



Nonprofits feel the pinch of economy, grant cutbacks

Nonprofits are feeling the pinch

Victim services groups hoping state fills in for federal cuts

By STARLA POINTER

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Nonprofit organizations that depend on donations of money, goods and time, and grants from private and government entities are feeling the squeeze from all angles.

“All nonprofits,” said Russell Mark, executive director of Juliette’s House, the Yamhill County Child Abuse Intervention Center.

Mark has talked with his counterparts in many other organizations that are budgeting through grant reductions, canceled contracts, dwindling donations and increasing costs. Some have already closed, leaving a critical gap in services in their communities, he said. Many, especially those “with any touch of federal funding,” are hurting. All are worried.

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For instance, the federal Victims of Crime Act money has been cut by 42%, affecting organizations like Juliette’s House, Henderson House and Yamhill County Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

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CASA is losing about \$80,000 because of federal funding cuts, said Sarah Johnson, executive director.

That’s about one-third of the annual budget that covers training and supporting CASA volunteers who help children whose families are involved in the court system, she said.

“A CASA is the only person who can focus on just one kid and represent their interests,” Johnson said.

The number of children who need to be matched with volunteers is increasing; just this spring, the waiting list has risen from six to 22, she said. She expects that trend to continue.

The good news is that more people are volunteering. A dozen new CASAs started the training program last week, and five more have already signed up for the next training in fall.

The influx in volunteers will mean that later this year, every child who needs a CASA in Yamhill County will have one – for the first time in the program’s 30-year history, Johnson said.

But that also requires more staff to support those volunteers. In addition, CASA is facing a 10% rent hike, its first increase in many years, the director said.

Coinciding with federal grant cuts, Mark said, “foundations have pulled back significantly in the timing and amount of grants,” and some individual donors, who have given large amounts in the past, are holding off this year.

Juliette’s House has had to lay off some staff members. Its prevention workers will be on rolling furloughs over the summer; someone will always be available, the director said, but not everyone will be working. Other staff members have agreed to shorter hours or taken pay cuts.

But without these measures, Juliette’s House might need to eliminate services, leading to more children being hurt, more families going without resources, fewer abusers being prosecuted and a rising problem of long-term effects of child abuse, Mark said.

“People need to wake up” and advocate for these critical programs and services,” said Mark, who has made frequent trips to Salem during the Legislative session. “This is a topic that is totally non-partisan. It’s not right vs. left; it’s right vs. wrong.”

Nonprofit leaders are hoping the state will help stabilize funding for crime victim support services.

Oregon, like many states around the country, is looking to backfill funding lost from cuts in federal Victims of Crime Act grants. House Bill 3196 would appropriate \$18.5 million in grants, along with \$3 million specifically for CASA programs in the state.

The bill passed out of the House Committee on Judiciary to the Joint Committee On Ways and Means. No committee meetings on the issue are currently scheduled.

Whether or not the bill passes, Johnson said, “(CASA is) going to have to really rely on the community more than ever.” She is working on more fundraising campaigns, including a “\$30,000 for 30 Years” appeal in July.

The program also will hold its second “Solid Foundation” fundraising tour of vintage structures next spring, and it accepts both monetary and in-kind donations, she said. The best way to donate, she said, is to make an ongoing monthly contribution, which makes it easier for the staff to predict revenue when budgeting.

Funding is uppermost in the mind of the staff and board at McMinnville Area Habitat for Humanity, as well.

Executive Director Katie Curry said the board plans to budget conservatively for 2025-26, because members are worried about how much Habitat will receive in donations. Donors are concerned by the economy and retirement savings, and they may not be able to give as much as usual, she said.

Her Habitat chapter doesn’t depend greatly on federal funding, fortunately. The organization, which uses volunteers to help low-income residents build homes, has chapters across the nation that depend on USDA and HUD funds to finance mortgages; McMinnville finances its own.

McMinnville did apply for federal funding through the Community-Initiated Projects program this year, for the first time. Curry said she’s not sure if a grant will come though.

She’s optimistic the Habitat ReStore, which raises money for housing by selling used building materials and other goods, may be busier than ever in the shaky economy.

In addition to worrying about revenue, she said, Habitat is facing increasing costs for building houses. Prices for lumber and other materials increased during Covid. Since Curry joined the McMinnville nonprofit in 2021, she said, costs have nearly doubled, from an average of \$100,000 to finish a home to almost \$200,000.

This year, costs are rising again, and some materials, such as lumber from Canada, may be affected by tariffs.

Still, no matter what, she said, “We’re going to continue to find ways to build houses. Maybe not as many, but as many as we can.”