



Newsletter

Summer 2022

Message from Cass

OHRA underwent an incredible transformation over the last two years. We went from 3.5 employees to 35. Our annual budget has increased tenfold. We saw the amazing opportunity afforded to us through Project Turnkey to buy this building and we took it. We knew it would come with risks and challenges, but the vision of The OHRA Center was so worth it. We had a board and staff that could see the vision, and their bravery is why we are here today.



The programs OHRA provides and the way we deliver them are so unique. We offer the only walk-in resource navigation center in Jackson County. OHRA provides wrap-around services and walks alongside people to move them from crisis to stability. We build trusting relationships over month and years, still being there for people down the road any time they need us. OHRA works with our community partners to create an interconnected web of support for our guests and remove barriers standing in their way. OHRA provides safety, dignity, a way forward, and hope for the future.

Things in our world are in many ways harder than ever. We have a housing crisis. People are struggling to make a living wage. It's getting harder to afford food, gas, and medical care. Many people are having difficulties with their mental health, and yet mental health services are difficult to find -- and even harder to afford. So many people are living paycheck to paycheck, barely making it. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Alameda fires showed us all that our lifestyle is fragile and most of us are not as far away as we once thought from losing our homes or being in crisis. **Now more than ever, people need a place to go, someone to turn to, and a glimmer of hope.** At



Our caring staff, like OHRA's bilingual front desk associate Martha (left), are the secret sauce of OHRA's life-changing programs and services.

OHRA, we strive to be that place, and be those people, and be that glimmer for our most vulnerable community members.

To make this extraordinary vision come true, we embarked on something we've never done before: a fundraising campaign, *Empower a life, transform a community*. This campaign is raising \$1.5 million for building renovations, and \$1 million for sustainability. We have a fantastic campaign steering committee made up of board members and community members who are helping guide this effort. We had a ribbon cutting and campaign kickoff event (page 3). OHRA is engaging in so many ongoing efforts and initiatives to bring the message of this good work to our whole community and raise these necessary funds.

So far, we have raised over \$1.3 million towards our goal. We are leaving no fundraising stone unturned and have been so grateful to receive grants, awards from foundations, and gifts from individuals just like you. Now is the time for our community to lean in, come together, and make an investment in our future. There are so many ways you can be involved from volunteering, to having your own engraved brick, to joining our monthly giving club, to sponsoring a whole space in the OHRA Center (more information on the campaign insert after page 4). Thank you for all you do for our community, and for walking alongside us as we create The OHRA Center.

The OHRA Center is for all of us, because it could be any of us.

Cass Sinclair, Executive Director

Welcome new board president

In June, when OHRA’s board elected its new officers, Dennis Slattery stepped up to become our next board president.

Dennis has been active in this community for decades. Take a walk with Dennis and you’ll be introduced to a half dozen people along the way. Folks may know him as a city council member from 2010 to 2020 or as an associate professor at SOU’s business school where he has taught since 2004. Or maybe they know him as an inaugural member of SOU’s board of trustees, chair of the Visitor & Convention Bureau, or president of the Ashland Chamber. The list does go on.

What makes this man tick is a commitment to community—to everyone in this community. That commitment to each person makes him a dedicated teacher. Dennis gives every student “a lifetime warranty.” “For as long as I live, I’m there for students to talk about principles of accounting, sure, but more importantly about career, life choices, or just to act as a sounding board.”

That belief -- that a community has a role in helping every individual -- also prompted Dennis to become a



Dennis and his wife, Sandra, in Ashland in 1991. Photo by Christopher Briscoe.

champion of our neighbors in need. In 2010, he established the city’s first Homeless Ad Hoc committee. Their first “victory” was installing porta-potties in town. Later, the committee secured funding for the Resource Center that is now part of OHRA.

“We knew it was complex set of issues, but we had to get started. Our community needed to make incremental progress to help the most vulnerable.” **Today, Dennis expresses pride in OHRA’s work helping those in need better their lives. “This is such an important organization partnering effectively with other organizations and with the city to help those in need. We offer a lifeline, a way forward.”**

Message from Dennis



It is my honor to have been selected as president of the board of directors for OHRA. OHRA’s leadership and staff are filled with wonderful people who have a strong sense of community and a desire to help find meaningful solutions for our neighbors living in poverty. I would like to thank our outgoing president Rev. Dan Fowler for his unrelenting dedication and hard work over the past year.

OHRA’s programs truly change lives. We are an open door for our guests to step through to find services and a path to a better tomorrow. I love being part of OHRA as much as I love being part of this community. You are an integral part of what we do. Our community is known for having a big heart and stepping up to challenges to help others.

This is an exciting time for me – and for you – to be part of OHRA. If you should wish to take a tour of The OHRA Center, we would be honored to make that happen. With your help, we can ensure that OHRA remains a long-term resource for our community.

Dennis Slattery, OHRA Board President

OHRA Center ribbon cutting & campaign kickoff event

On June 9th we celebrated The OHRA Center with a ribbon cutting ceremony. We welcomed our entire community to come celebrate with us. We also announced our fundraising campaign. We had an outstanding lineup of speakers for the event.



Representative Pam Marsh, who has been instrumental in the journey of the OHRA Center, spoke about the State of Oregon’s Project Turnkey. “This facility was the very first one because OHRA was ready to do the work. I want to tell you how proud I am to be in a community where we have an organization like OHRA ready to step up. When you have a chance to walk through, you will be blown away by what they are creating here.”

Amy Cuddy, Oregon Community Foundation’s philanthropic advisor and regional director for Southern Oregon, also attended. Cuddy remarked, “As we all came in, it was wonderful to see people greeting friends, and neighbors, and having this warm sense of community. What OHRA has done, and what we all owe them a debt of gratitude for, is to extend that notion of community and to bring people together to help one another.”

Executive director Cass Sinclair addressed the crowd, “In everything we do at OHRA, we seek to move people from crisis to stability. It’s hard to believe that we started ten years ago as a group of concerned citizens who got together once a month, and here we are today. In 2015 OHRA took on its first shelter program – the Ashland Winter Shelter. We operated an overnight shelter five months out of the year. The accommodations were simple – bunk beds in a big great room at a church. When COVID hit, we knew we needed to do something different.” She went on, “Every guest here has their own room,

their own bathroom. We serve them meals at night. We are really providing low-barrier services to the most vulnerable people in our community.”



Development director Michelle Arellano said, “Our secret sauce is our staff, our resource navigators work alongside our guests meeting them where they’re at.” Arellano went on, “We are going into a public phase of our fundraising campaign. We have some of our amazing supporters of the campaign out here today. We may be a small community here, but we are mighty.”



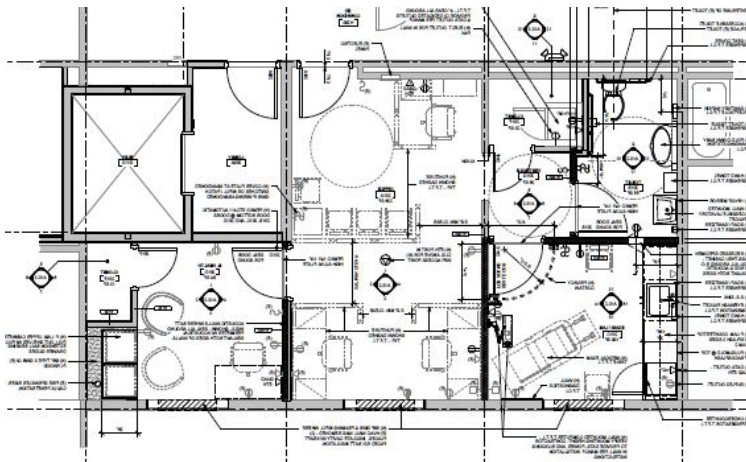
Rev. Dan Fowler, OHRA board president for the 2021/2022 year, reflected on the event, “The OHRA Center, having this building, and being able to serve our community in this way was something I had hoped for since I came on the board in 2018. Being able to cut the ribbon and realize this dream was such a hope-filled moment for me and for all of us. This day is something I will remember the rest of my life.”

Thank you to every single person, supporter, friend, media outlet, and partner who came out to be with us, celebrate The OHRA Center, and support OHRA’s fundraising campaign.

OHRA + La Clinica partnership The OHRA Wellness Center

One of the most exciting projects underway at The OHRA Center is the OHRA Wellness Center in partnership with La Clinica. We are so incredibly proud to be partnering with La Clinica to establish a behavioral health and primary care clinic within the walls of The OHRA Center. This clinic will be open to guests of the Shelter and guests of the Resource Center five days per week. Guests will be able to see a mental health professional as well as a primary care provider.

It can be a challenge for anyone to establish primary care or find a mental health counselor. When you're experiencing poverty or homelessness, the barriers only multiply. At OHRA, we take seriously the work of reducing barriers to stability for the people we serve.



Wellness Center plans include a medical exam room, behavioral health room, a lab, and waiting room.

Lisa Smith, OHRA's director of program services, spoke about why the Wellness Center will have so much impact: "When you're unhoused or staying here at the shelter, it's really difficult to deal with your mental health when you have to go to Medford to do it. Financially, coming up with \$2 each way for bus fare is a real barrier for some of our guests. Having the clinic right here will knock down all those barriers." (Want to read more about barrier reduction or the Housing First model? Check out the feature on page 6.)

When people can get a roof over their head, feel safe, establish trusting relationships, and really care for their body and mind, incredible things can happen for them. We have had partnerships with organizations in our

community for years to refer our guests to. Now, instead of sending them away for services we are bringing the services right to the guests and creating an access point for care. This new partnership with La Clinica is unique in its ability to lower barriers for our guests. The OHRA Wellness Center brings us one step closer to realizing the vision of the OHRA Center as a hub of social service resources and access point to partner organizations.



La Clinica staff, OHRA staff, Barbara Evans, and ACHF board members at the ACHF grant award presentation.

Janet Troy from Ashland Community Health Foundation (ACHF) says "OHRA and La Clinica have a track record for establishing trusting relationships with the individuals they serve. Trust in your medical provider is an important component when seeking and receiving care. People who trust their provider are more likely to follow through on their care plans, and in turn, overall patient outcomes are improved."

This project would not be possible without the incredible support of La Clinica as well as the funders who made this happen. We want to thank Margaret Evans and Barbara Evans for their generous donation and sponsorship of the space. We also want to thank the Ashland Community Health Foundation (ACHF) for their generous grant. Thank you to our partner organizations and the Evans family for your vision and dedication to this community and the guests we serve.

Thank you to Barbara Evans, Margaret Evans, Ashland Community Health Foundation (ACHF), Oregon Community Foundation (OCF), and La Clinica for making this community health effort possible.

Bricks for Change: Building a Foundation



You can be part of the foundation of OHRA and what OHRA will be in the future. Your brick is your permanent mark on this community. What you engrave is up to you.

\$500 per engraved brick

- Engrave with...
- Your name
- A brick for each family member
- A memory of a loved one
- An inspirational quote



The OHRA Center patio -- future site of the engraved brick wall

OHRA Circle of Hope: Become a monthly giver



When you and your family set up monthly giving you are becoming part of a **stable foundation** that will provide programs and services to your **most vulnerable neighbors**.

When you become part of OHRA's Circle of Hope:

- **Special communications** six times per year full of exciting information about OHRA including current events and heartwarming guest stories.
- Invitation to the annual **OHRA's Circle of Hope reception event**.
- A **personal tour** of The OHRA Center with OHRA executive director *Cass Sinclair*.

Friend



\$20 per month

Supporter



\$50 per month

Advocate



\$100 and beyond per month

To become part of The Circle of Hope or get your engraved brick today, visit helpingashland.org/campaign or use the enclosed envelope. Thinking a little bigger? Space sponsorships and naming opportunities begin at \$10,000. Contact ZoeT@helpingashland.org for details.

Thank you to every campaign supporter

Adrienne Simmons
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 State of Oregon
 Susan & Lonny Slack
 Suzanne & Frank Lang
 Suzi & Robert Given
 The Haines Philanthropic Foundation
 William Wood
 Zoë Templeton
 and many anonymous donors and supporters

“ I was literally outside sleeping and I didn’t have any hope until I got a call from you to tell me you guys had a place for me to stay. Without OHRA, I really don’t know where I would have ended up or what would have happened to me. Since I’ve been staying in The OHRA Shelter, I’ve held down a permanent job that I really like, I have a hot shower before I go to work, and a warm bed to sleep in. This is the best blessing I’ve ever received and words cannot express how happy and thankful I am for OHRA being here. I really hope more residents receive the help I’ve been offered. Also, they are helping me find a stable apartment. Again, I’m beyond excited and thankful for what OHRA has done for me. It’s by far the best help anyone could ever receive. Thank you!!!! ”

-A recent email from a guest of OHRA

OHRA by the numbers



Did you know...?

The OHRA Center is the only place in town where unhoused people can receive their mail. Without this service, guests would have no address to list on applications for imperative services and benefits. Having a primary mail home allows guests to receive important mail.



In the 2021/22 year, OHRA provided:

- 56** families with rental assistance and eviction protection
- 64** families with new housing
- 1,420** showers for guests at the Shower Trailer
- 3,893** individual housing services
- 4,834** mail services

OHRA Center Construction Update

Construction continues at The OHRA Center. Every part of construction is making the building safer, more accessible, and better able to serve our guests. We are still raising dollars for completing construction. For ways you can give and help complete this incredible project, see the campaign insert after page 4. Here are some of the things that have been completed recently:



New key card access door locks installed!



Resource Center lobby carpeted & complete!



Training & conference room complete and in use!

? When speaking with donors or friends around town, OHRA staff and board hear questions about our work. This regular feature addresses some of those questions.

What do “low-barrier” and “housing first” mean?

The OHRA Shelter is the only low-barrier shelter located in Ashland. **The low-barrier definition is simple: reduce as many barriers as possible to people being able to obtain shelter and services.** What kind of barriers are there? Here are some typical barriers to shelter that OHRA does *not* require:

- Completion of a substance recovery program
- Drug testing
- Not being able to bring personal belongings
- Not being able to bring pets
- Criminal convictions, felonies
- Too crowded, congregate living situation
- Not being able to room with partner
- Limited hours of shelter operation or being forced to leave during the daytime

OHRA has removed every single barrier listed above in order to best serve our most vulnerable neighbors. Being low-barrier comes with additional operational steps to ensure the safety of all guests and staff. Every staff member is trauma-informed and trained on deescalation. Guests sign agreements to abide by certain

standards of behavior, to respect staff and other guests, and not to bring substances on property. Key card access is required throughout the building to separate the 18+ Shelter and the Resource Center where we serve children and families. We are also staffed 24/7/365.

Operating a low-barrier shelter is one part of the proven housing first model. **Housing first is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.** Housing and food come before a job, a recovery program, or other steps to stability. Also, guest choice and agency of what they want to work on and where they want to live are critical components. To see why this approach works, see Sheila’s story on page 7.

(Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness)

Sheila's story: "I have a new life now."

If it hadn't been for OHRA, I would still be living on the street. But because of OHRA, I had a bed, a room, a foundation," says Sheila Chaney, a former Shelter guest. That foundation, combined with Sheila's own motivation and determination, enabled her to find the tools to build a better life. As a result, Sheila now has her own permanent home after five years of homelessness.

"When you are on the street you just live minute to minute," Sheila explains. The Shelter, she says, changed that. "OHRA gave me a home, so I wasn't on the street freezing and getting frost bite." Instead, she could focus on improving her life.

Chaney, a former OHRA shelter guest, now has her own apartment. She is nearly giddy when she talks about it and quickly credits the OHRA Shelter, the OHRA resource navigator, her church, Jackson County Housing Authority, United Way, and St. Vincent de Paul for her new home. **But clearly, the deciding factor in her ability to build a new life was her own determination.**



Sheila says her life went off the rails in 2018 due to a domestic tragedy that resulted in her losing custody of her two youngest children as well as her home. She was living on the street in California when she first sought help with drug addiction and began her journey to sobriety. Things appeared to be improving when a childhood friend in Ashland suggested she move in with her. For reasons Sheila does not understand, her friend assaulted her, and she ended up on the street again.

"I had no family. No friends. No support system." But despite her situation, Sheila remained determined to remain drug-free. "I was proud of being in control of my own sobriety." She was working with On Track, a Medford-based drug treatment center, to stay clear of drugs, and they told her about OHRA.



She applied and moved into the OHRA Center Shelter. **Once she was in the OHRA shelter, Sheila says, "I hit the ground running.** I did not have a car, so I had to walk everywhere and one day I saw a sign for an apartment for rent." Sheila applied instantly before she even had a HUD appointment or voucher because she knew apartments were scarce. She thought her income would cover the rent. But to be sure, she also applied for an Emergency Housing Voucher, which she eventually received.

Every day she called the rental agent and owner about the apartment. When the first person in line failed to claim the apartment, Sheila moved to the front of the line. But the rental deposit presented a huge obstacle. Sheila contacted her church about potential resources and to her delight they gave her enough to cover the deposit and some rent.

Sheila glows when she talks about her new home. **"I have a new life now. I have a beautiful home," she says gleefully. "OHRA gave me hope. My church gave me faith. It's incredible."**



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Ashland, OR 97520

What's inside

- Message from the Executive Director
- Welcome new Board President
- Guest success story
- Update on construction

Empower a life, transform a
community fundraising campaign:
Engraved bricks, the kickoff event,
monthly giving club, The OHRA
Wellness Center, and more!

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Newsletter

Summer 2022

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