



Message from Cass Sinclair

At the heart of OHRA's work is collaboration. From our navigators collaborating with guests to move them toward the services and resources they need, to our work with community partners in addressing the issues around housing and assistance in Jackson County, collaboration is a core value for our organization.



OHRA was built by a small group of committed volunteers who were called to help their fellow community members experiencing homelessness. That core vision continues to this day, even as our programs and services expand.

Since April 1, 2021, the Resource Center has received more than 55 visits per day, serving over 780 unduplicated guests, assisting 199 unhoused families into housing, and protecting housing for 299 families. The shelter has housed 333 guests, 72 of whom have moved into permanent housing and 124 who found employment.

Our work would not be possible without our amazing board and staff, as well as the community support from our generous donors, grant funders, partnership organizations, and local, state, and federal governments. The City of Ashland has been a key partner in the renovations for the OHRA Center, providing funding for ADA compliance projects like the elevator and ADA accessible bathrooms, which you can see in photos of our Construction Update on page 8. The City of Ashland continues to be an important partner as we work together to solve issues for our houseless community members. This winter, OHRA also partnered with Ashland to operate the city's Extreme Weather Shelter.

In February, OHRA was honored to host members of the Oregon Community Foundation's (OCF) board and staff for a tour of the resource center and shelter. OCF admin-



Cass and board president Dennis Slattery presenting to the Oregon Community Foundation board and staff on a site visit. See more about OCF's visit on page 6. Photo by Tim Tidball, courtesy of Oregon Community Foundation.

istered the Project Turnkey funds that enabled OHRA to purchase the Super 8 Motel in Ashland that has been converted into our social services hub. You can see some photos from their visit on page 6.

Helping the most vulnerable members of our community is at the center of OHRA's mission, so partnering with healthcare organizations like La Clinica, Rogue Community Health, AllCare, Jackson Care Connect, and the OHSU School of Nursing helps deepen our impact and provide increased access to healthcare for OHRA's guests at the Shelter, Resource Center, Laundry/Shower Trailer. The foot soak clinic offered by the OHSU Nursing Street Team builds trust, reduces stigma, and is a first point of contact for many people experiencing homelessness in accessing navigation services. Our feature article on page 4-5 provides a look at this partnership program with the OHSU School of Nursing.

Thank you so much for all you do for the community, and your continued support of OHRA! You make a difference. Our hope is that these newsletters give you a sense of the good work that OHRA accomplishes on a day-to-day basis in our community, and the partnerships that enhance and make possible our work. We really honor the process of our neighbors who are houseless or who are economically burdened. OHRA is here to walk alongside them every step of the way. Please reach out if you would like to take a tour of our facility and see firsthand how your support is being put to work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Cass Sinclair'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Cass Sinclair, Executive Director

Message from Dennis Slattery, OHRA board president



To put it very simply, we need you. We need your help in so many ways. The challenge of poverty and homelessness is not going away, in fact it is increasing. Two years ago, we counted just over 15,000 individual services provided to guests, last year there were over 25,000 and this year we will see an increase again.

We take great pride in being the only low-barrier, walk-in Resource Center in the Jackson County. This means we will help anyone who comes to us in need of assistance on a wide variety of issues and needs. We look to build trust in the individual, walk and work alongside them in their journey. This process, simple and yet very complex at the same time, is how we work to have the most positive impact on those who are most vulnerable in our community.

To accomplish all of this requires resources - funds, time and talent. We work with people in poverty to help keep them housed because it is much easier to help people stay housed than it is to help people get new housing. We work with the unhoused to find ways to a place where they can feel safe, address other issues and help make a difference in their lives. In every sense of the word, the solution to what we are attempting to make happen is community. Without the support

of community and the help of a myriad of community partners, we will never rise to achieve our goal.

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.” -Coretta Scott King

Our goal – simply put – is to end homelessness and help lift people from poverty. We’ve got great people on our staff to take up this important work. We’ve got great people on our board willing to help steer the organization and find needed resources. But, we need you as well. Whatever you can give in time, talent, or funds, \$5 or \$500, we will put it to work helping people find their way. In the end, we all benefit. When even one person succeeds, we all thrive.

Is it possible to end homelessness? Is it possible to improve on poverty? I don’t really know, all I know is that we have to try because there is no other way. It just isn’t going to solve itself. Please help however you can – it will be greatly appreciated.



Dennis Slattery, OHRA Board President

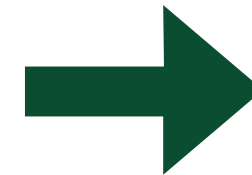
Shira Chertoff Memorial Fund

One year ago, Shira Rachel Rose Chertoff passed away. Shira was first a volunteer with OHRA, and then an employee. She was a fierce advocate for unhoused people. She was featured in the OHRA Spring 2022 newsletter. Her generous spirit has been carried on by her parents Dena & Rick with the establishment of the Shira Chertoff Memorial Fund. People who knew and loved Shira can donate in memory of her and make the world a better place. To date, nearly \$8,000 have been given by over 65 people in memory of Ms. Chertoff.

To donate and learn more about her inspiring life of service, visit: helpingashland.org/shira-chertoff-memorial-fund/



OHRA’s new name: Opportunities for Housing, Resources, & Assistance



OHRA was started by a group of concerned volunteers who wanted to make a difference for people struggling with homelessness in Ashland. Over time we have stayed true to that community spirit but we have also expanded our services and now assist people from all over Jackson County. OHRA’s physical presence is still in Ashland and our heart will always be here, but we are growing. In the midst of this growth we wanted to make a change to our name to reflect that.

You may have noticed that we haven’t been using our long name, Options for Helping Residents of Ashland, for quite some time. You will mostly hear us called “OHRA”

but now that acronym stands for something else: **Opportunities for Housing, Resources, & Assistance.** OHRA operates Jackson County’s only low-barrier, walk-in resource center where we continue to provide accessible services and help to every single resident of Ashland and beyond, whether housed or unhoused. Keeping families housed and preventing homelessness in this community will always be part of our mission. In the OHRA Shelter we serve folks from Ashland, but also all over the Valley.

You will see this name change reflected in the coming months in our communications, our logo, our website, and more. Thank you for your ongoing support! ♦

Welcome Jessica Klinke, OHRA’s new development director

With 20 years of experience in fundraising, communications, and organizational management, Jessica has dedicated her career to providing leadership and support to organizations with impactful community results. Klinke will serve under OHRA Executive Director Cass Sinclair to further the reach of OHRA’s services in Jackson County.

Prior to joining OHRA, Jessica was communications director for Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild) and Rogue Riverkeeper where she managed the digital fundraising strategy and all aspects of digital and print communications. She also worked in fundraising roles for Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), Death with Dignity, and PDX Bridge Festival.

While at KS Wild, Jessica served on the organization’s leadership council where she co-chaired the staff change team committee and led diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives for the organization. She also used her unique skills in audio documentation and new media to produce One Foot in the Black, a six-episode podcast series on fire and climate change in the West.



Jessica holds a bachelor’s degree from University of California, Santa Cruz and a master’s degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She has been in the southern Oregon community since 2011 and lives in Ashland with her son and old dog. ♦

The human touch: OHSU School of Nursing foot soak & listening clinics

The air is filled with the smell of eucalyptus, peppermint, and lavender. Soft conversations can be overheard,

“We’re not going to fix it in one week, but if you come see us every week, we can turn that around.”

“Are you sleeping outside right now?”

“If you want to, I’ll get you connected with them.”

The OHSU School of Nursing foot soak clinics are anything but clinical. Rachel Richmond, M.S.N., R.N. who is the Clinical Assistant Professor for the OHSU School of Nursing campus in Ashland oversees this program, which is part of a larger Street Nursing community outreach public health initiative. She and her nursing students hold these clinics at the OHRA Center and the OHRA Shower Trailer every Thursday. It all started 8 years ago when Rachel, and Patricia Schein, the Medical Director for Outreach Programs at La Clinica, were inspired by a speaker at Boston Healthcare for the Homeless about a foot soak clinic in Boston and decided to start their own.

The term clinic is used loosely -- it’s more about therapeutic listening and building a connection.

Rachel shares, “We don’t wear scrubs. We don’t wear name badges. We are meeting people human to human. We always sit below the level of our patients by design. It says, ‘You are a human who deserves dignity and respect.’ We are purposefully reversing the power structure that typically exists in healthcare settings. Patients say to me all the time ‘I’m kind of isolated in the community.’ **We talk about everything with them. Sometimes it’s about trauma, sometimes it’s about their favorite kind of music.**”

The term clinic is used loosely-- it’s more about the therapeutic listening and building a connection. The foot soaks are just a place to meet people where they are. Rachel says “My goal of doing this as a nurse educator is to

address bias and stigma around people who are unhoused as they enter the healthcare system. People jump to conclusions about people who are unhoused or struggle with substance use disorder.”

The approach is called “street as classroom”. **The idea is that if you immerse students in the culture of unhoused folks, they can shift their biases and open their eyes to the systems in place that are keeping people homeless.** The foot soak clinics are part of a larger community outreach program that includes medical appointment advocacy, site visits to parks and camps on the Greenway, and more. Each term, 6-8 students deeply immerse in the street nursing program. The long-term vision is to bring street nursing teams to all six OHSU campuses and create an “intersectionality of homelessness” curriculum that every nursing graduate would complete. In a recent study completed, it was found that students experience a shift in their personal bias about people who are unhoused after just one shift at a foot soak clinic.



A patient (left) and OHSU School of Nursing student Alyssa (right) chat during a therapeutic foot soak.

Billy is a street minister of 32 years, a resident of Ashland, and a foot clinic patient. When asked how he felt before and after visiting Rachel and her team, he said, “Before? Like crap. After? Like I’ve been in heaven.” Billy shared that he had gotten housed 4 years ago, but unfortunately is living outside again after being evicted during the pandemic.

Foot soaks include essential oils, Epsom salts, wound care, and conversation. **For some people living in the rough, the foot soak clinic might be the only human**

touch they experience. The biggest issues seen by Rachel’s team are trench foot and hypothermia. With recent grant funding, they were able to buy new boots to distribute to their patients. Also, the company Bombas donates a large volume of socks to programs like the OHSU street nursing team and OHRA. Rachel says “Your feet are your home. Especially if you’re living outside and collecting cans and bottles.” Many people living on the street also experience something that Rachel refers to as ‘tri-morbidity’ – a physical health condition, a mental health condition, and substance use disorder.

“We are purposefully reversing the power structure that typically exists in healthcare settings.”

Alyssa is currently one of the students deeply immersed in the street outreach program. She’s the youngest person in her class at 22 years old. This street outreach program was her first choice of the placement options this term. In just 7 weeks, the program has had a profound impact on her. She shares, “It’s been very eye-opening. You walk past people who are homeless every day and you just don’t stop and look. You don’t think about it. People see them as just an extension of the sidewalk.”

Since working with this program, Alyssa has also learned more about the other resources available to unhoused patients – like Max’s Mission, the free meals for people who are unhoused, and OHRA. **“I know so much more about the community that I’ve lived in my whole life.”** Alyssa says, “I think it’s important for healthcare providers to know about community resources so they can pro-



Lisa Smith (front left) OHRA director of program services touring the OHRA Center with OHSU School of Nursing students and staff.

vide information.” Rachel calls Alyssa ‘Superwoman’. When asked what she loves about the foot soak clinics, Rachel explains, “Just meeting Billy and other friends on the street. It’s such a gift to hear all these stories every week. **We are so lucky to peek into people’s worlds and make these friendships.** Seeing the shift in these students when they spend a full term with me, and how they interact with this marginalized group of people – it’s amazing.”

Rachel and her team of street nurses are a force of good in this community. Their program is creating meaningful change right now for people who are experiencing homelessness. Beyond that, they are seeking to educate the healthcare workers of tomorrow and dismantle the bias that exists towards people who are unhoused -- creating a brighter future. ♦

? When speaking with donors or friends around town, OHRA staff and board hear questions about our work. **!** This is a regular feature that addresses some of the questions we get.

What does it mean that OHRA has Jackson County’s only walk-in resource center?

You may have heard before that OHRA operates Jackson County’s only walk-in resource center and asked yourself “What does that mean? Why is that important?”. It means that any person in our community, housed or unhoused, can walk in the door and receive assistance. There are no background checks, no program enrollments, and no barriers.

Most other resource centers operate in concert with shelter and housing programs, meaning that only the people enrolled in those programs or staying at the shelter have access to the important resource navigation services offered there. At OHRA, anyone can make an appointment to meet with a resource navigator and start work immediately on issues large and small. We know that this model works to change lives and it’s important to keep our services accessible to all.

What we want you to know is that we are here for everyone, and we are here for you. If you’re worried about making rent for the first time ever this month -- give us a call. If you’re struggling with signing up for benefits like SNAP or disability -- give us a call. You don’t have to wait until things are ‘bad enough’ to reach out for help. You will be met with compassion and given hope. Our doors are open.

A visit from Oregon Community Foundation



In celebration of Oregon Community Foundation’s 50 year anniversary, the OCF board and staff is on the move!

#OCF50 celebrates 50 years of putting donated dollars to work. OCF was founded to improve the lives of all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy. OCF is traveling around Oregon to visit many of the projects they have funded. On their agenda was the OHRA Center, a “Project Turnkey success story”. OCF was instrumental in Project Turnkey, administering all the funds made available by the State of Oregon. OHRA was Project Turnkey’s first award recipient. Project Turnkey’s first round of funding created 19 projects in Oregon overall, creating over 800 new shelter beds in the state.

The board arrived for a presentation about OHRA’s programs and a tour of the newly renovated building. Thank you OCF! ♦



From left: Megan Loeb, Amy Drake, Cass Sinclair, Lisa Mensah



OCF staff & board and OHRA staff & board in front of the OHRA Center

*All photos in this story by Tim Tidball courtesy of Oregon Community Foundation



From left: OHRA staff Cass Sinclair, Zoë Templeton, Jessica Klinke, and OHRA board president Dennis Slattery

Funder spotlight



We are so grateful for our long-term partnership with funder Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation, who has been supporting OHRA since 2017. Their most recent grant to OHRA supports resource navigation – the key service that weaves throughout all of OHRA’s programs. Resource navigators are trauma-informed social service professionals who walk alongside OHRA’s guests building trust and providing support as guests change their lives. In past years, Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation has supported OHRA Shelter staff, barrier reduction, and more. We are so thankful for their ongoing support of OHRA’s mission, and the impact they make in communities around Oregon.

From the heart: Hear from OHRA’s guests

*All names used with permission



“I showed up with nothing, and the entire staff was very helpful in getting me what I needed. They went above and beyond to assist me in getting paired with a navigator, food, snacks, resources, and a friendly smile.”

- Anonymous guest of OHRA



“I encountered someone who really listened to my problems with caring, understanding, and respect, and not with judgement about what’s wrong with me. She recognized my value as a fellow human being with gifts to contribute and not just a societal problem to try to deal with. This alone reduced a lot of stress and helped me to rise up and better handle my problems. Then she actually had the knowledge, power, and means to help me... This has miraculously turned my life around!! Thank you so much OHRA you really saved my life!!”

-Anonymous guest of OHRA



SOU day of service with OHRA

Students and staff with the SOU Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion participated in a day of service in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday January 16th.

Students and staff made the day possible by donating and preparing different elements of the meal that would be served and dropping them off at the OHRA Shelter. Other volunteers stayed to serve the meal to shelter



guests and sit with them for the meal, providing community building and listening.

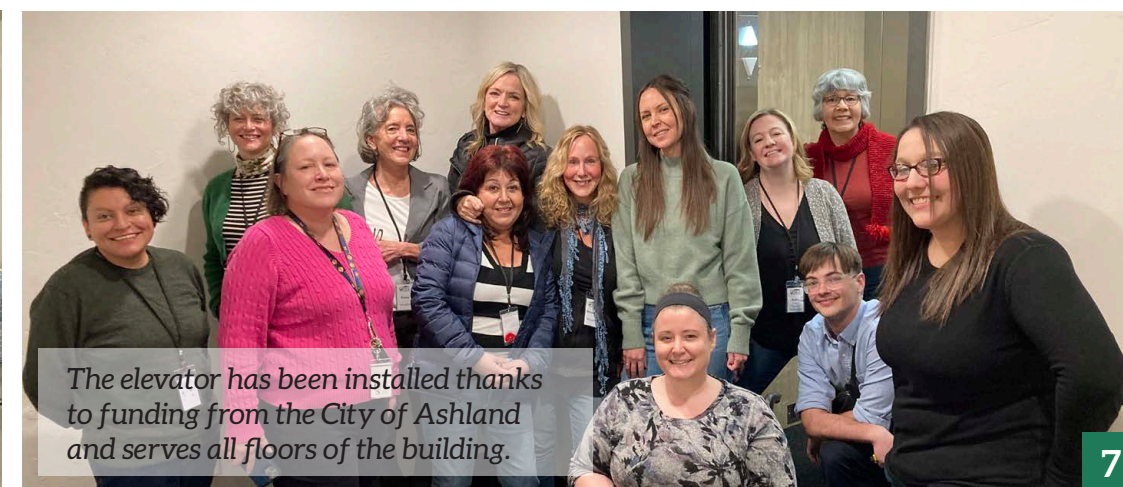
Until now, meals have been served to guests in their room due to the pandemic. Now that construction is complete on the congregate area for the shelter, we are looking forward to serving many more meals with the help of amazing volunteers.

OHRA Center construction update

Big news for the OHRA Center – the new elevator and the four ADA accessible bathrooms have been completed. When OHRA purchased the former Super 8 motel with grant dollars from the State of Oregon’s Project Turnkey, there was no fire suppression system, no elevator for the three-story building, and no ADA accessible bathrooms. Making the OHRA Center safe and accessible for all guests and staff was top priority.



The ADA bathrooms are larger, and include a roll-in shower accessible to wheelchair users.



The elevator has been installed thanks to funding from the City of Ashland and serves all floors of the building.

OHRA by the numbers



OHRA guest and resource navigator.

In 2022...

- 79** individuals who had their housing protected
- 85** individuals in new housing
- 135** guests who found jobs
- 1,469** showers offered at the OHRA Shower Trailer
- 3,874** mail services
- 13,378** total Resource Center visits

Thomas's story: Southern Oregon strong as told by Thomas

I was 16 years old when my family moved to the Rogue Valley in 1980 from Tacoma. It didn't take long to realize what an undiscovered jewel Southern Oregon is. I'm hard pressed to think of a more beautiful and friendly place anywhere. Decades later, my opinion has only strengthened. The wealth of easily accessible natural wonders is endless. The people care about and help each other, not at all like in the big city.

I attended Eagle Point HS my junior year, Crater HS my senior year and RCC Medford for my associates degree. This is also the best place to raise a kid, which I did, who turned out great. He recently received his master's degree in hard science, through RCC, SOU and U of O.

Life is strange, however, and sometimes things happen beyond our control. I didn't choose to be homeless and frankly I never thought I would be in this situation. I had a long, 35+ years career as a graphic designer, working for many of the largest companies in Medford. Whenever I would go to an interview, I would almost always get a job offer.

Then COVID-19 hit, and what was originally supposed to be a temporary layoff turned permanent. I was in weekly contact with my employer and the promise that I would be first in line to get my job back. I had unemployment to fall back on, but that eventually ran out. Two years passed and I wasn't getting calls back. The print media industry took a big hit and may never fully recover as the world turns to digital media for advertising and entertainment.

"Life is strange, however, and sometimes things happen beyond our control. I didn't choose to be homeless and frankly I never thought I would be in this situation."

My car was repossessed, my phone & internet shut off, and I was ultimately evicted from my apartment. It was difficult before all of this to get a job during COVID. It was virtually impossible afterwards because nobody could get ahold of me with no phone, email, internet, transportation or physical address. I lost everything and I was lost.

Living on the streets can be brutal. I stayed with acquaintances, couch-surfed, even slept in parking lots. I had my bike stolen, my prescriptions and my belongings, too. I was sometimes ridiculed by regular people and once I was physically attacked by other homeless people.

"There is no stigma of homelessness here."

I turned to alcohol as an escape, bad decision. Ultimately, I decided to seek recovery from alcohol, voluntarily, through OnTrack in Medford. I currently have more than four months of sobriety, with one slip up. I was told about OHRA by my counselor at OnTrack. He gave me their number and it took two months of incessant calling, but finally I was approved and invited in.

"I couldn't have come this far without OHRA and their amazing supportive people."

The first thing I noticed was the staff was compassionate and proficient. They didn't pass negative judgments and everyone has treated me like a human being. That is remarkable to me. I was given my own locking room with a private bathroom, tub and shower. I am warm and safe when it's icy, windy and cold outside. TVs are not allowed, which is good. I don't lay around all day watching television. Alcohol and drugs are strictly forbidden, which is a huge help with my continued sobriety. They serve a hearty meal at dinnertime which is delicious. They keep my sheets and towels cleaned regularly. I couldn't have come this far without OHRA and their amazing and supportive people.

My Navigator Kasey submitted the paperwork for HUD housing and made sure I had SNAP benefits, OHP and that free cell phone from the Oregon Dept. of Human Services. I meet with her regularly, as schedules permit. She helps me think of job opportunities and contacts, in or outside my field. She proofread my resume, made some recommendations and printed some out for me.



Thomas, Southern Oregon resident, graphic designer, father, and guest of OHRA.

OHRA shelter is near the farthest reaches of RVT, with the bus stop only one block away. I was gifted an unlimited ride bus pass for the months of Dec and Jan, so I can go anywhere anytime I need to. The 1X bus gets me from here to Medford in 20 minutes. I have a place to get mail delivered and a phone number, so I started putting out resumes and contacting ex employers. Nothing yet, but I remain ever optimistic.

"The goal is clearly not just housing, shelter and food. It is betterment of life. Feet on the ground. A future. Hope."

OHRA has truly been a blessing to me. There is no stigma of homelessness here. Instead an acknowledgement of persons with value and the immediate struggles we face. The goal is clearly not just housing, shelter and food. It is betterment of life. Feet on the ground. A future. Hope. And done so with respect and encouragement. If that doesn't sum up the community spirit of Southern Oregon that I grew to love over the past 42 years, then I don't know what else possibly could. ♦



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What's inside

- Oregon Community Foundation visits the OHRA Center
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- Thomas's story: "I never thought I would be in this position."
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Newsletter

Spring 2023

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