



## Message from Cass Sinclair

It's hard to read a newspaper or step out your front door without thinking about homelessness in our community. In the 2020 Jackson County Point in Time (PIT) Count there were about 700 people experiencing homelessness on a single evening in January. In 2022, during the same count just two years later, that number was over 1,200. Nationwide, we are seeing only a slight increase in the total homeless population, but in Jackson County the population is booming.



The National Alliance to End Homelessness released their 2023 State of Homelessness report. In the whole country, the average rate of homelessness is 18 people per 10,000. In Jackson County we have 55.9 people per 10,000 homeless—more than three times the national average. Portland/Multnomah County has 65.1 per 10,000 homeless. Oregon's average is 42.4 per 10,000. Some groups, such as transgender people and seniors, are disproportionately affected. To read one woman's story of being unhoused later in life, turn to page 6.

Governor Tina Kotek declared a state of emergency regarding homelessness in Oregon within 24 hours of taking office and signed a \$200 million package to provide rental assistance, prevent evictions, get people permanently housed, and increase the state's shelter bed capacity. A portion of that funding came to Jackson County. OHRA and other community organizations will help pass through the funding to underserved populations.

All over Oregon, cities are grappling with how to address unsheltered people camping within the city. These encampments and issues are a symptom of a much larger problem. The wave is coming. We have yet to see the full extent of how this economic climate will impact our community. We know that high housing costs are associated with high rates of homelessness.



Cass (third from left) accepting a recent grant award from Ashland Community Health Foundation. Also pictured from left: Kathleen Mackris (ACHF), Dennis Slattery (OHRA board president), and Stephanie Roland (ACHF).

Where does OHRA fit in all this? The issue of homelessness is complex. There are 'upstream' solutions like public policy, affordable housing, and living wages. And then there's OHRA—somewhere on the river's edge trying to pull people out of the water and prevent them from falling in. Upstream solutions can be effective at creating long-term change on the societal level. However, they don't provide immediate relief to individuals experiencing homelessness or facing eviction today. Community-level funding is only as effective as the organizations that carry out the services.

The state of the world may feel overwhelming but this isn't the time to bury our heads in the sand. It's the time to put our minds and our hearts together. We know that OHRA's programs and services are effective. Every day we see the profound change that resource navigation and wrap-around services have on individuals. One person at a time, one family at a time, we can help change our community. We will continue to operate Jackson County's only low-barrier walk-in resource center, the Laundry Shower Trailer, and the OHRA Shelter with up to a six-month stay that is getting people into permanent housing. With your help and support, we can be here as a long-term resource for anyone who needs help today, and for years to come.

To read the 2023 State of Homelessness, visit <https://endhomelessness.org/>

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Cass Sinclair'.

Cass Sinclair, Executive Director

## Message from Dennis Slattery, OHRA board president



Our Circle of Hope is so named because every donation, no matter the size, sends a message of hope to our guests and the incredible staff that serve them. I am a proud member of our Circle of Hope because I know just how important these dollars are. They are expressions of caring, dollars that make a difference, and an

essential support of our activities that is so meaningful. We work hard to raise grant dollars and other funds to fully support our programs and services, but the funds that come from people close to us are the most important—not only for what they mean to our guests, but for the story of support it allows us to tell others.

When I think about the circle of support surrounding our guests, I think of our staff and how they work to help people find a path forward. I think of our wonderful navigators and shelter staff, our fine management team and

development staff, all supported by a caring and talented group of people on the board of directors and our committees...and I think of you, the members of our Circle of Hope and how much your support means to our efforts to help give people a hand up. We are grateful for those continuous donations throughout the year that mean so much to the services we deliver to our guests.

Thank you to the members of the Circle of Hope, if you are not a member, please consider joining us as we continue to do this important work. Please contact us if you would like more information. We need you!

Dennis Slattery, Board President

## 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.

### Three giving levels:

- Friend, up to \$20 per month
- Supporter, \$50 per month
- Advocate, \$100 per month and beyond

At every level, you will receive:

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



To join the OHRA Circle of Hope today, visit [OHRAhelps.org](https://OHRAhelps.org) or scan this QR code!

## OHRA by the numbers

Since 2014

**1,750** families newly housed or protected from eviction

**4,400** loads of laundry

**11,750** showers provided

**75,500** total Resource Center visits

## All of us need all of us!

Your support of OHRA helps ensure our ability to serve as a vital long-term resource for our community. Your continued contribution brings to life our vision of a community where everyone has shelter. Your donation allows us to build a sustainable organization that can adapt to changing circumstances.



As you can see from the data on the left, your donations change lives. We get results! Your contributions allow us to serve the immediate need and also help us build a better community for all. Your investment in OHRA offers hope and creates possibilities.

We know there are a lot of worthy causes and organizations to support. We are so grateful when you choose to support OHRA, which in turn allows us to support our neighbors in need.

Jessica Klinke,  
Director of Development

## Funder spotlight: M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Foundation



**M.J. Murdock**  
CHARITABLE TRUST

The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust Foundation helps support community-focused organizations in the Pacific Northwest at every level of their development through grants, enrichment programming, and other resources. Murdock has been supporting OHRA for a number of years through funding infrastructure and staffing. In November 2022, the M.J. Murdock Trust awarded OHRA a \$451,000 grant toward the completion of the capital campaign to renovate the Super 8 motel into the OHRA Center. To receive the full award, OHRA has to match the grant by raising funds from other sources.

Once this final ‘top-off’ amount is raised, OHRA can receive the full grant amount. Since receiving the Murdock match, OHRA has received additional capital grants toward the match from the Autzen Foundation, Carpenter Foundation, Roundhouse Foundation, and Naito Foundation, leaving just \$143,180 to raise in order to complete the capital campaign for phase 1 renovations to the OHRA Center. OHRA thanks the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust for their ongoing support of our work. ♦



## “Familiarity breeds compassion” Hear from one of OHRA’s resource navigators

*Andy came to OHRA in January 2023 as one of our newest Resource Navigators bringing with him a unique perspective to the work. Andy is a Navy veteran and spent 22 years serving the community as a member of the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office working in the jail. From his perspective, there is an overlapping population between guests at OHRA and people he encountered working in law enforcement. The difference he sees, and why he feels that his current work at OHRA is the most rewarding of his life, is the compassionate approach to helping people rather than punitive action of the justice system. In this article, Andy details his experience as a Navigator and the way that his path of service has narrowed and deepened.*

What makes OHRA special? It’s in the very nature of the work we do. **Each time a staff member meets with a guest, we are personalizing our service to meet their needs.** We walk alongside them to connect them with the most appropriate resource that they are looking for. We get to connect with our guests in a deep and meaningful way. It’s impossible to not care about the outcome of their situation. There’s a saying that “familiarity breeds contempt.” **At OHRA we are proving daily that familiarity breeds compassion.**

Are we able to meet the needs of every individual we serve at OHRA? Unfortunately, the answer to that is no. There are limited resources, and challenges for the community we serve are ever increasing. In this job there are moments of heartbreak. Then there are the moments of joy: those frequent occasions when we can bring someone into the shelter, when their rent is paid, or when a new job starts. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the direct results of our hard work and that of our guests. **Regardless of our ability to meet a person’s physical or financial needs, every person gets their most fundamental human needs met—to be treated with dignity, to be appreciated, and to be seen.** This is the baseline of every navigator/guest interaction.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention OHRA’s work culture. It is the finest I’ve ever been a part of. We have supervisors who lead by example, stay connected, and remain approachable. My peers are supportive and we all believe

in the work we’re doing. Something that really stands out is the relationship between navigators and shelter staff. Having staff in the shelter who are available to and familiar with the shelter guests is an invaluable resource in making sure we are meeting the needs of the guests.

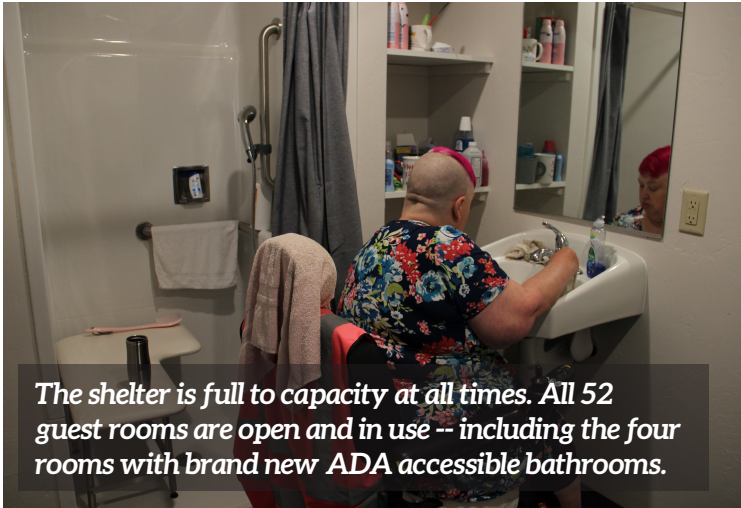
Recently, one of the shelter staff spoke to me about a guest who was considering going back to the abusive relationship that initially brought her to the shelter. When I met with that guest, we were able to reach the conclusion that because she has a safe place to stay in our shelter, she didn’t need to rush into a decision. Another shelter guest recently popped into my office wanting to tell me that he started his new job. Before he came into the shelter, he was living in his car after losing his job from an injury. That same day, I met another shelter guest at court to support and advocate for her. Resolving her justice charges is the final barrier preventing her from moving into long-term, stable, and supportive housing. These are just a handful of examples of the work we are doing every day. - Andy

*Andy’s reflections are indicative of the integrated services provided between the Resource Center and the Shelter—offering navigation services in conjunction with temporary emergency shelter. Guests have the opportunity to truly work on removing barriers to permanent or supportive housing. Andy is one of eight Resource Navigators on staff who work daily with shelter guests and guests of the Resource Center, connecting them to services, programs, or resources to assist them in making change in their lives. As Andy has seen firsthand in his time with law enforcement, many people who struggle with mental health, lack safe, affordable housing, or struggle with substance use disorder often end up justice-involved, which can limit their access to employment or housing—and the stability they so desperately need. ♦*

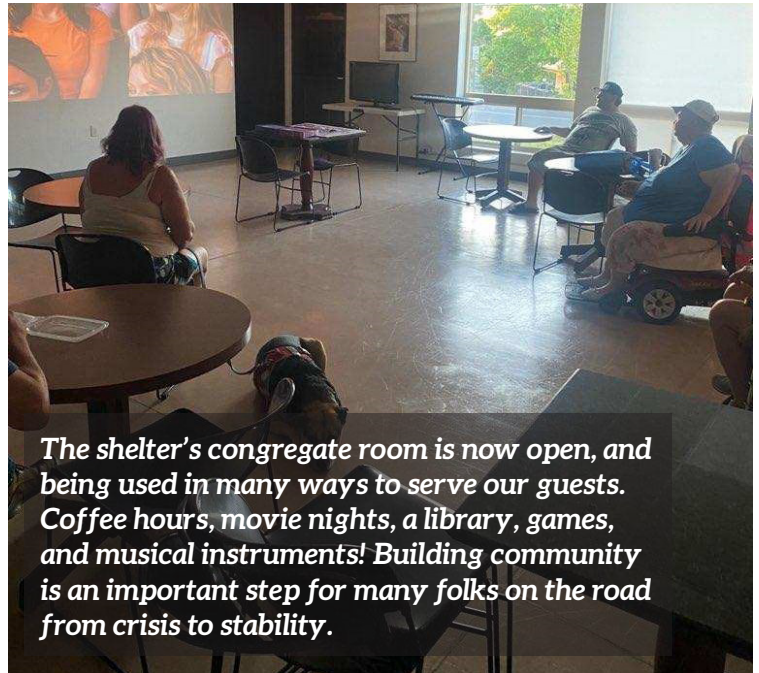


Andy working with one of OHRA’s guests.

## The OHRA Center construction update



The shelter is full to capacity at all times. All 52 guest rooms are open and in use -- including the four rooms with brand new ADA accessible bathrooms.



The shelter's congregate room is now open, and being used in many ways to serve our guests. Coffee hours, movie nights, a library, games, and musical instruments! Building community is an important step for many folks on the road from crisis to stability.

**?** 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.

### How long can guests stay at the OHRA Shelter? How does that process work?

The OHRA Shelter is an emergency shelter, meaning guests can stay during the day and the evenings for extended periods of time—up to six months. “Homeless shelters” are typically first-come-first-serve, nightly shelters where people stay for single nights at a time and are expected to leave in the morning. As an emergency shelter, OHRA operates differently. For guests to enter the OHRA Shelter they meet with a resource navigator to do an intake form determining their vulnerability score, which is based off many factors including mental health, physical health, and experiences of trauma or abuse. Guests with the highest vulnerability score are given priority and we usually have a waiting list. While guests stay with OHRA they may work closely with resource navigators to improve various areas of their life and work toward their personal goals. Since opening on April 1, 2021, more than 75 guests have moved directly from the OHRA Shelter into permanent housing. For some people, this is the first lease they have signed in their adult life. Our data shows that after people exit the Shelter, more than 90% stay in contact with their resource navigator for continued work.

### Community partner spotlight: Golden-Fields Construction & Arkitek

Thank you to two incredible community partners who have helped bring the vision of the OHRA Center to life—Arkitek and Golden-Fields Construction—who provided the architecture and general contracting support that transformed the Super 8 motel into the OHRA Center. They have been timely, under budget, inventive, and professional each step of the way. We are so honored to work with them. Phase 1 renovations are wrapping up and we will continue to work with Arkitek and Golden-Fields Construction on upcoming phase 2 renovations, including the installation of a commercial kitchen and the development of a master site plan.

**“John Fields from Golden-Fields Construction, as well as the whole team at Arkitek—specifically Jerome White and Chris Brown—have been an irreplaceable part of the OHRA team over the last two years. They bring not only expertise, but also compassion for the community. We are forever grateful,”** says Cass Sinclair, OHRA’s executive director.

Thank you Arkitek & Golden-Fields Construction!



## From the heart: Hear from OHRA's guests

\*All names and stories used with permission

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*"I am a domestic [abuse] survivor of the man I was with for 38 years, the father of my children. I had no place to go and OHRA opened their arms. Kasey [my resource navigator] is very helpful, and Martha at the front desk, and Sara."*

- Anonymous guest of OHRA

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*"It's so exciting. I know I'm going to cry when I get my keys. That's the one thing about being here with OHRA - this is the first shelter that I have actually witnessed people go into apartments and people getting placed into housing. That's what shelter is supposed to be all about - to help them move on to the next step, to meet their goals, to get their apartment. This is a good place to get yourself in, get a job, and be doing what you need to do to get your life back on track. This is the perfect, perfect place to do that. I've witnessed so many people get apartments and that's really cool."*

-Sandy, guest of OHRA

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OHRA's guests and resource navigation staff work closely to solve problems and create better futures.

Ready to volunteer? One of our greatest volunteer needs right now is in the congregate shelter room. By volunteering you can help us staff the shelter congregate room for more hours per week. Shelter guests can play games, read books from the library, socialize, study, and more.

Email [volunteer@helpingashland.org](mailto:volunteer@helpingashland.org) to get started.



## Homelessness and seniors— an emerging crisis: One woman's story

*We sat down with one of OHRA's guests, A.W., a 77-year-old resident of Ashland, and her resource navigator Tina. A.W. has been working with OHRA for nearly six years, meeting with her resource navigator more than 150 times over the years.*

*Prior to becoming homeless, A.W. was living in Monterey, CA. While living there, A.W. along with many other residents in the area were exposed to airborne toxins from the nearby military base.*

A.W. explains, "I was really sick. I was unable to work. I had been working as a masseuse. I also had a plant nursery. I kept it together for a couple years and then I just couldn't anymore. I lost everything. I had no idea how my life would end up. I grew up in an upper middle-class family, I'm the oldest of four girls. I thought I would have a house and a family. Not happily ever after, but I thought it would be a lot more stable. At 77, it's been pretty hard going."

*At the time A.W. moved to Ashland and started working with OHRA, she had already been living out of her car for a decade.*

"I was desperate to have a home and a safe place. It's really hard at this age to live on the road. My life was really uncertain. Basically, those ten years were survival. When

you're living out of your backpack, or your vehicle, there's no way you can keep track of everything you need. When I lived in my car, my stress level was so high I couldn't do much. Did I eat today? Did I have enough gas? Where am I going to sleep today?"

"I'm a little more difficult to find housing for because of my sensitivity to lights, pesticides, all kinds of things. Most housing just wouldn't work for me."

**"It's really hard at this age to live on the road. My life was really uncertain. Basically, those ten years were survival."**

*Tina and A.W. shared insights about their incredible partnership, and the symbiotic relationship between guests and OHRA's resource navigators.*

A.W. shared, "One of my challenges is that I don't use the internet. A lot of people think it's because I don't know how, or because I'm an older generation, which is true, but it's because I'm highly sensitive to the screen. It overstimulates me. You can't even make an appointment for a doctor without going online. It's inconsiderate for those of us who can't do that."

"Tina knows how to do all the paperwork, and stays informed about what's available when new funding or facilities come up."

Tina explained, "It feels like a partnership— and that's how it should be. Something I love about A.W. is that she's so persistent. She is so diligent. She tries everything and every resource possible. There aren't enough resources to meet the needs of her situation, such as her needs for naturopathic medicine. It will be great when we find it, but there is still work left to do. She never gives up."

"It doesn't get any better if you give up," replied A.W.

*One of the most difficult ongoing issues that Tina and A.W. continue to work on is getting her medical care covered. A.W. works with Oregon Health Plan (OHP) and Medicaid, but most of the care that works best for A.W. is not covered.*

"The naturopaths and types of doctors that A.W. sees that help her most are typically not covered, or covered only in small amounts," says Tina.

*A.W. shared why she thinks the community needs OHRA.*

"OHRA is great. This organization and how much it's grown and how much support there is shows that the need is profound. Something has to give here besides people dying, being sick, and being homeless."



"At one point I just accepted that this was my life. I don't think I would be here without the help of OHRA."

*A.W. explained the difference between working with OHRA and the other social service organizations she has worked with.*

"Many organizations are pretty overwhelming. You have to go, stand in line, fill out paperwork. Next time you go it's a new person and you have to tell your whole story again. The best thing about Tina is that she's known me all this time. I'm not just a client or another number. Tina's my personal link to the systems that can help me."

**"At one point I just accepted that this was my life. I don't think I would be here without the help of OHRA."**

"There's more hope. That's the biggest deal. I actually care about getting up in the morning. I'm actually laughing these days. "OLLI [The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute] is one of the best things I have going. They have classes, it's inexpensive, they even have scholarships. Everything from personal work, to dancing, to fly fishing, to movies. It's a wonderful resource. You meet people you have something in common with, and you meet people who are the same age."

"I'm taking folk dancing, ancient art, and a mentoring class. I don't feel like I'm whole yet, but OHRA and OLLI are helping me to do something constructive besides surviving."

"OHRA is awesome. They've saved my life." ♦

*In May 2023, 42% of the guests staying at the OHRA Shelter were 60 and older.*



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## What's inside

- “Familiarity breeds compassion”—hear firsthand from one of OHRA’s resource navigators!
- An emerging crisis: homelessness in seniors. One woman’s powerful story.
- Current volunteer opportunities—OHRA needs you!
- Funder spotlight and community partner spotlight—partnerships make our work possible!

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# OHRA Newsletter

Summer 2023

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