

# Community Connections

Orcas Community Resource Center News

Summer 2023

## ***Orcas Money Smart*** **Sharpening Financial Skills for Islanders**



***“I have gained the tools to break down any financial situation into manageable steps for success. I can apply smart goals to many aspects of my life in the future.”***

**O** CRC aims to help islanders sharpen financial skills with completion of the pilot financial literacy program known as Orcas Money Smart (OMS). OMS is a nine month program where volunteer mentors teach the basics of budgeting, savings, banking, housing decisions, debt, credit, disaster preparedness and more. Class content provides valuable knowledge to individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

Orcas Money Smart incorporates what are known as SMART goals. The “SMART” in SMART goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. This approach helps to set a clear timeline and track progress.

Participants also have the opportunity to earn as they learn with a financial incentive by successfully attending training, mentor meetings and completing goals.

Volunteer class mentors receive their own share of rewards by participating. Patricia Benton, OCRC Board Chair, led this pilot class along with fellow board member, Hugh Grant. Patricia shared, “This has been a great way to connect with others to help make a difference in an area of their lives that can oftentimes be stressful.” Seeing participants gain confidence and achieve their goals affirms that time invested as a program mentor is most certainly time well spent.

OCRC plans to launch the program in full swing this fall. If you are interested in being a part of Orcas Money Smart as either a student or a volunteer mentor, please contact OCRC at 360-376-3184 or [info@orcascrc.org](mailto:info@orcascrc.org).



## Bilingual Community Health Worker Program Expands to Orcas

A grant from the Northsound ACH brings an expansion of San Juan Island's Bilingual Community Health Worker program, making it available county-wide. Orcas and Lopez island providers have observed improved Latinx health services on San Juan Island and are eager to participate, ultimately creating a stronger network of care.

The new OCRC Bilingual Community Health Worker position will improve healthcare access and advocacy for our Spanish speaking population who have been marginalized due to language, cultural and financial barriers. Spanish speaking community members will serve on a Healthcare Access Advisory Committee to identify priority healthcare needs and implement unique solutions developed by and for Latinx community members. Funds will also allow for the purchase of medical supplies and equipment for use in community-based free pop-up healthcare clinics and educational workshops.

Stay tuned for more information as we develop this new program in partnership with San Juan Island and Lopez Island Resource Centers.



## All Grown Up! Kindergarten Transition Turns 15

Carrying on a fifteen year tradition, the Orcas Community Resource Center (OCRC) happily hosted Orcas' annual Kindergarten Transition event celebrating kids who are making the big leap to kindergarten in the fall. All kinderbound children, regardless of which school they will attend, were invited to join in the evening of fun.

Surrounded by familiar faces and new friends, thirty families engaged in a variety of learning activity stations focused on reading, math, art, writing, fine and gross motor skills and more. Activities were facilitated by enthusiastic preschool and kindergarten teachers, allowing families to gain an informative grasp on educational concepts they can practice at home.

The Orcas Island Library greeted attendees with a big smile and the

chance to sign up for their very own library card. Kids took home colorful backpacks full of goodies to help practice skills throughout the summer. Each child also received a Darvill's gift certificate to shop for books to add to their home collec-

***“This event allows my son to become excited about kindergarten. The activities are a huge help!”***

tion. To top it all off, a delicious taco dinner was served by Johanna's Salvadorian Catering.

This valuable opportunity to ease students' up-and-coming transition is a no-cost annual event sponsored by the Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program (ECEAP), OCRC and a generous local donor.



# Cost Burdened Households Find Relief Housing Support for Islanders Available at OCRC



**W**hether it's difficulty paying rent, substandard, overcrowded living conditions, eviction, or homelessness, housing insecurity exposes individuals and families to increased stress as well as mental and physical health problems.

Primary Language:
Highest Level of Education:
Whom may we thank for the referral?
What brings you to the Resource Center today? <i>Housing Assistance</i>

***"Because of your help and resources, I still have my house. Thank you!"***

According to the US Dept of Health & Human Services, households are considered to be cost burdened if they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Cost-burdened households have little left over each month to spend on other necessities such as food, clothing, utilities, and health care.

With more than 10% of Orcas Island households living below the poverty line and 40% not earning enough to make ends meet, the reality is that hiding beneath the island's surface is an intense need for help just to get by. So many of our neighbors are forced to make impossible decisions: pay the rent or put food on the table, keep the lights and heat on or receive necessary medical care.

While OPAL works to provide affordable housing on Orcas, OCRC serves as a safety net providing essential housing support services. Knowledgeable staff connect islanders with both contracted programs and in-house services that include short term rental assistance, housing assistance grants, support for the unsheltered, housing application help, utility assistance, hygiene and cleaning items, food, clothing, showers, and more.

A big thank you to those that participated in the recent spring GiveOrcas Campaign raising \$25,000 towards OCRC's Housing Support services. Your support makes ALL the difference in our community!

## **You Can Help!**

We depend on private donations to cover a third or more of our operating costs. It's easy to donate!

### **Mail a check**

PO Box 931, Eastsound, WA 98245

Go to [orcascrc.org](http://orcascrc.org)

Scan QR code



Consider donating to our **Endowment Fund**

Contact OICF

**360-376-6423**



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**Client Corner**

**We All Rise Together: Alex Callen's Story**

Islander Alex Callen knows first hand how difficult it is to secure affordable housing on Orcas. With a degree in natural science and musical talent abound, it may surprise you that 12



years ago Alex was homeless, living in a tent. Once winter came along, rats infiltrated his kitchen area leaving him unable to store or prepare food.

Alex was offered an OPAL apartment, but needed a deposit to secure it. Low on funds, he reached out and was able to qualify for a grant through OCRC's Housing Support services. That changed everything for Alex; he has gone from barely surviving to thriving. Self-declared as low income with humble digs, Alex has found comfort in not having to worry about a roof over his head or having adequate kitchen facilities. He

***"I don't make a lot of money, but I feel rich! I feel rich."***

shared, "I am able to help others now and that's what I do".

Working as a Marine Naturalist, Alex provides visitors and locals alike the opportunity to see the islands and learn about wildlife on the Salish Sea. In addition, he regularly gives back to the community and assists the elderly. For many years now he has cultivated his gardening skills growing skyscraper sunflowers and giant pumpkins. In late fall the fruits of his

labor are shared with local farms to nourish the animals.

What's next for Alex? When he's not out on the water or working on his garden he enjoys performing at open mics in Eastsound and Doe Bay. He shared, "I've always wanted to play the Village Green and that is still on my bucket list!"

To learn more about Alex's story and others that OCRC serves, check out our new video using the QR code here.



**Contact Us!**

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 374 North Beach Road

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