUNTY KIDS

Background

Washington County Kids (WCK) was formed out of a concern that children and youth in Washington County were not being served. Specifically, we were trying to address the reduction of funding for out of school time (OST) programs. We have a deep commitment to kids; to improving their chances of success by ensuring that when they are out of school they have the opportunity to access programs that keep kids engaged and growing. Programs that engage kids can mean success for thousands of children and teens in our community. Even before funding cuts, programs that served this population met the needs of just a fraction of eligible kids. After a trend of reduction in funding over several years fewer children and teens are now able to be served. We know that the children and teens who do receive these services have significantly better academic and career success. We want to make these results possible for every student who needs them.

How did it all start?

In 2002 the Washington County Commission on Children and Families was asked by the State Commission on Children and Families to conduct a comprehensive community plan. The resulting activity involved 200 community members participating in countless hours of review of needs and possible solutions to problems. The group’s final summit identified their highest priority as the implementation of community schools where the neighborhood school becomes the hub of the community, providing services that support academic success.

Two separate surveys of school principals were conducted to determine program needs. As a result, Family Resource Centers were implemented in each school district in the county or, in the case of smaller districts, in partnership with a neighboring district. In addition, Commission staff brokered support among diverse partners to create school based health centers in each of the large school districts. Commission funds were allocated to each school district to fund after school programs and other support services based upon the community area’s greatest needs. The Commission also formed a Community School Task Force that recognized schools with community school programs with a celebratory assembly including the presentation of a banner the schools proudly displayed afterwards. The committee held a community

school summit that provided information and technical assistance to schools and community groups who wanted to implement similar programs.

A new group was formed

In 2009 it had become apparent that the Commission did not have sufficient funds to address the Commission's OST goals, so members of the task force decided to form a separate group outside the Commission structure. Key members included Katie Riley, Susan Bender Phelps, and Susan Stoltenberg. Susan Bender Phelps agreed to be the convener. The group initially called themselves the "Children's Opportunity Fund Initiative of Washington County" or COFI and held monthly Steering Committee meetings that were open to the public. COFI researched different options for obtaining sustainable funding including pursuing foundation grants, crowd funding, social impact bonds, and seeking a community property levy. It was clear that the most viable option was pursuing a property tax levy. We researched groups that had already obtained levies for their communities; Seattle, San Francisco, Miami/Dade County in Florida, and Portland. We decided to begin gathering support in the community through endorsements. In addition, we realized we needed to conduct polling to determine if voters would support a levy.

Partnering for nonprofit status

A fiscal agreement was signed with Impact Northwest,* a non-profit with 501c3 status. With Impact NW as our fiscal sponsor, COFI could begin to solicit charitable donations through their accounting and online structures.

In 2012 we learned that the Commission system was going to be disbanded within a year and effective December 2013 all funds that had been used to benefit local groups would be redirected to the Early Childhood Council. Later, it was determined that some of the funds would be used for older youth and those funds were redirected to the Youth Development Council. The County Commissioners regrettably stated that the county would not be able to replace any of the funding.

In November 2012, Susan Bender Phelps was elected Chair of the Washington County Democrats and was no longer able to devote as much time to Chair COFI. Katie Riley agreed to chair the group. She embarked on an active campaign in 2013 to expand the endorsement process and collect additional donations. An eNewsletter was started in 2013 and articles were printed to profile partner groups who were administering out of school time (OST) programs. Lisa Allen agreed to serve as newsletter editor. Several articles were reprinted in area newspapers.

In 2013 a grant was obtained from Meyer Memorial Trust to conduct polling to assess the public's response to a potential levy. Bids were obtained from four polling firms and one was selected to conduct the poll. In January 2014, telephone interviews were conducted and 500 registered voters responded to the polling questions. Approximately 58% of respondents stated that they would vote for a levy that supported OST programs. These results were presented in individual meetings with County Commissioners but they were unwilling to place the initiative on the ballot due to other priorities. In June, 2015 a formal presentation and request was made at the County Commissioners regular meeting to place the initiative on the ballot. Approximately 20 supporters, representing partner organizations, attended in support of the initiative. Unfortunately, the Commissioners were not able to take action at that time.

Simply Washington County Kids (WCK)

In 2016, group members decided to change the name from Children's Opportunity Fund Initiative of Washington County to the Washington County Kids Fund to make it easier to identify the group. Steering

Committee members agreed to file and collect signatures for the levy initiative to be placed on the ballot. When the request was filed, Washington County Kids Fund received a letter from the County Counsel that only the County Commissioners could place a tax initiative on the ballot.

It was time for dialogue. In 2016 we held a summit of all organizations serving OST programs in the county. All community partners were invited to attend. Attendees agreed that Washington County Kids Fund should continue to serve as a convening/organizing group for the community and that WCKF should also pursue the goal of providing information on best practices. In 2016 the name Washington County Kids Fund was shortened to simply Washington County Kids (WCK). In fall 2016, WCK partnered with Oregon ASK (After School Kids) to present a workshop on STEM/STEAM, highlighting existing successful programs. Approximately 50 people attended including mayors from three cities. In spring 2017, WCK presented a workshop on Engaging Parents that was attended by approximately 20 staff from various OST programs throughout the county.

During the 2016 and 2017 legislative sessions a bill was introduced to allow the formation of Children's Special Districts by initiative petition. Although it received support and passed the Senate, the bill died in the House Revenue committee.

WCK now has approximately 140 endorsers and almost 200 people on its listserve of supporters. A new WCK website was launched in July 2017 with more communications opportunities. A Communications committee was formed recently and is responsible for spearheading targeted communications. It supports getting the message out about kids' needs. Volunteers include Fin Finley, chair, webmaster JinWei Niu, eNewsletter editor Lisa Allen, and volunteers Kara Parris, Melissa Habit, Rachel Gowland, Curtis Haley, and Karen Merrill, all dedicated to supporting WCK's mission with imagination, ingenuity and integrity.

And now, conversations

Currently, WCK is engaging in community conversations. These community conversations focus on talking about the need to support children and youth with OST programs and specifically how best to provide the opportunity for these programs and supporters to work as a coalition for the betterment of kids. WCK continues to provide publicity regarding the success of partner programs serving the community and the need for increasing the number of kids served. In addition, WCK disseminates information on best practices. The Steering Committee meets on the 4th Monday of each month from 6:30-8 pm in the Shute Park Library in Hillsboro (check the website for any variations as there was on the day of the eclipse). All are invited and most welcome.

www.washingtoncountykids.com

* Fiscal Sponsorship with ImpactNW allows Washington County Kids to operate as a 501c3 (nonprofit) under their umbrella with 501(c)(3) status.