# Community Connections

**ORCAS COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER** 

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025

#### Finding Home: An Islander's Journey

hen Rene moved to Orcas Island fifteen years ago to work as an educator, she never imagined she'd be facing homelessness. But after her landlord decided to sell the cottage she'd rented for over a decade, Rene found herself in an impossible situation—searching for affordable housing on an island where rental prices have skyrocketed beyond what her modest income could support.

## "I asked everyone I knew—there was just nothing available that I could afford."

With only 60 days to find a new place, the stress began affecting her health and her ability to focus at work. The thought of leaving the island—her community, her job, the life she'd built—felt devastating.

Three weeks before her move-out date, through our community network, a retired couple heard about Rene's situation. They had a mother-in-law unit that had been sitting empty—they'd considered renting it out but hadn't gotten around to it. Within days, Rene had found her new home.

Rene's story had a happy ending, but dozens of islanders are facing similar crises right now. The solution requires both more housing options AND the financial support to help people through transitions.

#### Do you have extra space that could become a home?

- A basement apartment that needs minor updates
- An ADU or mother-in-law unit sitting vacant
- Extra rooms in your home

By creating a rental space, you're helping keep families together, allowing essential workers to stay in our community, and strengthening the fabric of island life. Taking that step could mean a teacher, healthcare worker, or restaurant server can continue to thrive in our community.

But that's not the only way you can help.
While you may not have extra space, you can help provide emergency rental assistance with a gift today at orcascrc.org.

Whether it's covering a deposit or managing an unexpected expense between paychecks, we're here to help

Islanders stay housed while they find practical solutions.



#### Give the Gift of Community

We are excited to offer our new online Holiday Gift Catalog! At orcascrc.org you can choose meaningful, tangible ways to support our community programs—from funding warm weather kits to covering air lift insurance for a neighbor. It's a wonderful way to give back and share the spirit of the season with friends and loved ones.

Thanks to generous supporters like you, the Orcas Community Resource Center can continue providing critical services that keep Orcas Island safe, stable, and connected. This holiday season, give the gift that truly matters—a stronger, more caring community!

#### Hands Across the Water

Building Bridges Between Island Communities

When island communities face challenges like affordable housing shortages, environmental pressures, and ensuring every voice is heard in decision-making, collaboration becomes essential. Thanks to generous supporters, event organizers, and participants, Resource Center board members recently had the opportunity to represent our organization at Hands Across the Water, a cross-border gathering where nonprofit leaders from U.S. and Canadian islands came together to tackle these shared challenges.

Crucial funds were raised for two nonprofit organizations—the Orcas Community Resource Center and Transition Salt Spring, whose vision is a thriving Salt Spring Island, resilient to climate change.

The event addressed a critical need: breaking down the isolation that can prevent island communities from learning about each other's successes and struggles. Board member Patricia Benton captured the spirit perfectly, "A border is simply in someone's mind. We're all the same across each border. We all have the same needs, the same highs, the same lows, the joys and sorrows."



Resource Center representatives Teresa Gerringer, Patricia Benton & Jan Ehrlichman

Participants were inspired by the Resource Center's collaborative approach—how we bring partner organizations together to reduce service overlap and ensure no community need falls through the cracks.

During conversations with the Transition Salt Spring team, our board members witnessed firsthand how Orcas' commitment to serving neighbors is inspiring other island communities to strengthen their own collaborative networks. Valuable insights into integrating First Nation voices within community initiatives were also gained, reinforcing our commitment to ensuring every Islander feels heard and valued.

## Roots Taking Hold

We are thrilled to share some momentous news with our community: the Orcas Community Resource Center is purchasing our current building, with closing expected in January 2026. This incredible opportunity to establish our roots is all made possible thanks to generous donors and supporters like YOU!

This acquisition represents a tremendous milestone in our organization's history securing our ability to serve the community for generations to come. Last year we served over 700 island households. Now, by owning our building, we're ensuring that support never wavers.

This purchase stands as a financially sound decision. By acquiring our current building for under \$2 million, we've achieved significant savings compared to alternative options. Had we continued with the Pea Patch Project location, we would have needed to raise approximately \$9 million—more than four times our current investment. This allows us to better serve the community—keeping funds focused on helping those who need support.

The Resource Center remains committed to the success of the Pea Patch Community Campus, located just blocks away. We will continue collaboration with OPAL and the Food Bank to meet Islanders' needs and look forward to providing on-site supportive



services for residents in OPAL's campus housing.

As we prepare for ownership in early 2026, we are excited to celebrate this incredible milestone with you! Watch for upcoming announcements about events and opportunities to help us make this building truly feel like home—for our staff, our clients, and our entire island community. Thank you for being part of our journey. Your support makes moments like this possible.



#### Healthcare Panel Live Discussion Event

A step toward a more connected, responsive care system



Several members of our healthcare discussion panel - October 2025

his summer, the Orcas
Community-Based Care
Stakeholder Workgroup brought
together healthcare and service
partners to identify the most
pressing out-of-clinic care needs
for Orcas Island residents. Thanks
to participants, areas of need were
identified and shared with the
community.

The workgroup, comprising representatives from the Orcas Island Health Care District, Fire & Rescue, Senior Services, Hospice of the Northwest, Island Primary Care, and the Orcas Community Resource Center, collaboratively assessed local gaps and recommended coordinated solutions.

Through this process, six key areas of action emerged:

- Developing a coordinated caregiving system
- Advancing Mobile Integrated Health services
- Improving emergency and offisland care coordination
- Expanding transportation access
- Increasing health education and screening opportunities
- Sustaining long-term care on Orcas Island

In October, the Resource Center hosted a community event held at the Orcas Island Public Library in the form of a live panel discussion, providing residents an opportunity to learn about the workgroup's findings, ask questions, and share their perspectives on next steps for community-based care.

With unwavering support from community members, these efforts were made possible. Together, we have a shared commitment to strengthening local health supports, especially for residents needing care outside traditional clinical settings. Marking an important step toward a more connected, responsive care system on Orcas Island—one built through collaboration, shared insight, and community voice.



I didn't know about the Orcas Community Resource Center until I'd lived here for eight years. When my husband and I toured the Resource Center in 2016, we were immediately struck by how warm, welcoming, and professional it felt.

As former single parents who knew what it was like to juggle bills and responsibilities, we quickly recognized how vital the Resource Center's work is for our community. We were so happy to see that a place like this existed on Orcas to help anyone in need, whether with a new coat, paper goods, access to a computer or help filling out an application.

That visit inspired us to become ongoing supporters, and today I'm proud to serve on the Board—sharing the Resource Center's mission with islanders who need help and those who can offer it.



-Jan Ehrlichman Resource Center Board Member

"It was great to have the chance to share these conversations with the community. There is readiness amongst health systems partners on Orcas to take on some of the persistent challenges Islanders face in navigating complex health issues. I'm excited to see what we build!"

> -Trillium Swanson Community Health Project Manager, Orcas Island Health Care District



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#### Celebrate the Season of Giving

The OICF Holiday GiveOrcas Campaign is Back!



Holidays are a time for coming together, celebrating community, and supporting those who need a helping hand. The Orcas Community Resource Center is proud to participate in the 2025 OICF Holiday GiveOrcas Campaign, which year-after-year brings neighbors together to strengthen the island we love to call home.

This season, our focus is emergency rental assistance—helping families facing unexpected financial hardships stay safely housed and maintain stability.

Recently, we met an islander struggling to cover rent after an unforeseen medical expense. With emergency support, they were able to keep their home—but countless others quietly face similar challenges.

"I've seen how one unexpected expense can turn a stable situation into a crisis. So many families are doing everything right, but one setback can put their home at risk. When we can step in with rental assistance, it's not just about keeping a roof overhead—it's about restoring hope, stability and dignity."

-Holly Southern, Resource Center Programs Director

The strength of our island shines brightest when we support one another. Visit giveorcas.org December 2nd-11th to donate and be part of keeping Islanders safe, stable, and connected to our community.





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