

Ashland UCC's Laundry Love Project  
Neighbors in Need (NIN) Year-end Report March 2019  
Submitted to [NIN@UCC.org](mailto:NIN@UCC.org)  
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Information related to how the money was used:

All Laundry Love funds, annual budget \$6,000, except for \$500 have been spent directly on providing laundry. The \$500 were spent on the red aprons which are used as uniforms for volunteers and functionally to hold the quarters while doing laundry, and a small amount was spent on fundraising in terms of letters and postage. Funds are not spent on laundry supplies because donations of soap and softener are always received.

Eight Laundry Love volunteers regularly welcome 35 to 40 people each 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday afternoon of the month in remembrance of T Bone, a gentleman on the streets of Ventura in 2002 and the inspiration for the first Laundry Love project, who famously said, "I think people would treat me like a human being if I had clean clothes." Our guests arrive with their clothes, sleeping bags and other bedding, and sometimes their children, excited to be receiving some financial help to wash all their belongings. Some live in small houses, trailers or apartments, some live in their cars or tents and some live on the streets and sleep wherever they can. They often say how much they are looking forward to a good night's sleep in their clean and maybe still warm sheets, blankets and bags, wherever it is they may be sleeping. Each month it costs between \$10 and \$15 per person, or approximately \$350, to assist these neighbors with their laundry. We know many of them as friends by now and enjoy visiting with them and even helping them fold their clean laundry at times. Most have jobs.

The grant we received from Neighbors in Need has served as the bedrock of our annual budget of \$6,000. It helped us leverage additional contributions including \$500 from both Ashland's Unitarian and Quaker congregations, a monthly collection of quarters from Gracepoint Fellowship Church of the Nazarene, donations ranging from \$250 to \$500 from three local businesses, a grant for \$1,000 from the Leightman-Maxey Foundation, almost \$2,000 from our Laundry Love fundraiser along with numerous contributions from Ashland UCC's membership and other members of the community. Our congregations Men's groups does one month a year and provides the funding and the volunteers.

How the community was transformed as a result of completing this project:

As a community we are being transformed in several ways. First, our many donors and our pool of eleven regular and six substitute volunteers represent a variety of sects and world religions and we are enjoying new ecumenical friendships as a consequence. Partly because of getting to know our Laundry Love neighbors, several volunteers have taken on new and additional volunteer work at Ashland's Winter Shelter, including preparing dinners and breakfasts, washing the shelter's blankets and

spending the night. It's a wonderful transformation for many of us to recognize people on the streets as individuals we know and care about, to call each other by name and stop to catch up on one another's lives.

Laundry Love has caused several of us, volunteers and guests alike, to feel more energy and determination to join and participate in other local groups to find ways to improve all our lives, such as a Compassionate Listening group at Ashland's Culture of Peace Commission and our community radio station where one of our Laundry Love guests recently interviewed a local Parks & Recreation Commissioner who was up for recall. It was our guest's first interview and he did such a fine job, the Commissioner called him later to express appreciation. Our guest is thrilled to find himself on what he hopes to be a new career path.

Some of our Laundry Love guests have begun to attend church services at Ashland UCC. We know they are all experiencing improved hygiene because of Laundry Love which we hope translates into improved health, although we have no hard data on this. We also see an improvement in mental health in our guests. It does a lot for a person to feel cared for by others. Without statistical data I think we can safely say that feeling clean increases one's self esteem and dignity. There is also a noticeable sense of calm and well-being at the end of the afternoon as people are folding the last of their clean belongings and preparing to go back out into the world, feeling they will look presentable, maybe even good enough to apply for a job, and as T Bone said, knowing they will be treated more like a human being.

The last transformation that we want to mention in this report is that the Episcopal Church in a nearby town, Shady Cove, was inspired by our example here in Ashland and has started their own Laundry Love project. They asked some of us to come and answer the same questions that you have asked us, hoping to learn from our mistakes as well as our accomplishments.

#### What lessons were learned (positive and negative)?

\*This is an easy project for which to fundraise because most people totally understand the importance of being clean and are willing to support it.

\*Practical applications such as figuring out we needed to buy sweatpants and sweatshirts for people who come to Laundry Love needing to wash everything they own including what they are wearing

\*That it is important to offer quarters to everyone at the laundromat during our hours of service so that we are not discriminating by appearance about who needs help and who doesn't. People who don't need help politely decline our assistance but often express appreciation that it has been offered to all.

\*That it is difficult to measure Laundry Love's impact statistically. We only have our perceptions and the stories we hear.

\*We need to figure out how we can offer food during Laundry Love. We used to bring homemade soups, stews and rice and our guests enjoyed them. However, the

laundromat owner was justifiably concerned about health standards and risk management and asked us to stop. People are hungry though. Our attendance is lower now that we no longer provide food. A pizza parlor nearby has offered free pizza that we may be able to serve outside. We are exploring solutions.

What would you do differently if you had it to do over?

We have had to change the date for Laundry Love a few times because of holidays and we changed the time of day from evening to late afternoon. These have been attempts to provide better service but the changes have been confusing and unsettling to our guests. Constancy is an important value we need to honor by showing up at the same time on the same day of each month.

Two other changes that have been positive are reducing our hours from four to three and creating volunteer shifts that are now one and a half hours each. These changes have made the volunteer job less tiring and we have been able to involve twice as many willing volunteers because of them. If we had this to do over, we would begin with shorter volunteer shifts.

What is next for the community having completed the project?

This is an ongoing project. We do not anticipate stopping Laundry Love because the need for it will not go away until we have figured out how to do away with poverty in the United States. However, we think Laundry Love will change when the Ashland community manages to build a permanent shelter for people without homes. That facility is in the planning stages and will include a laundromat where we will be charged less to do laundry and where there will be a kitchen that meets health standards in which we can prepare food for all our guests, those with and without homes of their own.

Photographs:



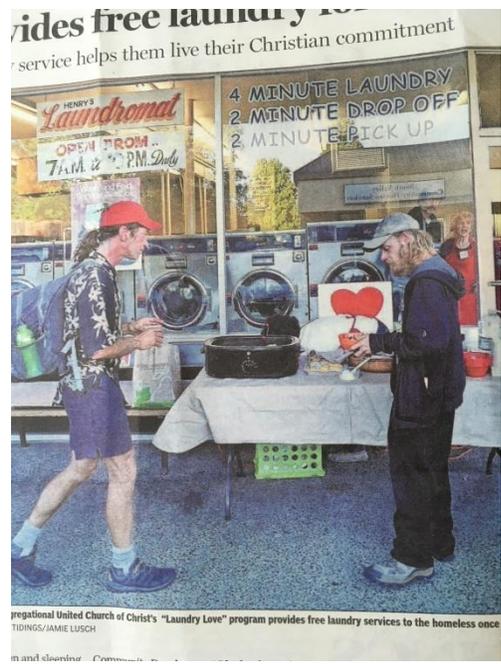
Alex assisting guests.



Drew sharing his gifts with the volunteers.



Hedy and a guest featured in the paper.



Two guests enjoying food featured in the paper.



Loading dryers.