



**UPPER  
VALLEY  
MEND**

**2022 – 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN**

Dear Friend of MEND,

It is with great excitement that we present our 2022 – 2027 strategic plan. This plan is a collaborative effort between Upper Valley MEND board, staff and the entire Upper Valley community. It is the culmination of a year-long effort to represent the community's vision of what Upper Valley MEND should be working to accomplish. With your help, this plan is a roadmap for the next five years.

In 2017, Upper Valley MEND created its first major strategic plan. This plan was our first attempt at setting strategic priorities and specific goals that would allow us to make bigger steps towards supporting the community. This plan allowed us to accomplish big goals since 2017.

In 2018 the thrift store moved out of the Community Cupboard into its own space at 211 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Das Thrift Haus has blossomed. It's more visible, more welcoming and has a wider variety of low-cost goods. Items are better curated and individually priced. It provides more opportunities for volunteerism. It can accommodate donations of more second-hand goods at once, which donors had requested for years. Sales are up – meaning better sustainability for Upper Valley MEND's service programs.

With more space in the food bank, we adapted our food distribution model to improve dignity and choice. Food bank shoppers can now visit as often as they like and shop for their preferred food. It's as close as we could get to a free grocery store. Six days per week, the food bank offers grocery staples, specialty food, abundant fresh produce, and hygiene items to anyone in need.

In 2021, we hired our first full-time social worker to better support our most vulnerable neighbors on a more regular basis. In the past, we've offered one-time financial assistance in times of crisis. Now, we're able to offer more ongoing support in both English and Spanish, including case management, transportation assistance and home visits. In this way, our programs make sure no one falls through the cracks and there is a strong safety net for support in the Upper Valley.

In 2020 Covid-19 shook each of our individual worlds, and the Upper Valley community. During this time, all of MEND's programs adjusted to be able to continue to serve the community in a new reality. During the pandemic, our community stepped up to support each other at levels we had never seen. New faces appeared at the food bank, finding themselves needing help for the first time. Donors donated more than they ever had. Volunteers adapted to new protocols with unwavering support. And staff led their programs with positivity through seemingly endless changes.

The last five years have highlighted areas where MEND is poised to grow. The Upper Valley's lack of affordable housing threatens to dismiss the very core of our community – the local workforce who make this a vibrant place to live. Our food bank building continues to age and limits our ability to provide services in a safe and healthy environment. This plan outlines how we hope to address these challenges and more over the next five years.

Thank you for taking this journey with us,



Kaylin Bettinger  
Executive Director



## Mission and Vision

Mission: Meeting each need with dignity (MEND)

Vision: We envision an empowered community with equitable access to food, housing, wellness and economic security.

## Food

One of Upper Valley MEND's core beliefs is that every child and adult should have access to high quality food to nourish their body and mind. Upper Valley MEND's original program, the Community Cupboard, has consistently supported the Upper Valley since 1988. In 2021, Community Cupboard food bank served 580 households with our full-service free grocery store, and additional people access the 24-hour free fridge outside. Community Harvest gleaning program provides fresh, local fruits and vegetables to more than 10,000 people in Chelan and Douglas counties during the harvest months.

### Five-year vision:

Upper Valley MEND's food programs focus on the following values when providing food for anyone in our community:

- **Accessible:** The food bank is open 6 days a week and accessible and available to everyone. Food is provided to anyone in need and limits on food are kept to a minimum. Food bank hours accommodate households with varying schedules and accessibility needs.
- **Nutritious:** Emphasis is on providing healthy, nourishing food to food bank shoppers. Nutritionally irrelevant food is kept to a minimum.
- **Convenient:** Grocery items and ready-to-eat items are available to food bank shoppers, with consideration given to the season and the living situation of shoppers.
- **Culturally considerate:** available food reflects the culinary cultures of the people who live in our service area. Staff and volunteers are culturally competent and whenever possible, speak the first language of the people who live in our service area.
- **Sustainable:** much of the food distributed through the food bank would otherwise be thrown away by local grocery stores, or left unpicked at local farms, orchards and backyards. Collection and distribution of rescued food is a priority for its environmental impact through reduction of food waste.
- **Useful:** The food bank provides relevant non-food items (such as household supplies and toiletries) that will help ease the grocery burden and improve life for food bank shoppers.
- **Connected:** The food bank is a place of community connection, love and support for shoppers, volunteers, staff and others who spend time there.
- **Economically valuable:** Many jobs in the Upper Valley are in hospitality and agriculture industries and are historically seasonal and low wages. Food bank services are intended to ease the financial stress for these local employees as well as support local businesses who struggle to hire local workers.
- **Educational:** The food bank is the first place many clients engage with Upper Valley MEND. Education is provided on other available support, both through Upper Valley MEND and outside referrals, and assistance signing up for additional services is available.



*Children volunteer along with their parents on a cherry glean. Community Harvest Gleaning Program volunteers pick thousands of pounds of excess produce each year for distribution at food banks across Chelan and Douglas Counties.*

### SMART goals:

MEND has achieved a high-level of excellence in its food programs, achieving these values today and pushing the limits of how much can be done within our current constraints. The board of directors recognizes that to go beyond this, it must eliminate its overriding barrier: the state of its facilities. As such, our main goal for food is:

- Move to a facility that will optimize the Community Cupboard food bank and other food programs and centralize MEND's services in one location by December 2027.

## Housing

Over the past decade, the cost of housing in the Upper Valley has increased steadily, outpacing local wages. During and after the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of housing jumped significantly due to an increased demand for both rentals and homeownership. The lack of affordable rentals and entry level homeownership opportunities impacts every aspect of community life. Local employers struggle to hire staff. Families move out of the area because they can't find a place to live. Seniors find themselves with tax burdens they can't afford long after their homes are paid off. Community morale drops as people feel they can't make a place for themselves in the community they love.



*MEND's first affordable homeownership neighborhood – Alpine Heights – was built in 2001. The 10 homes in the neighborhood are permanently affordable, meaning homeowners now and in the future will be able to own these homes for a price they can afford earning local wages.*

At Upper Valley MEND, we know home is where it all starts. Since 2001, Upper Valley MEND has built and stewarded 20 homes in our Community Land Trust, working to provide affordable, high-quality opportunities for local people to purchase homes in the Upper Wenatchee Valley. Since its inception, our CLT has provided permanently affordable homeownership opportunities to 32 local households.

Adding additional homes to the Community Land Trust portfolio will require changes within MEND's current organizational structure so additional homes can be successfully built and stewarded. These changes include adding additional staffing or consulting for stewardship and development capacity, creating a staffing and management plan and a fundraising plan to fund these new expenses.

### Five-year vision:

Steward current CLT homes and add additional homes to the program. Foster excellent stewardship of current and future homes with appropriate staffing and management.

### SMART goals:

- Add 15 CLT homes to the program by December 2027.

- Create a staffing and management plan for the CLT by December 2022.
- Create an advocacy plan to work towards sustainable funding for CLT development and management by December 2022.
- Explore feasibility of creating a long-term rental assistance program by December 2024.

## Wellness

For those living in or near poverty, health and wellness can take a backseat to other basic needs. Even for those with health insurance, high premiums and deductibles often mean patients pay out of pocket for everything but care for catastrophic events. Upper Valley residents have access to high quality healthcare, but only if they can afford it.

Upper Valley MEND's wellness services address the gaps in healthcare for those living in the Upper Valley.

- **Free health clinic:** Upper Valley MEND hosts a free health clinic at Cascade Medical Center each week. This clinic utilizes licensed volunteer providers, nurses, receptionists, and translators to provide free urgent care.
- **Dental services:** In a recent survey of over 300 MEND clients, 70% of respondents reported that they don't have dental insurance. Upper Valley MEND's dental assistance program works with local dentists who provide urgent dental and hygiene care to Upper Valley residents, and MEND pays the bill. Upper Valley MEND also offers financial assistance for dentures.
- **Financial assistance:** Upper Valley MEND provides support with medical bills. MEND's social worker helps clients navigate health-related resources available to them.



*Dr. Karl Kranz sees patients at the Upper Valley Free Clinic each week. The walk-in clinic is a partnership between Cascade Medical Center and Upper Valley MEND.*

Upper Valley MEND has long recognized that ensuring wellness for vulnerable people requires a whole-person approach that addresses specific health concerns as well as social determinants of health. For example, if someone is experiencing stress-induced health concerns because they have unstable housing, Upper Valley MEND can help with both the health concern and the housing.

All of Upper Valley MEND's wellness programs assist people in decreasing barriers to access healthcare through traditional systems. To this end, in 2020 Upper Valley MEND hired our first bilingual, bicultural social worker, who helps meet clients' immediate needs, as well as provides ongoing support. Readers of this strategic plan will notice the social worker position highlighted in other areas, as this position works to help patients and clients access support among MEND's many programs, as well as relevant support outside of Upper Valley MEND.

### Five-year vision:

Over the next five years, Upper Valley MEND's wellness programs will work to further incorporate the following:

- **Whole-person care:** many health concerns stem from other systemic issues. MEND's wellness programs will work to integrate healthcare with addressing social determinants of health.
- **Access to specialty providers and other disciplines:** Many patients benefit from seeing a specialty provider. MEND will provide referrals, financial support and facilitate access to healthcare, including mental health, physical therapy, chiropractic, optometry, dental or alternative healthcare.



### SMART goals:

- Adjust healthcare services (time, date, location, transportation) to meet accessibility needs for target populations, especially vulnerable groups not otherwise served well by mainstream healthcare system.
- Build policies and procedures for financial assistance, including help with medical bills through financial assistance program, referrals to partners and specialty providers, and financial support complimenting local hospitals' sliding scales.
- Assess effectiveness of Upper Valley Free Clinic by December 2023.

## Economic Security

While many people who access MEND's services have fallen on hard times and simply need temporary support, others need a more holistic approach. To help clients meet the variety of needs they face, Upper Valley MEND provides immediate and one-time financial assistance, case management for ongoing support, and assistance connecting with resources.

MEND has been providing immediate and one-time financial assistance for more than two decades. We have seen that many people who reach out to MEND for financial assistance have deeper and more diverse needs than will be met with a rent or utility payment, or a few nights in a local hotel. In 2020, MEND expanded this program with a full-time staff position to manage the emergency financial assistance program. Priorities in hiring included a staff member who is bilingual, bicultural and has a background and educational credentials in social work or a related field.

Along with financial assistance, MEND now offers ongoing case management and assistance with accessing resources outside of MEND. This means that for someone who can't pay rent because they lost their job and had a big medical bill, we can help them pay rent, help them address barriers to getting a new job, and help them access support for their medical care. This approach is based on relationships and community partnerships, recognizing that establishing trust is the first step to helping clients with multiple needs find lasting change.

### Five-year vision:

Over the next five years, Upper Valley MEND's emergency assistance program will continue the same trajectory as MEND began when we created the full-time emergency assistance program manager in 2020:

- Every person in the Upper Valley who is going through a personal emergency has access to immediate and ongoing support through Upper Valley MEND.
- Grow the program to serve more people each year over the next five years.

### SMART goals:

- By 2027, at least 40 clients will be enrolled in the case management program, which is the expected full case load for the emergency assistance manager.
- By 2027, volunteers will be utilized to support the program, especially as case numbers grow.



*After the home they owned burned in a house fire, Upper Valley MEND's emergency assistance program helped this local family pay for a temporary apartment for 2.5 months.*

- We will be able to map the geography and demographics of 80 percent of our clients across all programs to identify gaps in our services.

## Operational excellence and cross-program goals

For Upper Valley MEND to effectively and sustainably support the Upper Valley community, the organization must have excellent operational capacity. The following goals will ensure that our operational capacity allows us to meet our strategic goals in each area by 2027.

### Revenue Model:

- **Fundraising:** Expand MEND's fundraising program to ensure strong community support and connection and long-term sustainability. Focus will be on donor engagement and feedback, expansion of the major donor program, capital campaigns and events – all in the spirit of bringing the community together.
- **Retail:** Maintain Das Thrift Haus and Jubilee Global Gifts as sources of unrestricted revenue for the organization, as well as providing low-cost goods in our local community and fair working conditions abroad.
- **Grants:** Pursue grants for operational support and special projects. Maintain relationships with local grant-making jurisdictions and organizations as well as private funders and grant writers.



### People:

- **Staff:** Ensure retention of a strong, qualified staff team by providing competitive wages and benefits, a strong culture and ongoing staff development.
- **Volunteers:** Recruit and retain an energetic, qualified volunteer team by providing a variety of volunteer opportunities across programs, a strong training program and ongoing support and appreciation.

### Data and financial systems:

- Improve collection, tracking and visualization of client and patient data to understand success areas and gaps in service between programs utilizing Salesforce CRM.
- Ensure integration between client, volunteer and donor database and financial processing software.
- Maintain proper financial controls and financial capacity by maintaining policies, conducting regular audits and ensuring diversified and forward-looking investment strategies.



### Marketing and outreach:

- Continue to emphasize building a strong network of partnerships locally and across the region to support client needs.

- Expand knowledge of the program to vulnerable groups: This includes people who are elderly and home bound, people who are geographically remote and lack transportation or communication technology, and people whose first language is not English.

Facilities:

- By December 2027, move to a facility that will centralize MEND's services in one location, including MEND's offices, Community Cupboard food bank and Das Thrift Haus. A new facility will allow for improvement of each of MEND's services and expansion into new areas of service to better meet the needs of the community.