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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kaiser Permanente community grant fosters healthy beginnings and better food access for Rockwood residents

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) received a \$180,052 grant from the Kaiser Permanente Community Fund (KPCF), through the Northwest Health Foundation, for the two-year Rockwood Food Opportunity Project of its Interfaith Food & Farms Partnership (IFFP) program. The project equips Rockwood residents to improve access to healthy food for pregnant women, mothers, and children, while enhancing economic, employment, and educational opportunities around food and health.

The mission of IFFP is to empower faith communities, farmers, and neighborhoods to build urban-rural alliances and create innovative partnerships for just and sustainable food systems that promote community health.

The Rockwood Food Opportunity Project builds on IFFP's recently completed Rockwood Community Food Assessment, which engaged eight residents with low-incomes in conducting 235 door-to-door surveys to ask about their neighbors' challenges, desires and ideas for new food resources. Over 75 percent of the residents surveyed travel five miles or more to get most of their groceries, and 66 percent indicated that it was difficult to stretch their food budget to the end of the month.

The project also enhances other work in the community to improve food access and livability by agencies and groups including Rockwood Community Food Justice, Rockwood Community Development Corporation, Wallace Medical Concern, and Human Solutions.

A key strategy is training and deploying a cadre of Community Health Workers (CHWs) of diverse backgrounds and languages to lead and conduct much of the organizing, education and outreach work of the project. CHWs and community volunteers will help with the following mutually reinforcing goals: 1) increase quality and quantity of affordable, fresh produce available at corner stores; 2) improve nutrition at congregations and at pre-schools serving Rockwood; 3) create an affordable, accessible farm stand or

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

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Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

market that accepts food benefits; 4) build community capacity for advancing health equity and improving nutrition; and 5) engage the community of Rockwood in action to improve nutrition through training, education and advocacy campaigns.

“Because they are members of the community, the CHWs will be available to support ongoing and new activities that will sustain the momentum emerging from the project,” says project director, Jenny Holmes.

The Rockwood Food Opportunity Project comes at an opportune time for Gresham and Rockwood. The City of Gresham’s efforts to revitalize Rockwood are stepping up, and it recently adopted Health Eating Active Living (HEAL) to foster the development of healthier environments. The voices of diverse residents can help ensure that renewal and development efforts are equitable, support health, and respect and build on the diverse cultural backgrounds of Rockwood. Small grants for the project have also been received from The Harold and Arlene Schnitzer Cares Foundation and the Presbyterian Hunger Program.

The Kaiser Permanente Community Fund has awarded more than \$2.5 million in grant funds to 20 organizations, including EMO, that improve health in Oregon and southwest Washington. Awarded annually, these grants address the “upstream” or underlying factors that impact community health. Each project selected for a KPCF grant seeks to make measurable improvements in health for individuals and families, while also improving the long-term health of communities.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.