



(Left) Anna Jones, co-founder of and tireless volunteer at the Clackamas Service Center. (Right) Anna, with her beautifully bundled bedding rolls. Photos by Ashley Campion.

founding member gives her a gravitas somehow enhanced by her diminutive stature.

“I love these people,” she declares, hands on hips, and adds that she knows that expanding CSC is a community imperative, that it will be community donations, from caring citizens, that will help CSC at last grow to match need. Donations are welcome, she says, because CSC can’t in its present circumstances live up to its potential. And contributions toward a new facility are urgently needed. “After all,” she proclaims, “nobody chooses to be poor!” As for her own involvement, like so many of CSC’s volunteers, she’s not going anywhere: “my daughter’s retiring, my husband just died, but this is a comfort to me. I will stay until I can’t.” Ashley Campion—a young philanthropist whose advocacy, fundraising, and contributions to CSC have made her part of the organization’s bedrock in her own right—says, “without a doubt [Anna is] one of the most outstanding Oregonian volunteers of our time.”

Sustained by people like Anna, these three organizations and others like them survive through volunteerism and sheer tenacity. They provide not just food and blankets but the warmth and love that are essential to feeling human even in the depths of stark poverty. They are places that build a sense of community, that solidify a sense of place, and that articulate the difference between basic welfare provision and literal philanthropy.

### **THE MASLOW PROJECT**

Those who work in the nonprofit sector may be familiar with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, usually represented as a pyramid whose base consists of physiological needs (food, water, sleep). The next tier is safety (of body,

employment, resources, health, property). Subsequent tiers ascend through love and belonging, to esteem, and finally to the pinnacle, self-actualization (established capacities for morality, creativity, appreciation of fact, lack of prejudice, etc.). There are many examples in *State of Giving* of organizations providing for needs on multiple levels of this hierarchy. Medford's Maslow Project, an organization established to help homeless youth, takes provision at all levels of the hierarchy as its mandate, and its success is largely owed to two passionate people: founder Mary Ferrell and board treasurer and committed patron Roger Stokes.

Jackson County has some of the highest homeless numbers in the state, and in Medford's schools, one in ten children has no fixed place to sleep.<sup>14</sup> These children are Maslow's client demographic; the organization delivers as comprehensive a service as possible. "These kids are thinking about really adult things—they're sleeping in a tent and doing homework by flashlight, they're worried about providing meals for a younger brother, or about who's going to sleep next to them," declares founder and director Ferrell. A petite blonde woman with a sleeves-rolled-up-to-her-elbows, hands-on energy, Mary's philosophy is simple: individuals must have survival needs met before they can accomplish higher goals, and thus the provision of food, clothing, and safety can help stabilize homeless children's basic needs so that they can stay engaged in school and have the support and life skills necessary to make it through the rough patches and on to graduation, employment, and contentment. Working with sixteen hundred homeless newborn-to-twenty-one-year-olds and their families, the small staff at the Maslow Project provides both emergency and longer-term services, ranging from toothpaste, soap, school supplies, sleeping bags, food, and clothes to tutoring, counseling, safety training, funding for extracurricular activities, life-skills coaching, legal advice, and guided applications for social services and for post-secondary academic and vocational programs.

At five years old, the Maslow Project is a relative newcomer to southern Oregon's nonprofit community and, with a no-frills operating budget, it is hardly flashy. Its facility is an old 1920s building opposite Central Medford High School that the school district had abandoned as derelict. On busy days it feels like supplies and people are bursting from the building's venerable seams. Despite Maslow's youth and frugality, however, its impact on Jackson County has been huge: it's become a de facto office and home base for Jackson County's homeless youth.

The Maslow Project is a one-stop shop and an all-in-one resource. Clients can obtain soap or school supplies at the same place where they can fill out applications for birth certificates or college. They can also do their homework, use computers, meet with their social worker, undergo counseling or



(Left) Mary Ferrell, director of the Maslow Project. (Right) The week's activities at Maslow. Photos by Kristin Anderson.

the Maslow Project's popular new art therapy sessions, shop for free clothes, eat lunch, get referred for medical and dental treatment, and get advice on other needs and goals. And that's not all. As Mary explains, "We also want to give these kids the opportunity to be kids. We fund them for after-school programs and sports and give them the chance to play so that homelessness doesn't become the focus of their existence."

The Maslow Project also provides services that extend beyond its walls. "Here in Medford, kids can come to us, but in the more rural parts of our region, it requires collaborative systems, an underground army," Mary says. That underground army is a key part of their supply chain, and Mary has spent many years building relationships with churches, police, social workers, doctors, businesses, schools, other aid organizations, and private citizens so that, as she puts it, "if a kid in Butte Falls needs a sleeping bag, we find out and can get it to her, and then get her in the system and start helping her move forward."

"The [community] collaboration is so important," adds Roger Stokes, Maslow's treasurer, founding board member, and one of their major donors. A self-effacing guy with a broad smile, Roger prefers to talk more about the organization than his own contributions to it. "It's a different way to provide service," Roger says. Mary pulls out a piece of paper covered with colored bubbles linked to each other in a complicated web. "Within every single bubble," Mary says, "we have a network of humans that we can connect with to help streamline access for these kids and get their needs met quickly and

directly. We've identified local partners—media, state police, food pantries, lawyers, therapists, networks of individuals and groups who can help do drives, help provide a friendly face, help provide funds." If Maslow needs to restock its supply of clothing, Mary says, she knows who to call. One church even does a monthly "Undy-Sunday" socks-and-underwear drive for the organization.

"If we find a gap, it guides our growth and helps us expand relationships to fill the need," Mary says. For example, procuring official IDs is difficult for those without one. Maslow acquired a notary and started issuing kids with a government-recognized ID card that also served as a free bus pass ("I called up Nathan at the bus company," Mary says). "I've never had anyone saying, 'no, we don't want to support homeless children,' especially when our approach isn't to list what we need from them but to ask them how they can help, what they can offer, whether it's time, resources, money, or simply encouragement."

This interlocking web of donors, providers, and supporters has helped Maslow "remain nimble so that we can respond quickly and flexibly," Mary notes. "It's a resilient model, and because it's so firmly grounded in community support, it means we have an established group of people who can provide services, alert us to need, and help promote and further our relationships all at once. It really helps keep us mission-focused on the kids, who are at the heart of our organization."

Also at the heart of the Maslow Project are Mary and Roger themselves, both true philanthropists—although both dispute the description. Mary worked for nine years in the school district providing services for homeless youth, but quickly realized that her paid position was inadequate to meet her students' growing needs. In her off-hours, she filled the gap for her students by voluntarily running a parallel service, amassing bedding and toothpaste and taking the kids to food pantries or to social service offices. Based out of a glorified broom closet, as Roger calls it, Mary began building up the network of services, donors, and community members that, after careful consultation and delineation, would form the foundation of the Maslow Project. In 2009, Mary quit her job at the school district and began working full-time as the director of an organization that she had built up from scratch via thousands of unpaid hours and an unwavering dedication to the kids in her care.

Roger became involved with Maslow long before it moved out of the broom closet. "Some communities," Roger notes, "say that they don't need our services, that they don't have any homeless kids. I was like everyone else: you don't see these kids because they're invisible—they're in the shadows, living in cars or tents or couch-surfing without a permanent place to

call home. How would you feel if you're six, eight, or ten and don't have a place to spend the night, or have a meal or a wash?"

Roger wears many hats at Maslow: he serves as a consultant, strategist, board member, chief donor, and committed volunteer. He bought them office furniture, helped broker their move to the current facility, helped tear down walls and redecorate once they'd moved, purchased a new industrial freezer after the old one died on a 105-degree day, and, through a managed fund at the Oregon Community Foundation, provides them with regular financial support as well. "Roger's donations were the first unrestricted<sup>15</sup> contributions we received," Mary said, "and they were crucial to our development, a vote of confidence for us." An enthusiastic and youthful grandfather, he says he enjoys working on behalf of all children. "The earlier we can help them, the less time and money society will need to spend on them further down the line," Roger says. "They're all good kids, and they didn't choose to be in these circumstances."



Roger Stokes taking a break in California. Courtesy Roger Stokes.

Together, Mary, Roger, and the Maslow Project's staff members have helped turn around the lives of countless homeless youths. "I've attended five services for clients that we've lost, but I've also attended way more graduations and weddings," Mary says. "This community is tremendously generous if they feel like a cause in just," Roger says, and local generosity has helped build the Maslow Project into a huge success. It has been recognized nationally and internationally for its innovative, grassroots, community-driven structure: the BBC, ABC, and the *New York Times* have all profiled the organization; the Gates Foundation consulted with Maslow staff; Governor Kitzhaber visited Maslow as an example of "what's working in Oregon;" and a Maslow Project has started up in Coos Bay based on the Medford model.

"There's a feeling that we're doing the right thing," Roger adds, "and for every youngster we've helped, that's money that goes back into the schools." With increased philanthropic investment, the Maslow Project should be able to continue developing and expanding its services and range. Mary speaks with pride about what has been achieved. "As a nonprofit we're only five years old, and we've tackled every goal we've put in front of ourselves successfully." They also find a place for everyone who wants to help. "It's not just about writing a check," Mary says, "it's more about finding where you fit in this model, what your piece of the network is, what service you can provide. There's huge heart in this community." When asked why he has devoted so much of his time and money to Maslow, Roger doesn't hesitate:

“It’s luck of the draw how you’re born, and these kids are bright, interested, capable, no different than anyone else . . . They just need someone to let them know that they care.”

### THE OLSRUDS AND ACCESS

Across town, in a leafy Medford suburb, Sherm and Wanda Olsrud sit in the living room of their modest midcentury home. They have lived there since 1967, when they moved to Medford from Eugene, and the house probably hasn’t changed much since then. It is comfortable, beautifully cared for, and cozy, filled with recliners and overstuffed couches and decorated with bronze horses, paintings, and reminders of their family and their community. The large picture window looks across the adjacent park toward distant Mt. Ashland, and although their view of the peak became somewhat obscured when the city recently planted a few trees, they still enjoy a panoramic vista onto a stunning part of the state.

Long married, Sherm and Wanda are now in their eighties and are moving a bit more slowly than when they first moved to Medford. In Eugene, they ran first a meat shop and then a small grocery store (“we were the first twenty-four-hour market in Eugene,” Wanda says, “and our beer sales between eleven and twelve at night were pretty good”). Now, they own and operate three Sherm’s Thunderbird Markets and one Sherm’s Food4Less. They are used to working twelve- to fourteen-hour days in the stores and office, doing everything from restocking and cashiering to coupon processing, procurement, and investment management. They have recruited their son Steve as a partner in the business, but their interest in the stores and in their community hasn’t waned a bit. They know their employees by name, and they recall fondly how employees progressed in their careers.

Both have a deep commitment to Oregon in general, and to southern Oregon in particular. Their appreciation for their community has led Sherm and Wanda to become quiet pillars of it, and they have donated much of their profits to local programs and services. Their whole family started up a scholarship fund for students from southern Oregon, and Sherm and Wanda are regular supporters of the local nonprofit Kids Unlimited (whose kids now play and perform in the organization’s Olsrud Gymnasium). They donate to the Maslow Project and to the Family Nurturing Center, and are big supporters of 4-H, even buying prize-winning animals from children to sell in their stores. “We donate mostly to things around here,” Wanda says, “because these are the people who have supported us and made our work possible.”



Sherm and Wanda Olsrud. Courtesy the Olsrud family.