



Options for Helping Residents of Ashland

Newsletter

Spring 2022

Message from Cass

I **Imagine the Possibilities...** that was the thought in our minds in February 2021 when we hung a banner over the sign outside the Super 8 Motel, proclaiming it as "The OHRA Center." It was a brutally cold morning. We were reminded what it was like to be unsheltered. We knew this building had to be put to use as quickly as we could for the benefit of our community.



So we wasted no time. We started sheltering people on April 1, less than two months after purchasing the building.

- Over 170 people have stayed at the Shelter, no longer needing to sleep on the Greenway, in a park, or in their car. All OHRA Shelter guests work closely with our resource navigators on their next steps.
- 42 people have found permanent housing.
- 92% of people who have stayed in the Shelter are still in contact with a navigator, on their path to stability.

Our next transformative step was moving the Resource Center under the same roof as the Shelter in September 2021.

We did not wait for necessary remodeling to be done. It cannot be overstated how generous and flexible our staff and guests have been amid the ongoing construction. We continue to deliver services to an average of 55 guests per day. Anyone, whether housed or unhoused, can walk in the door and find help.



Cass connecting with three guests and their pets.

During this time of transformation, it's important to look back and see just how far we have come:

- In 2012, OHRA was just a group of concerned citizens meeting once a month.
- In 2013 we had one program – The Shower Trailer.
- In 2014 we opened a small Resource Center.
- In 2018, OHRA undertook management of the Ashland Winter Shelter, operating overnight for just five months a year.
- Today, we operate Ashland's first 365/24/7 low-barrier shelter.

The OHRA Center is a model of success for how Project Turnkey funds help those in need and provide immeasurable benefits to our entire community. OHRA keeps growing not only in the number of people being served, but also in the depth of impact we are able to make in each individual life. We will never stop envisioning how we can keep improving our services.

Without you, none of this would be possible. We are grateful for your support in making these possibilities a reality.

Cass Sinclair, Executive Director

There will be an official ribbon cutting event for The OHRA Center on June 9th at 4pm. Please RSVP, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ohra-center-ribbon-cutting-tickets-340139946737>. If you have questions, email zoet@helpingashland.org

Message from Dan

“Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.”
- Mother Teresa

With every conversation, email, or newsletter, we try to illuminate for you the impact of OHRA’s work in our community and the people we serve.

Often, we share data. It is important to understand how many we have helped with what kinds of services.

Yet, the numbers give a limited view.



We recognize that no two journeys to stability are the same. That’s why it’s our guests’ stories that truly breathe life into our work. Those stories don’t emerge—and lasting change doesn’t happen—by churning people

through a program. Rather, it’s through the trusting relationships OHRA’s team creates with every individual.

We are indebted to all of you and the communities we serve throughout Jackson County for your consistent and generous support. It’s because of you that we can offer an individualized approach that will help someone transform their life.

We are also indebted to our guests.

Our ability to be effective is directly tied to their courage and determination to embrace change, to take an attainable step, and to stay on the path away from crisis and toward stability.

May you be blessed on your own journey,

Rev. Dan Fowler, OHRA Board President

Guest story: There until the end

When Jack* came to the OHRA Shelter, he was a beam of sunshine. Always lovely with staff, he even acted as a mentor to the younger men who stayed there. Unfortunately, after he was at the OHRA Shelter for a just a few weeks, he was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. **With his diagnosis, he became even more positive. We would see him strolling the halls of the shelter, using his walker adorned with artificial flowers, visiting with staff, and encouraging other guests in their journey.**

He always expressed how much he appreciated being a part of our shelter community, and how thankful he was for the staff. Although Jack didn’t want to leave our shelter community, he realized that he needed a higher level of medical care than he could receive at the OHRA Shelter. The resource navigators, in partnership with Jack’s home health care organization were able to secure Jack a bed in a hospice home. After his move, Jack would stop by to visit as often as he could, sharing joy and kind-

ness with everyone he came in contact with. Our shelter supervisor, Peter, reached out to the hospice home to recently to check on Jack. We were notified that Jack had passed away on April 20th, 2022. **The owner of the hospice home shared how much Jack talked about the OHRA shelter staff, and the kindness he was shown while here.**



Before his passing, a hospice worker helped Jack fill out a simple will naming OHRA as the beneficiary of the funds remaining in his bank account. **Even in death, Jack continues to spread sunshine, good will, and generosity with the world.**

*Name has been changed for privacy

Remembering Shira Chertoff: Dedicated volunteer and staff

The world lost a lovely soul the day Shira Chertoff passed away this February. She had been a long-time volunteer at both the Laundry/Shower Trailer and the Resource Center. When COVID hit, she became an OHRA staff member.

Shira had a love for life and a very caring heart for our guests. She laughed easily, had a wonderful sense of humor, and never thought anything was impossible. Shira was a fierce advocate and friend of the homeless.



Before opening the doors at OHRA in the morning, Shira and one of her colleagues would put music on, so they could dance and laugh together. When it was time to open the doors to the guests who were already waiting, they felt better prepared for having first taken the time to enjoy each other and the moment. That was part of Shira's magic.

Take the day a gentleman walked into the Resource Center needing help getting glasses. He had recently been in Idaho and gotten a new prescription, but he couldn't find them anywhere.

She asked, "Do you remember the name of the town in Idaho where you got your glasses?"

"No" he said, "But it was near Boise."

Undaunted, Shira pulled up a map of Idaho on the computer. The man pointed to the town where he had seen the eye doctor. She then Googled optometrists in that town, and a list popped up.

"Do you remember the doctor's name?"



"No" he replied.

So, Shira started calling. Within two or three phone calls, she reached an office who said that yes, this gentleman was a patient of theirs! Shira then explained the situation, and asked if they would fax her a copy of the prescription, which they did within minutes.

Once Shira had the prescription, she called the Lions Sight and Hearing Center in Medford who regularly provides glasses for our guests. They told her that if she faxed the prescription that morning, they would have a new pair of glasses for OHRA's guest to pick up by 1:00 that same afternoon! This was all accomplished in a matter of 30 minutes.

A friend of Shira's once asked her, "What do you enjoy most about your work?" Shira's answer was, "Just being able to help people. I love making their day better and making them smile. I leave work feeling good and humble; happier for the most part too."

Shira personified the support people find at OHRA's Resource Center every day. **Shira knew so many of our guests. She made them smile and laugh, and she never wanted to tell them "No". Working with her was always fun and such a privilege. We mourn the loss of Shira, and remember with fondness the amazing work she did in our community.**

At the behest of Shira's family, donations were sent to OHRA as a tribute to Shira's life. At this time, we have received nearly \$3,000 from almost 30 different people who knew and loved her. We want to extend our deepest condolences to her parents, Dena and Rick. We also want to thank them for sustaining Shira's spirit of generosity and helping us continue the work that meant so much to her. If you would like to make a contribution in Shira's honor, please go to helpingashland.org.

OHRA Center Construction Update

Construction continues at The OHRA Center. The front lobby has now been completed and is operational complete with a family bathroom. After a supply chain delay, secure key card doors are arriving in May. The 1st floor is being sheetrocked and then guests will move into first floor rooms. More to come! Thank you to our staff and guests for continuing to be flexible.



Training and conference room



Resource Center lobby underway (at time of publication the carpet is in)



2nd floor fire suppression system underway



New flooring installed in guest rooms and staff offices



Elevator shaft is complete... elevator coming soon



3rd floor fire suppression system completed

? When speaking with donors or friends around town, OHRA staff and board hear questions about our work. For that reason, we are starting a regular feature that will address some of the questions we get.

So what exactly is a 'resource navigator'?

As you many know, here at OHRA we don't call anyone a "client" -- they are our guests. Why? Because client isn't a word that captures the relationship we build with them and the work we do together. You may also have heard the title "case manager". Why don't we use that for our staff? Because it doesn't capture the depth and breadth of what our resource navigators do for our guests and our community. Resource navigators are the lifeblood of OHRA and their work weaves through every program we have. Resource navigators are social service professionals who work with guests to identify and resolve barriers to stability so that the guest can move forward.

Here are some core components to OHRA's navigation philosophy:

- **Relationships:** navigators work first to build trust with our guests and establish an environment of safety.
- **No time limit:** we will work with people as long as they want to work with us.
- **Trauma-informed and inclusive:** most of our guests have experienced trauma and our staff is trained on how to help. Navigators are also trained in and committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Strengths-based approach:** we believe our guests are capable of changing their lives and navigators are there to walk alongside them.

Farewell to Ken Gudger: “We all stand on Ken’s shoulders.”

Ask anyone at OHRA about Ken Gudger and you’ll hear words like this: a decent man, a kind soul, a tireless worker. Spend five minutes with him and you’ll come to appreciate so much more: his leadership acumen, his financial smarts, and his passion for OHRA’s mission.

Ken joined OHRA’s board in 2013. He served as OHRA’s president and its treasurer. He volunteered at the winter shelter, sleeping on a cot, talking with guests, and helping keep the shelter safe. He will complete his ninth and final year on the board in June.



That litany of roles does not begin to describe his impact. “He is one of our founding fathers,” says Michelle Arellano, OHRA’s development director and first executive director.

Ken and his wife Debbie moved to Ashland in 2008 from California where they raised their family and Ken built his career. He was vice president of energy efficiency for Southern California Edison, and then CEO of Global Energy Partners, a consultancy formed to spearhead energy efficiency in industries.

When Ken became involved with OHRA in 2013, it was a fledgling nonprofit.

David Stoebel, OHRA’s grant administrator, saw firsthand the difference Ken made during OHRA’s early years. “As a former CEO, Ken brought an understanding

of what OHRA needed as an organization. He was able to blend his passion for the work with his business insight.” When Michelle became OHRA’s executive director in 2019, she and Ken were on the phone nearly every day. “Before I was hired, Ken really was the acting Executive Director. He knew everything.”

Ken produced OHRA’s first annual reports, spearheaded the start of the Advisory Council, secured OHRA’s first grants, retained its first bookkeeper, helped organize its first financial reports, and was an advocate for the start of OHRA’s three programs.

Montye Male, who served on the board with Ken, remembers his efforts to set up the winter shelter in a former church on East Main. “It was a huge task. In addition to the logistics, there was a high bar of county regulations to meet. Ken tackled red tape that would have made a lesser person abandon hope.”

Cass Sinclair, OHRA executive director, makes it plain. “We all stand on Ken’s shoulders. He played an essential role in building OHRA. Plus, he’s an amazing advocate for the people we serve.”

Dennis Slattery, former Ashland City Council member and now OHRA’s board treasurer, remembers Ken’s many presentations to the Council when the city needed a partner to help those at risk in our community. “Ken was a game changer. While OHRA’s mission has always been a community asset, it was Ken who put a voice to it, persistently, positively and convincingly.”

When asked what really sticks with him after his years of service, Ken talks about the early collaboration among faith-based organizations, the city, and nonprofits like OHRA, ACCESS and Jobs for Justice. “I could see the community involvement, a commitment to the common good.”

With a characteristic thoughtful pause, Ken goes on, “That spirit of collaboration, hope and effectiveness continues to this day. This community keeps doing something to make a difference. It really is something to celebrate.”

OHRA + Ashland Food Co-op Change for Good

Once again, OHRA has a chance to be part of the Ashland Food Co-op's "Change for Good" Program which lets Co-op customers round up their purchases at the register to benefit local nonprofits. Between May 24 and June 6, Co-op owners will have the opportunity to vote for organizations they want to support. You can go vote for OHRA to be a Change for Good partner in 2023.



OHRA Board members Diane de Ryss, left, and Cathy Gerbracht tabling at the Co-op in April!

OHRA was selected for 2022 and was the featured nonprofit in April of this year. **This program allowed OHRA to have daily exposure to thousands of Co-op customers and we raised over \$3,000 in donations!** Interested in becoming Ashland Food Co-op owners before the election? See <https://ashlandfood.coop/become-owner>.

Funder Spotlight: AllCare

OHRA is grateful to the many community partners who support our work. In this edition we want to thank AllCare Health. As a company dedicated to providing quality, cost-effective healthcare in Southern Oregon, AllCare strives for health equity, by supporting community programs that go beyond direct healthcare to include issues like food and housing insecurity and poverty.

In 2020, when COVID hit, AllCare stepped up with financial support for OHRA's Essential Services program that helped pandemic-impacted people get back on their feet. Then last spring, AllCare provided a second grant for OHRA's Resource Navigation services. **Thank you so much to AllCare for everything you do to support OHRA and our community!**

“ Good morning. I just want you to know that I moved into my new apartment here in Ashland last Friday. I am so thrilled and happy. Finally after 3 1/2 years to find an actual home. Thank you and OHRA for all your support and patience. This is the first time in a long time that I don't feel on a daily basis the uncertainty of not being able to plan and live a normal life. ”

-A recent email from a guest of OHRA

OHRA by the numbers

*Data for January-March 2022

- 10** Guests exited the OHRA Shelter into permanent housing in April
- 14** Families newly housed*
- 16** Families had housing protected*
- 391** Showers taken at the Shower Trailer*
- 3,514** Visits to the Resource Center*