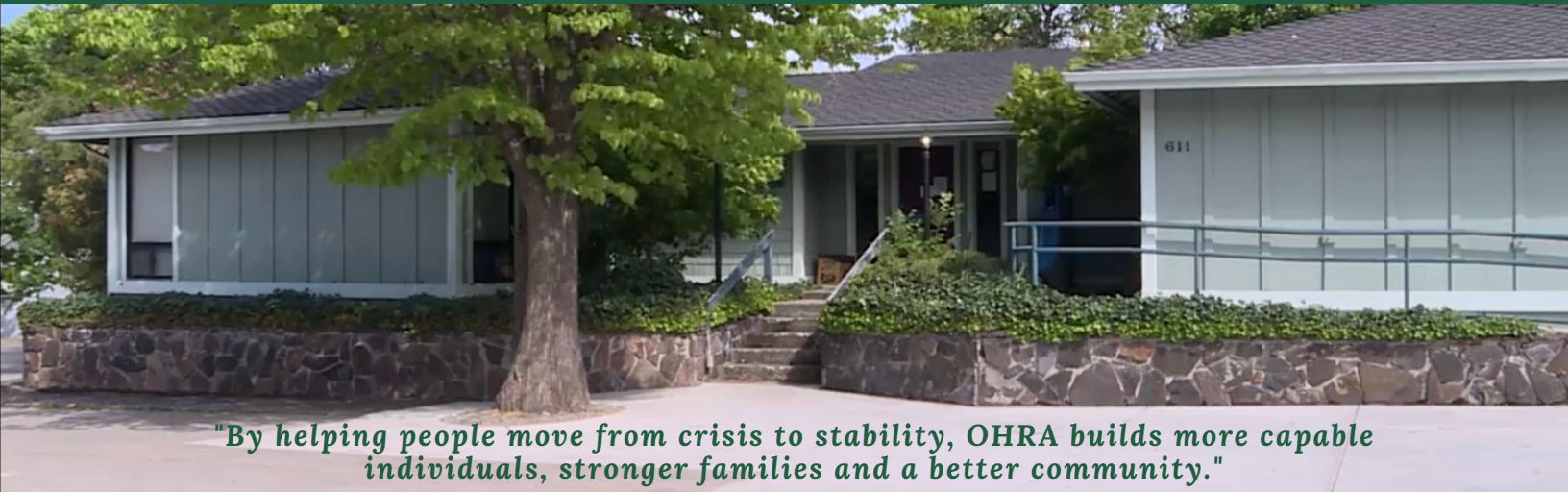




# NEWSLETTER



*"By helping people move from crisis to stability, OHRA builds more capable individuals, stronger families and a better community."*

## Message from Michelle

Michelle Arellano, OHRA Executive Director



OHRA exists to help people move from crisis to stability. In the wake of COVID and the Alameda fire, the need for our services is greater than ever. If we didn't have such a dedicated and skilled team of staff members, donors, volunteers and partner agencies, the challenge could be overwhelming.

That is why I want to give a shout out to those who made...and continue to make...it possible for us to be a comfort and resource to people whose lives have been shattered for any reason: fire, loss of a loved one, loss of a job, illness or the many crises that stalk humanity.

Let me share with you the two crises affecting our community and how OHRA is helping those in need.

**COVID-** As I explained in the last newsletter, it forced us to close our winter shelter a little early as the facility did not meet recommended distancing requirements for all our guests. During the early days of COVID, we secured 66 motel rooms and 28 permanent homes for our shelter guests and others living without shelter. We have witnessed how COVID-19 disrupted the economy, upending lives. The best measure may be the number of people we see coming to our Resource Center. Pre-COVID, we were seeing 20 guests each day. It quickly mushroomed to 60.

Simply sharing the growth in guests' numbers fails to capture the minutes, hours and days navigators may spend on a single guest in order to help them assemble the building blocks to regain stability.

In addition to forcing us to require appointments so we have sufficient room for social distancing, COVID has also compelled us to add staff and expenditures for cleaning (the shower trailer) and cleaning supplies. We now have five navigators. All staff members faithfully clean surfaces at the center, a small but consistent time-eater when you are trying to help those grappling with crisis.

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## Message from Michelle, con't

Like our guests, they wear masks and frequently wash their hands.

We have, of course, rethought the Emergency Winter Shelter given the fact that COVID is still with us. It will open November 1 at Calvin Hall for the shelter season because it is large enough for us to maintain sufficient distances between guests.

If there is a bright side to the pandemic, it is that it has freed up some additional housing funds for rapid rehousing rent relief. See the box on page 3 for a more technical description of the CVRRP program. Also, read our guest spotlight to understand how much these funds can change someone's life.

**The Alameda Fire-** I expect the number of guests at the Resource Center to grow as the initial "acute" problems of the Alameda fire are solved (clothing and emergency evacuation shelters), and fire victims focus on the longer term challenges of rebuilding their lives and finding long-term shelter. That is where OHRA's team can best help.

As navigation services are the unique skill of OHRA, we stand ready to help victims work their way through the maze of social services, as well as providing our usual essential services. Those who lost homes face the tight inventory of low- and middle-income housing.

While our navigators cannot make housing magically appear, OHRA and its partners know the Rogue Valley market, and will help with rehousing, rent and utilities whenever possible. We also have extended our shower trailer days of operation at the First United Methodist Church in Ashland to respond to the increased demand for our services.

We also launched a Fire Relief Support Services Fund because we know the fire will put added pressure on our staff and budget. At the same time, we will probably face weeks and months of the pandemic.

**Can you help?** Make a contribution either on our web page or by simply sending a check to PO Box 1133, Ashland, Oregon 97520.

Our goal is not to compete with the many other emergency funds that focus on food, clothing and other urgent needs. Instead, it will help us with staffing and other expenses so our navigators can do what they do best: walk beside guests in their hour of need, helping them find the building blocks to move out of crisis to stability. That is our mission.

Thank you for supporting it.



Michelle Arellano, Executive Director

## Staff Profile

Once you get to know Cass Sinclair, it is tempting to puzzle which is her greater gift: her passion for service or her "jump right in and get it done" attitude.

Both qualities are highly valuable in her role as OHRA's Senior Director of Programs and Services, a job with the tall responsibility of managing OHRA's resource center, laundry/shower trailer and emergency winter shelter.

Cass joined OHRA on October 28 of last year as winter shelter director. The shelter was scheduled to open just a few days later on November 4. Her challenge in that short time was to manage shelter set-up logistics, establish operating protocols and lead volunteer training. It was a high bar, but she sailed over it. Then, in March, when COVID struck, and the shelter was ruled too small for distancing requirements, she and others scrambled to find housing for the most vulnerable and worked with a team to deliver meals for former guests. She is currently working closely with OHRA Executive Director Michelle Arellano to prepare this season's shelter and to help



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## PROFILE, con't

OHRA guests stay in housing, acquire housing, find jobs and access essential services including showers.

Cass was working as a community outreach educator and syringe exchange program coordinator at Jackson County Public Health Department when she saw the posting for the OHRA job. She was drawn to OHRA's emphasis on protecting and finding housing for those in or near poverty because her role at the county had repeatedly shown her how housing is a key to anyone struggling with financial or personal crises.

"Getting people housed is the key building block to helping them reach stability," she said. "I love what we are doing at OHRA in running a low barrier shelter. And, I can't emphasize enough the importance of the resource center. Every time we help someone overcome a challenge, we help ensure they stay in their home. I am grateful and appreciative to our staff, volunteers, community partners and the city for making it possible."

It doesn't take long to figure out that Cass's greatest quality is doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

"One skill set is that I am not scared of cleaning the bathroom or talking with elected officials" both of which she needed when first joining OHRA.

Fortunately, staffing has increased, and she now focuses primarily on ensuring the smooth operations of the center, shelter and trailer and, with OHRA's executive director, building relationships with funders and officials.

A current core responsibility is working closely with OHRA's navigators (case managers) and guests to ensure OHRA can best apply Rent Relief funds (see sidebar) made possible by federal COVID funding.

Cass has lived in Ashland for 27 years and grew up in Pleasanton, Calif. Before working for the county she held positions at the American Cancer Society, and AstraZeneca Pharmaceutical.

## Rent Relief Program Benefits Guests

Over the last several months, OHRA has had extra funds for housing thanks to Oregon's COVID-19 Cares Rent Relief Program (CVRRP).

Sponsored by the Oregon Housing and Human Services Homeless Services Section, this state program provides funds for rent assistance to individuals and families affected by COVID in any of a number of ways: loss of income related to COVID-19, COVID exposure, and/or displaced or unstably housed because of public health measures taken to reduce the spread of COVID. Households must meet income eligibility, housing status requirements and at least one of the COVID-19 Rent Relief program specific eligibility requirements.

Since August, OHRA has helped 77 families impacted by COVID-19 keep a roof over their heads by distributing over \$280,000 in rental assistance to those in need.

"Our navigators are very familiar with this program and its eligibility requirements," said OHRA Executive Director Michelle Arellano. "We have seen it help many of our guests and on their behalf we want to thank our partner ACCESS and our state's leadership for facilitating it during these challenging times."





## Guest Success

*Spotlight on Stability*

Knowledge and determination are among the superpowers of OHRA's navigators. These OHRA case workers use their powers daily to help resource center guests find their way out of crises.

A couple we will call John and Judy came into the center in August. They had been living in a motel for two weeks after losing their jobs and home. Judy was collecting unemployment but even with that, room costs were quickly eating their savings. John has chronic cellulitis in both legs so living in their vehicle or camping were not options. Because of his condition, John had filed for disability payments, but he was waiting on government certification before receiving them. Judy was working diligently to find a job.

"They were beside themselves with worry, just trying to make it," said Lisa Smith, lead resource navigator.



When Lisa interviewed John and Judy, she quickly recognized that they qualified for COVID rapid relief rehousing funds to cover rent because John was at high risk for COVID. That was knowledge on display. Then determination kicked in. Rent funds secured, Lisa found them an apartment just nine days after they came to the center. When Lisa told Judy, "I can get you housed right now," Judy fell to her knees and cried.

"Since then, John's disability has been certified for disability payments. Judy continues to look for work, but in Lisa's words, "a world of worry has been lifted off their shoulders."

## Emergency Winter Shelter Opens Nov. 1

"OHRA is currently gearing up for the next Emergency Winter Shelter, which will run November 1 until March 31," said Cass Sinclair, senior director of programs and services.

OHRA provides a low-barrier shelter serving our highest risk community members. The shelter is open to those that are over the age of 18. To ensure that the shelter prioritizes the most vulnerable, people who wish to stay at the shelter are required to make an appointment for an intake and risk assessment at the OHRA Resource Center starting October 5. To schedule an appointment call: 541-631-2235.

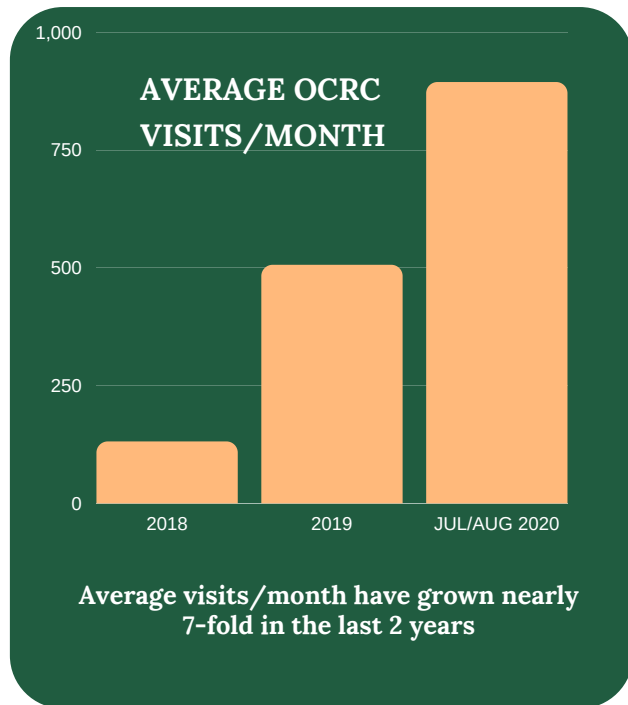
"Because COVID requires distancing, which requires space, we have leased Calvin Hall of the First Presbyterian Church so we can maintain our capacity to serve 45 people," Cass explained. Hours are 6 p.m. to 9 a.m. "In addition to having space to sleep 45, the hall also offers a commercial kitchen facility for food preparation preparation for our shelter guests.

This is not a drop-in shelter, rather a place for 45 individuals to have a safe, warm place to sleep each night for 5 months, while receiving navigation services to help remove barriers to achieving long-term stability in their lives," said Cass.

This shelter season, OHRA will use paid staff so volunteers can stay home and be safe during COVID. OHRA will have overnight hosts, as well as fire-watch staff during hours of operation. "We'll also have our navigators available to help guests address barriers to housing, including jobs, I.D's, and accessing essential services in our community," Cass continued.

"Navigation is what is unique about our organization, and our shelter. Staff works with guests not only on site, but at the center as well, both in and out of season. Because of the navigators' support, last year we were able to find permanent housing for 28 shelter guests during shelter season."

## Meeting the Needs



Shelter Guests  
Permanently Housed  
2019/20 Season

28

Families Protected with  
CVRRP Assistance \$

77

“Options for Helping Residents of Ashland is changing the course of homelessness in our region.”

-Oregon State Representative Pam Marsh

## Partner Spotlight

Hundreds of individual donors, dozens of community partners and many foundations make it possible for OHRA to help our neighbors in need. Among these is the Oregon Community Foundation whose mission is to improve the lives of all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy. We are grateful for OCF's support, which is why we are focusing on them in this issue.

OHRA has received two grants from OCF :

- OCF Schneider Family Fund: \$25,000 to support an administrative/resource coordinator position
- OCF Walker Family Fund: \$60,000 for housing, employment and essential services.

“As community needs have grown due to the COVID economic impact and now the fires, these grants are essential to our operations,” said Diane de Ryss, OHRA board president. “OCF and OHRA make a great team because of our shared values.” OCF's values are:

- Collaborative action • Wise stewardship • Equity, diversity and inclusion • Spirit of community

“I hope that what we have in common is obvious,” she continues. “However, I suspect our supporters do not know that OHRA is improving how we reach out to, support, and learn from the diverse communities in our valley. OHRA now has a bilingual (Spanish-English) navigator on staff. We're starting to build bridges to organizations like Unete and BASE. Plus, through workshops attended by our board, staff, and volunteers, we are constantly striving to be better at what we do, and community-focused foundations like OCF help make that possible.”

Oregon  
Community  
Foundation



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- Akiva DeJack
- Cathy Gerbracht
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- Steve Russo
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- Cass Sinclair, Senior Director, Programs & Services
- Pam Lott, Administrator
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- Tina Stevens, Lead Navigator/Jobs Specialist
- Lisa Smith, Lead Navigator/Winter Shelter
- Sam Hough, Navigator
- Miguel Delit, Navigator

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