

Standing on Solid Ground

Diane de Ryss, OHRA Board President

Over the past 13 months, people in our community faced unanticipated hardship. People lost their livelihoods and homes. They faced unexpected health risks. Lives were upended and even lost.

For OHRA, that meant unprecedented demand for our services. We saw a dramatic increase in those struggling to find their way out of a crisis, whether triggered by the pandemic, the Alameda fire, or the relentless toll of long-term poverty.

Yet, OHRA met that increased need, adapted how we work, and expanded our reach. As if that weren't enough, we executed on a bold plan, acquiring an underutilized motel to convert it to The OHRA Center.

How did we do it? We were standing on solid ground. We had great leadership and staff, a well-run organization, a dedicated board and a strong network of partners, supporters and volunteers. And we remained disciplined: we stayed focused on our core work.

In this newsletter, it's a time to look back, to reflect, and then share how we envision our work in the final quarter of our fiscal year and in the upcoming year. We hope you agree that looking back brings the coming year's goals into focus: Stay true to our mission; take measured steps to enhance our services; successfully and sustainably operate The OHRA Center; and do what it takes to remain a financially stable and well-run organization.

It Took a Compassionate and Skilled Team

It was the strength of OHRA's team that allowed us to stay open during the pandemic.

In this newsletter (page 7) you can read about our navigators, the skilled and compassionate staff who breathe life into our mission.

Whether at the resource center, the winter shelter, or the laundry/shower trailer, OHRA's navigators work alongside our guests, helping them find the next step on their journey from crisis to stability. We've profiled one of our guests on page 7.

Our diligent leadership and administrative staff were critical to ensuring continued operations. They adapted to an onslaught of complications, from new partnerships to new policies, from finding masks to reinventing a winter shelter that could be safely operated during a pandemic.

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Because our organization was standing on solid ground, we were a steady resource for those in need during a challenging year and did more than ever before to meet our mission.

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Solid Ground, con't

It Took Organizational Capacity

While a great team is necessary for an organization to meet unforeseen challenges, it is also not enough. Over the past 12 months, OHRA demonstrated that the unglamorous nuts and bolts of running an organization is an essential investment. In the nonprofit sector, that is called organizational capacity, a bit of jargon that refers to good management, sound operations, a strong board, a committed community and stable finances.

OHRA had those elements in place as we entered 2020. As a result, we were a steady resource for those in need during a challenging year and we did more than ever before to meet our mission.

Two Examples Illustrate What OHRA Could Accomplish Because of its Capacity

Since March 2020, the number of people we served mushroomed from 25 per day to 70 to 90 per day, including those struggling with the pandemic's economic downturn and those displaced by the fire. We met that demand by adapting how we work and training new staff.

In August, 2020, Jackson County ACCESS asked us to be their partner in the south end of the Rogue Valley to distribute federal COVID-19 Rent Relief Program (CVRRP) funds to people facing possible eviction. Through that program, OHRA worked with over 250 families and individuals and distributed over \$1 million in rent and rapid rehousing dollars, providing critical assistance to COVID-impacted tenants and economic stability to landlords, and at times allowing us to temporarily house guests in local hotels which welcomed the business. See page 9 for more about OHRA's results.

It Took Strong Partnerships

A great team and organizational capacity are still not enough. It also takes an extensive network of effective partners. That collaboration is essential because of the wide range of individuals who come to OHRA for help (seniors, families, single adults, single parents, Spanish speaking) and the range of issues that affect them (missing benefits, lack of health care, job searches, eviction risk, homelessness).

No one organization and no one agency does it all. For example, Peace House and our faith-based communities provide meal service for our shelter guests. Navigators help guests plug into Oregon Health Plan to secure benefits. We rely on Maslow to aid youth and families, and St. Vincent de Paul to provide financial assistance for essential items for our guests. See the inset box for a sample of other valued partners, including those organizations that provide funding necessary for OHRA's stability and ability to serve.

We Seized Opportunities That Mattered to Our Mission

Despite the heightened need during a very tough year, OHRA had the capacity and confidence to pursue opportunities that mattered to our mission.

Our most ambitious step was purchasing an underutilized motel so we could convert it into The OHRA Center. We investigated numerous properties and, thanks to a grant through Oregon's Project Turnkey, we made a competitive offer on our first choice. After extensive due diligence confirmed we had a good building, we closed in February. You can read about our plans for opening and operating The OHRA Center on page 6.

In 2020, OHRA also expanded our service area. While we continue to focus on Ashland and Talent, funders have asked to provide services to residents throughout the Rogue Valley, for example distributing CVRRP funds to help those at risk of eviction. In addition, our geographic reach broadened as folks displaced from fires from Talent and Phoenix came to OHRA for help.



Here is a sampling of organizations OHRA works with regularly, including other service providers and funding partners.

- ACCESS
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Rogue Community Health
- La Clinica
- Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs
- City of Ashland
- Ashland Police Department
- Jackson County Continuum of Care
- Maslow Project
- The MJ Murdock Charitable Trust
- Oregon Community Foundation

Solid Ground, con't

We also began to engage with more of the communities in our valley. OHRA now has bilingual (English-Spanish) staff, is building alliances with organizations that focus on serving diverse communities, and is diversifying its board to bring a richer and more inclusive perspective to our discussions.

Looking Forward

As we turn our attention to this final quarter of our fiscal year and look ahead to the following 12 months, we owe it to our guests, supporters, partners and our community, to remain focused.

It is not the sexiest call to action, but it is the right time to ensure our organization continues to stand on solid ground. As a financially stable and well-run organization dedicated to its core work, we can best help our guests as they continue to confront the lingering challenges brought on by the crises of 2020 and the destabilizing effects of long-term poverty.

So, we will **continue our core navigation** services, working alongside guests to help them navigate their way out of crisis and toward stability.

Instead of expanding into new realms, we will **enhance our services** by making full use of The OHRA Center, which will house both our resource center and shelter. With the OHRA Center, we will serve more people with greater impact. We will offer space to partner agencies to work directly with guests. We will operate the shelter year-round, rather than just in winter, and offer shelter guests better access to navigation services improving their ability to find permanent homes. We will continue to improve our outreach to all of the diverse communities in our valley, especially the Latinx community. And we are looking forward to increasing follow-up case management for guests who have reached stability.

We will **build our capacity**—our financial and organizational foundation—so we sustainably operate our new building, continue to provide strong management support for our hard-working staff, and most importantly, offer reliable and skilled assistance to people in need.

During this time, the board and staff are excited about our recent announcement of a leadership transition. Senior Director of Programs & Services Cass Sinclair will step into the executive director role in May. Cass has the right combination of operational and management experience to take OHRA's reins. We are delighted that current Executive Director Michelle Arellano will stay with OHRA while she pursues her passion for ministry. Michelle will become our development director, leveraging her considerable skills in cultivating partnerships and growing a strong funding base. See page 4 to read about this upcoming transition.

In closing, it must be said that OHRA's Board, our staff and our guests remain grateful to you. You receive this newsletter because you have supported OHRA through a financial donation, by volunteering your time and skills, by working with us in a partner organization, or by providing pro bono, discounted, or priority access to goods or services. We know OHRA is successful because of the remarkable support of this community. You are a critical part of that.

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With gratitude,



Diane de Ryss, OHRA Board President

Special Announcement

Sinclair to Become Executive Director, Arellano Moves to Development Director

The position of executive director, currently held by Michelle Arellano, is transitioning to Cass Sinclair, currently senior director of programs and services, as recently announced in a news release. The change is occurring over the next month, as Michelle, recently ordained as a minister at the Center for Spiritual Living, gradually reduces her role at OHRA to focus on her ministry.

"I feel incredibly grateful to work with such an amazing organization. Cass's promotion is well deserved. With her leadership, OHRA will continue to do great work in the community serving those most in need," said Michelle. "Cass is the ideal person to oversee our move into The OHRA Center. As the senior director of programs and services, she is uniquely equipped to lead the operational move."

Michelle and Cass are currently working side-by-side with Cass assuming the executive director post on May 1. Michelle's role will shift to that of development director, a part-time position that will allow OHRA to benefit from her fund-raising expertise, while giving Michelle time for her ministry.

"I've seen a lot of leadership transitions in my career, and this one is notable because of its stability," said OHRA Board of Directors President Diane de Ryss. "Even beyond May, Michelle will stay involved with OHRA working on outreach and development. With this level of engagement, OHRA won't miss a beat."

Diane continued, "We are very fortunate to have Cass already in a leadership role, and ready to assume the role of ED. Michelle has been a terrific leader to OHRA, guiding us through a period of rapid growth, the acquisition of our own building and managing OHRA through the pandemic with all the complications that entails."

Michelle joined OHRA in April 2019 after a long leadership career with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Cass joined the organization in fall of the same year as director of the winter shelter program and in 2020 became senior director of programs and services with responsibility for the resource center and the laundry/shower trailer in addition to



Cass Sinclair, OHRA's new Executive Director

the winter shelter. She was previously community outreach educator and syringe exchange program coordinator at Jackson County Public Health Department. Prior to that, she held positions at the American Cancer Society and AstraZeneca Pharmaceutical.

"To me there is nothing more important than working with vulnerable members of our community to help them find a path from crisis to stability. I love this work and am honored to be selected as OHRA's new leader. We are all grateful that Michelle will continue to work with OHRA and I am looking forward to continuing to work closely with her," Cass said.

Cass officially takes the reins May 1, 2021.

Project Turnkey Opens Door for New OHRA Center

The \$4.2 million grant that funded OHRA's purchase of a former motel as its new home is powering OHRA's plan to step up services for the most vulnerable.

Having a year-round shelter and our resource center in a single location will give our guests greater access to our navigators and as a result, we will be providing more support to guests on their journey from crisis to stability. The ability to own our own facility and to co-locate our center and shelter there is huge! It removes the financial drain of mortgage debt and rent as

well as the emotional and energy drain of finding a new facility each shelter season. "We are so grateful to Project Turnkey and the Oregon Community Foundation," said Diane de Ryss, OHRA board president. "We are also supremely honored to be the first nonprofit in the state to receive a Project Turnkey grant."

The grant was created by the Oregon Legislature's allocation of a total of \$65 million in Project Turnkey funding for the purpose of acquiring financially distressed motels/hotels for use as noncongregant shelter for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the wake of COVID and wildfires. Oregon Community Foundation administers Turnkey funds through an application and selection process with guidance from an Advisory Committee of state, local and community stakeholders.

A key supporter of the Project Turnkey legislation was Oregon State Representative Pam Marsh, a former Ashland city council member, who represents District 5/Southern Jackson County.

"The opportunity to acquire a Project Turnkey facility is a game changer for our work with homeless individuals and families, including those displaced by the September 2020 wildfire," said Marsh. "For far too long our shelter providers have had to scramble to find a place for people to come in from the cold. Now we have a permanent location in the community that will serve as a base to help individuals regain their footing."

Project
Turnkey

LEVERAGING CARES
ACT FUNDS FOR
HOUSING IN OREGON



Oregon State Representative Pam Marsh (above) and OHRA board and staff (left) at February 4th OCF press conference.

OHRA is on the Move!

Guests began moving into the new OHRA Center on April 1, thanks to a huge amount of detailed preparation and planning on the part of Senior Director of Programs and Services Cass Sinclair and her staff. Acquisition of the former motel that is being converted to The OHRA Center, will house both OHRA's shelter and resource center, and was funded by a \$4.2 million Project Turnkey grant.



"It's been a busy time," says Cass. Over the past month OHRA has been developing and checking all shelter operational procedures, safety and security protocols, hiring staff and training for the new facility. In addition, Cass and her team have evaluated the vulnerability of potential guests, including those who were in the winter shelter, using a confidential assessment tool, developed by HUD. "Our goal is to make sure the highest risk guests get rooms at the Center," Cass explains.

The shelter portion of The OHRA Center is expected to be full by mid-May. The total number accommodated will likely range from 50-70, depending on how many rooms will have double occupancy. The resource center staff is not expected to move into the Center until late summer because remodeling is required to build offices. Offices eventually are also planned for partner agencies.

"Our goal is to have as many resources as possible on site to support guests in developing the skills to eventually have their own homes," Cass explains. "The OHRA Center offers temporary shelter. It is not transitional or permanent housing. Our navigators and partners will be working side-by-side with guests to help them move on to a new chapter in their lives."

Much of the focus in recent weeks has been on shelter operating procedures. The guest agreement covers everything from safety and health protocols (social distancing, twice daily temperature checks and hand washing) to entrance times (guests may only enter between 7 am and 10 pm daily) to pet regulations and grievance resolution. No congregating or loitering outside the building is allowed. Cameras are in the lobby and on the grounds for staff and guest safety. OHRA has contracted for packaged meals (breakfast and dinner) to be delivered daily.

Until offices are built enabling all navigators to work at the shelter, one navigator will be working on site in a temporary office 9 am to 5 pm, five days a week. Every day, at all times – 24 hours a day – a minimum of three OHRA staffers will be on site to ensure smooth operations. "We have plenty of experience from operating the winter shelter so a number of seasoned shelter staff members will be in the rotation," Cass said.

"Our highest priority is a safe facility that benefits our guests and the entire community."



Guest Success

Spotlight on Stability

Guests find their way to OHRA on many paths.

Take Mark (not his real name) who first contacted OHRA through its Job Match Program about three years ago. He was middle-aged and had a personality disorder that made communications difficult.

Despite his age, Mark had only had held only two temporary jobs in his life because of these issues. He knew he needed to find a way to become financially independent if he lost his parents. Yet, he was unable to get hired due both to his lack of experience and behavioral challenges tied to his mental health disorder. Tina Stevens, lead navigator and jobs specialist, worked closely with him for more than a year and a half, ultimately finding him a part-time job. When his hours were cut in that job, she worked with him again and found a second job in a supermarket. But a year or so later, due to economic factors, his employer cut his hours. Again, Mark contacted Tina and together they found a way to work with the union to get him additional hours. As a result, Mark



enjoys his job, continues to be employed and continues to live on his own.

Tina believes that Mark's practice of returning to OHRA for help demonstrates the strength and value of the relationships navigators forge with their guests.

"I was ecstatic when he came back to work with us again. Knowing that Mark will come back to us when he needs help again, shows that he trusts us as a source of support and knowledge," Tina says. "I felt proud and grateful to have built that relationship and know that all our navigators strive to be a trusted resource."

Navigation: The Heart of OHRA

Navigation shines as OHRA's superpower, despite the fact we have no boats or planes. Instead, OHRA has guests, and its navigators' job is to help them chart a course from crisis to stability.

Another word for navigator in social services language is case worker – someone who "walks" beside guests during their journey. As a trusted resource, a human social services directory, an advocate, sounding board, and source of hope, a navigator works to help a guest reach a safe harbor.

But the navigator's job is not to determine how guest gets there or what a safe harbor looks like. Each guest is a unique individual with unique goals and, perhaps, traumas. For that reason "the guests drive the train. They decide what they want to work on," says Lisa Smith, OHRA shelter manager.

It doesn't matter if a guest comes to OHRA through its resource center, shelter or laundry-shower trailer, a navigator is available to help with a wide array of issues.

An OHRA guest may need food stamps, but has no identification. An OHRA navigator helps them get a birth certificate. An OHRA guest, homeless due to COVID's economic impact, needs housing. A navigator, tells them about the federal rapid rehousing funding and helps them complete the 20+ page application that will result in a room. A guest already in Section 8 subsidized housing might be in a panic because she received a letter about a rent increase and fears she is once again homeless. A navigator explains that the agency, not the renter pays the amount of the increase. A guest is going into a residential detoxification program and needs a short-term home for her cat. The navigator finds a foster home.

These examples are inadequate because they are single and somewhat transactional. "It's never one and done," says Cass Sinclair, OHRA senior director of programs and services. An individual guest may need help with several issues: if car camping, a place to pick up the mail and access to a computer

Navigation, con't

for job searches; if housed, help paying utilities and applying for health benefits. And, if homeless a guest may need the stability the OHRA shelter can bring while working on longer term goals such as a job or housing.

"This is why we operate as a low-barrier shelter," says Cass. Research indicates that once people have the security of knowing where they are sleeping each night, they are better equipped to address the trauma and other barriers that affect them. "But it is nearly impossible to get a job or address sobriety when you are exhausted and cold and wet and feel at risk because you are sleeping outside," Cass continues.

Cass says the work of a navigator would be easier to understand if you could describe a typical day. But you can't. Even though appointments are required, navigators meeting new guests have no idea of what they might need to do to help them.

"The first time a guest comes in for an appointment, we tell them, 'This is what we offer. What would you like to work on?'" Lisa explains. Telling a guest how OHRA can help is vital to managing expectations, as OHRA's resources are finite and it cannot be all things to all people. But if OHRA does not provide the program or service, it will refer a guest to an agency that does. "If we can't provide a service, we probably know an agency that does," says Lisa.

Sometimes the day starts with a new guest who may have a basic need – say a laundry voucher. Sometimes they need a phone so they can contact apartment houses for vacancies. The next guest may have found an apartment and has the income to support their rent. But they lack first and last months' rent and a security deposit. In that event, if OHRA does not have all the needed funds, a navigator may call a member of the faith community or a partner agency such as St. Vincent de Paul and pool their resources. Another guest qualifies for veterans' benefits, but needs help applying. A navigator will help the guest with the needed paperwork. OHRA navigators' experience at all of these things is invaluable because when they call either a public agency, say the VA, or a private nonprofit, the navigator knows the name and direct phone line of the person who can help, saving the guest from the frustration and discouragement of voice menus.

"All of these transactions," says Lisa, "are conducted in a collaborative manner that respects the guest's dignity and that builds trust between navigator and guests." Lisa continues, "boundaries are important. If someone is disruptive in the shelter or at the resource center, they are told, you seem to be having trouble being quiet. If you can't I have to ask you to leave."

Qualities that make a good navigator are compassion, tenacity, knowledge of social service resources, calm and grace in the presence of trauma, and creativity – what Lisa calls "thinking outside the box." Even when a guest gets fractious, a navigator always must show calm and patience because respecting the dignity of all is a core OHRA value.

All of OHRA's staff -- including receptionists and administrators -- and our volunteers understand the need to treat their guests respectfully. Lisa says, "OHRA is a place where guests can feel that they are seen and heard. We want to give them hope, as well as help on their journey."



Tina Stevens



Lisa Smith



Sam Hough



Jessica Hodge



Marianne Rudek

Shelter Impacts 20/21 Season

OHRA's last seasonal shelter, the 2020-2021, successfully ended on April 1 with an average of 40 guests enjoying five months of warm, peaceful evenings in Calvin Hall of the First Presbyterian Church.

"It went really well because everyone had their own space due to the pipe and drape we used to meet social distancing requirements," said Lisa Smith, shelter director. The result were separated areas that "were like little efficiency apartments." Each guest had a full bunk bed to his or her self and could store belongings in the attached bunk unit.

"Because it was so quiet, we were able to do more navigation than last year," said Lisa. "The only bad news is that we were not able to get more people into housing." She explained that the Alameda fire made housing even more scarce than usual in Jackson County. In addition, the county ran out of funds for section 8 housing vouchers.

Guests were given a box dinner each night and a bag breakfast each morning. To enable the guests to safely distance, these meals were delivered on a push cart to each guest's sleeping area. The meals were prepared by volunteers from Peace House, First Presbyterian Church, The Unitarians, Temple Emek Shalom and Havurah Shir Hadash "The meals were great. We really appreciate all the effort that went into, seven days a week," Lisa says.

No guest developed COVID. A hand washing station was set up outside the hall and guests waited in line, socially distanced to wash their hands and get their temperature checked before entering the shelter. Guests were discouraged from leaving their area except to use the rest rooms. Hand sanitizer was always handy.

As is true in the general population, a few guests didn't "believe" in COVID, Lisa explained, but they respected the safety measures. "We have to do this to keep the shelter open. We appreciate you doing this," Lisa and the staff would explain, and the guests complied.

"The success of the shelter is that we work really hard with our shelter guests on building relationships," said Lisa.



By the Numbers July-February 20/21

9097

Vists to Resource Center

83

of Guests served
by the Shelter in
20/21 Season

15

Shelter Guests
Permanently
Housed
2020-21 Season

108

Families Housed with
CVRRP Assistance \$

143

Families Protected with
CVRRP Assistance \$

322

Families Aided by Pass
Thru Funds



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DIANE DE RYSS

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OHRA IS ON THE
MOVE

GUEST SUCCESS

"By helping people move from crisis to stability, OHRA builds more capable individuals, stronger families and a better community."

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