



PO Box 1133  
Ashland, OR 97520

**“Rebuilding systems instead of changing individual behavior can solve and end homelessness.”**

-Bryan Guiney, Oregon field office director for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) speaking at the 2024 Southern Oregon Homelessness Summit.

[More inside!](#)

**“I came in completely broken and not seeing any way out. To receive kindness, encouragement, along with housing and a wonderful meal? I have been transformed. I reconnected with my family while here and I have an entire different outlook on life.”**

-Penelope, guest of OHRA

[Read Roger’s story of transformation inside!](#)

# **Newsletter** Spring 2024

## **OHRA’s board & staff**

### **OHRA BOARD**

**President**

*Dennis Slattery*

**Vice President**

*Cathy Gerbracht*

**Secretary**

*Jodi Rasor*

**Treasurer**

*Eileen Piker*

**Board Members**

*Jackie Bachman*

*Ben Bellinson*

*Sachta Card*

*Diane de Ryss*

*Libby Gill*

*Catherine Greenspan*

*Jordan Pease*

*Meiwen Richards*

*Diego Rojas*

*Rev. Brett Strobel*

*Jeffrey Tatum*

*Deneice Zeve*

### **OHRA LEADERSHIP**

**Executive Director**

*Cass Sinclair*

**Director of Administration**

*Julie Carr*

**Director of Program Services**

*Lisa Smith*

**Development Director**

*Jackie Agee - Welcome Inside!*

**Asst. Development Director**

*Zoë Templeton*

**Grants Specialist**

*David Stoebel*

**OHRA Center Supervisor**

*Katie Blomgren*

## Southern Oregon Homelessness Summit 2024 at Ashland Hills

Thought leaders from around the state were joined by over 250 community members for a sold-out event on Saturday February 3rd at the Aquarius Ballroom of the Ashland Hills Hotel. The event was sponsored by the Rogue Valley Metaphysical Library (RVML) in partnership with OHRA. Presenters and panelists tackled the biggest social issue of our time — homelessness.

Bryan Guiney, Oregon field office director for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), kicked things off in the morning sharing about underlying causes of homelessness and possible solutions from the federal perspective. “First and foremost, homelessness is a housing problem. The rise in homelessness you see in your neighborhood and all around your communities is a structural failure.” said Guiney. “Rebuilding systems instead of changing individual behavior can solve and end homelessness.”

***“Rebuilding systems instead of changing individual behavior can solve and end homelessness.”***

State Representative Pam Marsh described the state-level outlook. “You can have state level policy and funding, but if you don’t have local partners on the ground, you will not have the outcomes you need.”

She went on to say, “Sometimes it feels like homelessness is a phenomenon that just appeared in front of us, but we know that’s not the case. A lot of us have just begun to pay attention to the issue which has been with us for decades.” Rep Marsh shared a look back at the historical events that contributed to the homelessness issue we see today. Among



*State Representative Pam Marsh gave a presentation on the State of Oregon’s response to the homelessness crisis.*



*State Senator Jeff Golden delivering a thought-provoking presentation.*

them were the closing of psychiatric institutions and ‘poor farms’ in the 1980s by the Reagan administration. Representative Marsh’s presentation was met with a standing ovation.



*After lunch, a panel of local experts representing organizations from around the area gathered to share about how their organizations are making an impact.*

State Senator Jeff Golden took the stage next, “I want to say how energizing it is to be here, among so much experience and dedication and innovation and creativity and collaboration. We are known for that state-wide.” Senator Golden went on, “If we don’t want to be coming to this room again in twenty years, and have this problem be as big or bigger as it is today, we have to start talking about it.”



*Lunchtime keynote speaker Libby Gill uplifted the crowd, speaking on the science of hope and keeping hope alive in situations that seem hopeless.*

OHRA is so grateful to all the community partners and neighbors who participated in this important event. A special thank you to Jordan Pease, executive director of RVML. Jordan serves on OHRA’s board of directors and was the primary sponsor and organizer for this fabulous event. RVML’s mission is “providing easy access to information that inspires, heals, and connects.” Thank you Jordan and RVML for doing just that! To view a full recording of the event, visit [www.youtube.com/@RVMLResourceCenter](http://www.youtube.com/@RVMLResourceCenter).



*Jordan Pease, executive director at Rogue Valley Metaphysical Library and OHRA board member.*

# Leadership Message

The issue of homelessness is bigger than the individual, and so too, must be the solution. As we learned at the 2024 Southern Oregon Homelessness Summit, there is a choreographed dance of services and solutions happening between the federal and state governments, local service providers, guests in need, and YOU dear reader. Supporters like you with a heart for our mission are a key component to the continued success of OHRA’s programs in preventing and ending homelessness. Rather than focus on our individualism, we must focus on the whole community. Rather than seeing things that make us different, we must see the commonality that connects us all: our humanity. **We talk about this idea often at OHRA: it could be any one of us at any time who next needs OHRA’s services.** Luckily, we operate Jackson County’s largest walk-in resource center and we are here when our guests, you, or anyone else might need us. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to solving homelessness, and supporting OHRA.



Dennis Slattery  
Board President



Cass Sinclair  
Executive Director



## Welcome Jackie Agee to OHRA



As I walked past our guest rooms on the way to my office a few days ago, a wave of emotion came over me, and tears filled my eyes. I thought about the vulnerable unhoused people who find refuge at the OHRA Shelter, and how grateful I am that **we are here not only to give them shelter but also to provide a chance to leave homelessness behind.**

Our donors make our work possible and for that, we are grateful to you, for your support and your commitment to OHRA.

I joined the OHRA team as Development Director just a few months ago after working at ACCESS for nearly six years. I’ve closely followed OHRA’s work over many years. While at ACCESS, I had the opportunity to work closely with OHRA and always told myself if I ever left ACCESS, I wanted to work at OHRA. And here I am!

Because I am new to my position, I’ve made it my mission to get to know as many of you as possible. In the weeks to come, I will reach out to ask you to meet with me for coffee and conversation. I’m looking forward to meeting you and I can’t thank you enough for supporting OHRA. If you’d like to contact me, please feel free to email [jackie@OHRAhelps.org](mailto:jackie@OHRAhelps.org).

## OHRA services in 2023

153

families got permanently housed from homelessness

164

families were prevented from facing eviction

1,702

showers provided

4,879

meal services provided

Data is from 01/01/2023-12/31/2023

## La Clinica at the OHRA Center: Removing healthcare barriers

OHRA and La Clinica have a long-standing relationship, partnering to care for the most vulnerable people in our community. La Clinica used to come to the OHRA Center and serve guests with their mobile unit, among many other services. **Now, La Clinica operates a federally-qualified health center right here on the second floor of the OHRA Center.** We are proud of this partnership and excited to remove barriers for our guests and get people the care they need.

At this time the clinic is open three days a week, serving OHRA's shelter guests and resource center guests. No appointment is necessary and there is no time limit for how long a person can stay at the clinic. There are six people on staff – two medical providers, a medical assistant, a behavioral health specialist, a receptionist and a community resource specialist. The clinic provides behavioral and primary care, and is able to prescribe medication and run some labs onsite.

By not requiring appointments, the clinic eliminates significant barriers for our guests seeking medical care. When we talk about “barriers” we are referring to anything that prevents people from receiving the care they need. **For our unhoused guests those barriers might include the cost of transportation, difficulties with keeping scheduled appointments, previous mistreatment in medical settings, shame, trauma, and more.**



*Alex Alvarado Castro (left), community resource specialist and Patti Schein, medical director sitting in the exam room at OHRA.*

La Clinica is addressing all these concerns. The staff are all experienced in working with the population we serve and providing judgement-free care. Our guests already come to the OHRA Center, and by having healthcare here on site the barriers for travel are reduced. Read about one guest's story below:

**Tom\* had been staying at the Ashland Emergency Shelter when he presented with breathing problems, rashes and seizures. Staff at La Clinica got involved immediately and he was transferred to the clinic at the OHRA Center.** After he was assessed, it became clear that his health problems were directly related to substance use disorder. Tom completed medical detox and is back at the OHRA Shelter where he is diligently working on his sobriety, finding a job, housing, and getting his life back.

*\*This guest's name has been changed to preserve anonymity.*

## Thank you to the Barth Family Fund of Oregon Community Foundation

We want to take this opportunity to especially acknowledge Richard and Debra Barth for their generous and steadfast support of OHRA. They have given both their treasure and their time to help our organization become successful. For example, Richard served as a member of the OHRA Center Capital Campaign Steering Committee, and the couple hosted a campaign event in 2022. In addition, Richard has been a big help to us in our work planning the construction of a commercial kitchen at the OHRA Center. Given his passion for environmentalism, Richard's insight was instrumental in our decision to make the kitchen all-electric rather than gas. Often, whenever we have a time-sensitive specific need, the Barth's generously step forward to help us.

The Barths have lived in Ashland for over 20 years. Prior to moving to Ashland, they spent over 20 years in Silicon

Valley. Richard worked in the high tech industry and Debra as a college professor. While living in Ashland Richard has served in leadership and advisory capacities with multiple local nonprofit and government organizations. He is the vice chair of the City of Ashland Climate and Environment Policy Advisory Committee and a founding board member of the Ashland Climate Collaborative.

According to Richard and Debra, **“We have supported OHRA for many years from its small beginnings to the amazing organization it has grown into. We especially appreciate OHRA's focus on helping people transition from crisis to stability.”** OHRA is deeply grateful to Richard and Debra for their ongoing assistance. Their support is one reason we can serve our most vulnerable neighbors in need. Thank you!

## City of Ashland shelter update



Since November 1, 2023, OHRA has been the contracted service provider for City of Ashland Emergency Shelter at the city’s request. The shelter located at 2200 Ashland Street has served 72 people including 64 adults and eight children. Some of the guests who stayed at the shelter have moved on to permanent housing.

A few examples include a single mother and her son who reconnected with the mom’s parents in California and were able to secure permanent housing. Another person who had experienced homelessness for the past 12 years tackled some health issues while at the shelter and recently moved into permanent housing. In addition, a young man received navigation services at the shelter including help with his resume. Shortly thereafter, he obtained employment and then he secured permanent housing.

The City of Ashland Emergency Shelter will close the morning of April 1, 2024.

## From the heart: Words from OHRA’s guests

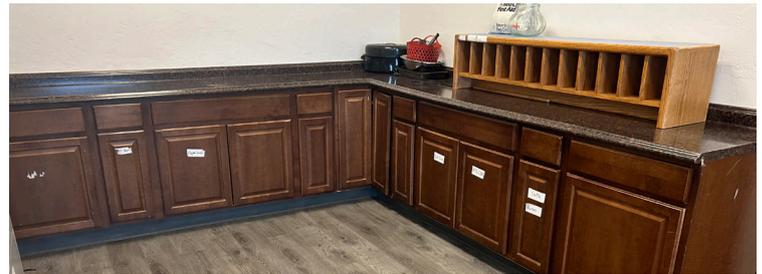
*\*All names and stories used with permission*

*“The kindness shown to me by employees at OHRA has been a gift. The connection to local resources is incredible. OHRA welcomes other service providers and is thus a one-stop-shop for anyone needing assistance in the Rogue Valley. OHRA was able to assist me with a final invoice to my previous property management company. This opened the door for me to obtain permanent housing.”*

*- Emily, guest of OHRA\**

## OHRA Center construction: What’s next? The kitchen.

OHRA is grateful to John Fields (Golden-Fields Construction), Jerome White (Arkitek), and Chris Brown (Arkitek) for their ongoing partnership on renovations to the OHRA Center. They helped OHRA transform the old Super 8 motel into the OHRA Center with phase one renovations including a fire suppression system and three-story elevator. **Over the last several months, we have also been planning for the installation of a commercial kitchen at the OHRA Center.** Recently-retired architect Steve Ennis began donating his time as the Project Manager for the kitchen project.



Once completed, the kitchen will give us the ability to provide “home-cooked” meals to our shelter guests. Currently, shelter guest meals are being provided in partnership with local restaurants. We hope that having a commercial kitchen will allow us to bring in our wonderful volunteers to feed guests and reduce our food costs.

**The kitchen will be all electric and more climate friendly than gas.** However, choosing to use electricity makes the project more expensive. Our electrical panel and plumbing will require an upgrade.

We estimate it will take about one year for us to receive the electrical and plumbing equipment necessary for the project. Therefore, we believe the project completion date will be mid to late 2025. We look forward to updating you.

*“I have been homeless 17 years. OHRA gave me hope where I did not have any. I recommend this place to anyone and everyone I talk to. I’m hugely grateful for OHRA and the wonderful people here on staff.”*

*- Anonymous guest of OHRA*

## Roger's Story: Seeing more for his future

*Former OHRA shelter guest Roger attributes his life's transformation to OHRA and to his hard work.*

When Roger first came to OHRA in 2023 he had recently overcome a long-term drug addiction and was experiencing homelessness. **But he was ready to turn his life around -- and did just that.** Now, as a warehouse lead at Goodwill in Ashland, Roger's face appears on posters around the facility to let others know about the opportunities that helped him transform his life.

Roger had been living in an RV in Central Point which was, as Roger puts it, "old and cold." When his girlfriend Lisa required a three-week stay in the hospital, they realized that living in that RV was no longer an option. The couple had heard about OHRA and, even though it was initially difficult to admit they needed support, they came into the Shelter and asked for help.

*That's when they met Tina, one of OHRA's resource navigators, and life has never been the same.*

"Tina was the best counselor I ever had," Roger said, noting how quickly things fell into place once the couple started working with her. Luckily, OHRA was able to place Roger and Lisa Marie in the OHRA Shelter almost right away. They moved in and immediately went to work. Roger began applying for jobs, while his partner began her studies to become a Certified Nurse Assistant, a goal she'd set for herself while in the hospital.

**With Tina's help, they found an apartment just four months later.** "A lot of people say it's too hard to get an apartment, but if you do the research, you'll find something," Roger said. "I didn't have good credit, but I started to turn it around. Then I came into Goodwill one day, where I used to shop and resell things, and the manager said I should apply for a job since I was there every day anyway."

Roger applied and landed a job at Goodwill handling donations in the warehouse. In the meantime, Lisa graduated with her CNA and went to work in a hospital. "I grew up in a good family, but I made the wrong choices and spent 15 years in prison. It took me three convictions to finally learn. Now my friends and family are so happy for me," he said, emphasizing the point that homelessness can happen to anyone.

Roger soon got a promotion at Goodwill and, after a year as a supervisor, was promoted again to warehouse lead. "Goodwill changed my life. We're like a family there. People see my posters in Goodwill and when they ask me for help, I send them to OHRA. I can't take on all their problems, because I've got to keep working on myself. But I know OHRA will help them, as long as they are willing to do the work."



*Roger, former OHRA shelter guest, is excited to share his story.*

As Roger said, **"I see more homeless people now than all the years I've been in Oregon. I see kids, grandmas, families, people living in cars. It's not just here, it's everywhere."** Oregon has the fourth largest homeless population per capita in the country, behind D.C., California and Vermont, and it's growing at an above-average pace. "I still got friends out there."

Roger is proud of his journey. He went from living in an RV to buying a new car—the first new car he's ever bought in his life—and he and his partner moved from their apartment into a house. "My mom is happy. My kids are happy. And now I'm starting a landscape business on the side."

But even with all the forward momentum, Roger sees more for his future. "My ultimate dream is to open a place like OHRA. I could be a good counselor," he said with a grin. "I think I'll apply for a part-time job here. I want to save people from a lot of the hard times I had."

His dad passed away while he was in prison. "When my dad was alive the whole family was always together. And then they just came apart. Since I came back, I've been trying to get all my brothers back together." Since Roger stepped into that role as the family's patriarch, "We have dinner every two weeks now."

**Perhaps the biggest accomplishment of all is that when Roger visits his dad's grave now, he hears his dad's voice saying 'You did it, son.'**