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## “Who is my neighbor?”

Navigators Neighbors staff Cindy Benson and her discussion group began asking this question over a year ago. The result is Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners (KNP) an organization that serves people in their community who are struggling to have basic needs met. Today, despite its launch in March 2020 at the start of the COVID pandemic, KNP has served more than 100 individuals and families and has nearly 200 volunteers poised to help their neighbors.

Cindy’s community in New Hampshire appears wealthy at first glance, catering to skiers and people with vacation homes around the scenic lakes. “The poverty here is hidden,” Cindy says. “It’s on back roads, in trailers in the woods.”

She is part of a church group in nearby New London that read and discussed *The Tangible Kingdom* by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay. The group began talking about how they might reach out beyond church walls.

Some were involved with a ministry of the local churches that gave money to help people in crisis. But they began to notice that the same people were always struggling, and that life-crippling issues passed from generation to generation. How could they address the root causes of poverty? After doing more research, a plan began to form.

They began with “Flash Missions” a one-time commitment to help load and deliver wood to those who heat their homes with wood stoves. Locals donated wood; someone in the group stored it. But the group wanted to do more. Meal deliveries, phone check-ins, grocery shopping, helping with small moves, yard work, and assisting with applications for aid are some of the many ways volunteers and advocates now serve others.

“We don’t want to be money-oriented, we want to be relationship-oriented,” Cindy explains. They often walk with people long-term, helping them find affordable housing (a particular challenge in that area), create a budget, and connect to resources and services that already exist. Their goal is to help people “out of the chaos to more stability,” Cindy says.

“Someone told me my spiritual gift is networking,” Cindy laughs. “And I guess that’s true!” She and others mine their connections in the community, bringing organizations together to help people most efficiently and effectively.

One example of such cooperation is how they addressed food insecurity. Last summer, a farm donated 250 trays of vegetable seedlings. A hardware store contributed gardening tools to the project. Volunteers delivered the trays of seedlings to neighbors in need and first responders' families. College students studying environmental science and sustainability taught people how to plant and care for their gardens. They made the project fun throughout the growing season, holding activities such as a contest for growing the largest pumpkin.

KNP helps service organizations as well as individuals. When a local food pantry needs extra volunteers, KNP sends out the word to their volunteer list and the need is met.

Thanks to the efforts of a newly retired couple from the IT industry, a comprehensive website, database, and social media presence aids in communicating, storing information, and matching needs with willing volunteers. People can go to [knpnh.org](http://knpnh.org), click on "Neighbors Needing Help" or "Neighbors Ready to Help," and choose from lists of services. The website also offers connections to a variety of local services.

(One neighbor said) "It's amazing how those kinds of things can be the lifeline you need to keep you moving forward. I am so blessed to have come into contact with so many people who care so much. . . . I was feeling defeated and all alone, but because of all the kindness, I feel renewed and know that my story does not have to end in despair."

KNP's goals are remarkably similar to one goal of Navigators Neighbors: to transform not only individuals but communities.