

Vitality



Virus pandemic tests community resilience

COVID-19 reveals strengths and weaknesses as rural leaders respond



By **Anne Kubisch**
President
The Ford Family Foundation

We started researching the stories for this edition of *Community Vitality* in the summer of 2020. It was clear then that our nation and our region were experiencing an unprecedented combination of health, economic and racial crises, but we had no idea how long it would last and how much it would affect us.

We have experienced tragic loss of life, social and political unrest, and a recession that has deprived millions of stable incomes. And, now, as we go to press on this issue, our region is being devastated by the most catastrophic wildfires we have ever seen.

As we talked with people from across Oregon and Northern California, it quickly became apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly harmed all facets of daily life in rural communities — from caring for and educating our children, to business operations, to our ability to help our most vulnerable populations.

The extent of the pain and suffering is almost unfathomable, and we at The Ford Family Foundation send love, support and courage to all of you.

Beacons of hope

But it is in our nature to find the beacons of hope during times of darkness. As we were learning about the impact of COVID-19, something else became apparent — rural leaders in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California, are fearlessly stepping up to the challenge.

Economic development agencies are preparing their communities for what comes next. Child care centers are creating innovative solutions to address critical shortages of care. Internet access is coming to even the most rural, infrastructure-challenged areas.

Those of us dedicated to building vital communities

Continued on page 11



Child care. See page 6.

I N S I D E

- Education:** Schools deliver lesson plans, books and meals **2**
- Resilience:** Communities, governments work to mitigate fallout..... **4**
- Not enough child care:** COVID-19 made a bad situation worse **6**
- Public health:** Ford Scholar played key role **8**
- Vaccines:** Phase 3 trial comes to Oregon..... **9**
- High risk:** Virus takes bigger toll on agricultural workers **10**
- Rush to online:** Lack of high-speed internet affects virtually learning **12**
- Innovative:** To survive, businesses get creative **13**
- Community Building:** Connections pay off **14**
- Visual Arts:** Hallie Ford Fellows announced..... **15**
- Book Review:** *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* . **16**

➔ **Community Vitality**
Join our mailing list.
See page 11.



Claudia Vargas hired as program officer for Children, Youth and Families

Claudia Vargas has joined The Ford Family Foundation as a program officer for the department of Children, Youth and Families. In her position, Vargas supports the Foundation's work to promote early childhood success and kindergarten readiness.



Claudia Vargas

She will work with the team to further develop and manage a portfolio of projects aimed at improving alignment between early childhood education, K-12 and health and human service systems.

Vargas comes to the Foundation from the Community Development Institute Head Start where she helped support Head Start programs across the United States.

From her home in rural Texas, Claudia has helped lead teams from places across the country through organizational development and change-management processes. She has a deep background working with families in child care settings, home-based settings and with parenting education.

"We are delighted to have Claudia join the Foundation," says Keavy Cook, director of the Children, Youth and Families department. "Her deep experience in early childhood development and mental health will be extremely helpful in the Foundation's work with our youngest community members."

Vargas holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the Intercontinental University in Mexico City and has done postgraduate studies in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. She is a Parent Child Home Program Certified Supervisor.

Community Vitality is published twice a year (in a printed format and at www.tfff.org/cv) for community leaders by The Ford Family Foundation. © 2020 The Ford Family Foundation. All rights reserved.

Anne Kubisch, President
Nora Vitz Harrison, Editor
Megan Monson, Assistant Editor

The views expressed by the authors in bylined articles are not necessarily the views of the Foundation. If you'd like to be added to (or removed from) our mailing list, or have a suggestion, send an email to communityvitality@tfff.org. Please help us make this publication a valuable resource by sharing your comments or ideas.

Community Vitality
 The Ford Family Foundation
 1600 NW Stewart Parkway, Roseburg, OR 97471
 Telephone: (541) 957-5574
www.tfff.org



Jen Shilling, left, and Peggy Carson load food items and packets of learning resources into a van before setting off on their delivery route in Yoncalla in July.



PHOTO: MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Education expands its role

In addition to lesson plans, schools deliver meals, books

When COVID-19 emptied classrooms in Oregon schools last spring, it highlighted the critical role schools play — not just in education but in the community. Besides providing remote instruction, district employees worked with community groups to deliver meals and essential home supplies, provide child care, and check in with vulnerable populations.

Amidst all the uncertainty about how schools were going to operate was the conviction

that they needed to continue their mission of serving students and their families. Along the way, districts have been assessing and refining the way they deliver services. "It's forcing districts to evaluate what's working, what's effective, what's not," says Nate Schult, program officer for The Ford Family Foundation.

Food insecurity

The Yoncalla School District is one of many districts in Oregon that delivered meals directly to students' homes. When it became apparent that entire families were struggling with food security, the district decided to expand the program to include all families with chil-

dren from birth to 18 years old, and to deliver enough food for the entire week.

The district seized the opportunity to revamp the food program in response to an earlier needs assessment, which found that families wanted to learn how to cook healthier foods. Food boxes now include

whole foods, fruits and vegetables, along with USDA-approved recipes.

"We have learned what a community-builder food can be," says Erin Helgren, Yoncalla Early Works director and the alignment coordinator for the district. "And it has really solidified the school as a place for families to go where kids get their needs met."

Yoncalla also invited the library to be part of the program, and throughout the summer the district delivered meals, books



Erin Helgren

We have learned what a community-builder food can be.

—Erin Helgren

and learning activities to about 150 families.

Helgren identified a couple of unintended consequences. Staff members, she says, collaborated in unprecedented ways to make the program work. And it also provided the district with a way to connect with families. "Families are feeling very socially and rurally isolated right now, and this allowed us to check on the welfare of children," she says.

In Douglas County, the "Thank an Educator" project coordinated by Douglas Education Service District brought to light the many ways educators were continuing to support families even when students were learning from home (see sidebar, right). Students and parents nominated outstanding educators through a Google form, and a Foundation grant provided winners with gift cards for area businesses. There were stories of teachers sending text messages, making phone calls, delivering learning materials, creating virtual art exhibits, conducting virtual music lessons and providing daily meals.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has had devastating consequences for school districts and the families they serve, but there is also room for hope.

"The pandemic is an opportunity for increased collaboration and for districts to come together, for ESDs to play a role, for other community partners to think about what is needed, what is best for kids," says Schult. "It's a chance for us to think collectively on how to help address those needs, because none of us have the resources to go at it alone." ■

Parents say thanks to special teachers

In Douglas County, the "Thank an Educator" project gave parents a public way to show their appreciation to teachers who supported their students through tough times. Here are just a few of the comments:

"We have had a rough year as a family and then all this hit. [My child's teacher] has reached out to me making sure everything is okay and seeing if there is anything extra my daughter, or even our family, needs. Before the virus hit, he was already an awesome teacher. He helped the kids learn to concentrate through chaos, taught them all about fish and their life cycle, had fun dance parties to get things started in the mornings."

"[My child's teacher] made distance learning exciting, fun and educational. Each week she created videos of herself going to imaginary places like a deserted island or wrangling a cow. All of the videos were created for a math, science, or English lesson which made the learning process fun and allowed the students to also use their imaginations."

"[These two teachers] gave their students something positive to look forward to each day, videos that were the closest to being in the classroom as they could get, some fun banter, a little ukulele music and a great art lesson too!"

"[She] has called my children multiple times to check in with them and to just talk on days when distant learning seemed to bring out meltdowns. She listened when we were overwhelmed and made it less complicated." ■

Resilience: leaning in to recovery after a disaster

Communities, regions, state work collaboratively to mitigate fallout

It is Josh Bruce's job to plan for the worst. As program director of the Oregon Partnership for Disaster Resilience, Bruce and his University of Oregon team help communities all across Oregon prepare to respond to and recover from potential disasters. Earthquakes. Forest fires. Floods. His team even worked on an economic resiliency plan addressing the effects of a massive influx of tourists for 2018's eclipse. But a global pandemic? Not so much.

"We talk so often about the need to prepare for anything, but a global pandemic was not top of mind for me," Bruce says. "Now that it's happened, com-

As bad as this is, we have the luxury of having power and water and transportation — all the critical infrastructure we are concerned about losing with some disaster scenarios.

— Josh Bruce

munities are dealing with the ever-changing situation and its ramifications."

Without effective business-oriented recovery efforts, the impacts on businesses are sure to be devastating. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, more than 40% of businesses do not reopen after a disaster. Of those businesses that do reopen, roughly 25% fail within one year, and the Small Business Administration estimates that more than 90% fail within two years of a disaster event.

Despite the potential economic and social fallout, Bruce sees the current situation as a golden opportunity. "As bad as this is," he says, "we have the luxury of having power and water and transportation — all the critical infrastructure we are concerned about losing with some disaster scenarios."

"We have an opportunity to identify the gaps and work to fill them, so we are ready next time."

The resiliency muscle

One area of opportunity, Bruce says, is in the need of addressing recovery in parallel with initial response. "Regardless of the disaster, best practices suggest that when you set up an emergency operations center to respond, you need to launch recovery efforts at the same time. That is the piece we haven't really seen happening."

For example, in this crisis, Bruce says, tracing and testing is actually a recovery strategy.



Josh Bruce

"Aligning these activities means we can reopen sooner, which allows us to recover sooner." Bruce calls it "building the recovery muscle" and says it is imperative that communities stretch and exercise that muscle, even in the absence of an event.

Bruce points to the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, working collaboratively with the state's Regional Solutions Center, as an example of an area that leaned early into recovery. The devastating Eagle Creek fire in 2017 meant area leaders already had built a little muscle around economic recovery.

MCEDD's close partnership with Regional Solutions, as well as a resiliency assessment plan funded by a grant through Business Oregon's Local Economic Opportunity Fund, helped the region get a running start when COVID-19 hit communities on both sides of the Columbia Gorge.

Throughout the crisis, the region has been a leader in

collaborating with partners from all sectors of the community, sharing information, and providing training to help businesses deal with the current environment.

Nate Stice, Gov. Kate Brown's Regional Solutions coordinator for the Columbia River area, worked with Jessica Metta, MCEDD's executive director, to quickly mobilize the Mid-Columbia Economic Resilience Team — a group of economic stakeholders from seven counties in Oregon and Washington. Stice is one of eight coordinators around the state, each of whom has stood up similar COVID-19 economic recovery teams in their regions. "The governor calls us her boots on the ground, and she quickly deployed us to provide capacity as needed during this crisis," Stice says.

Trust, social capital

"The plan and MCEDD and Regional Solutions are all based on trust and social capital," says Metta. "Strong partners and well-cultivated relationships helped us to set a collaborative table."

Larger meetings share state guidance and identify coordination strategies, while a smaller leadership team meets weekly to do a deep dive into specific issues, such as broadband, school re-openings and the agricultural economy. As a direct result, MCEDD recently sponsored a training for businesses on preparing for workplace outbreaks (see page 10).

The team's work benefits

more than its immediate region. Information collected from the field is shared at the state level, and the team also compiles a daily digest of information, which is deployed across Oregon through Regional Solutions.

RARE

Josh Bruce and his University of Oregon team are working with The Ford Family Foundation to increase the capacity of rural communities to respond to disasters such as COVID-19. Through the AmeriCorps Program, six Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) students are embedded in economic development districts across the state.

"There is a tremendous need in rural areas and we are trying to provide capacity through our RARE appointments," Bruce says. "All of these folks working together in a cohort will share lessons learned, leverage their relationships and elevate the successes we see in rural Oregon." ■

This handout from the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District summarizes best practices for business preparedness.



Business Preparedness

Prepare your business before disaster strikes! Prioritizing efforts focused on prevention and recovery are vital in supporting business resiliency. Prevention and mitigation activities can reduce or eliminate risks before a disaster and lessen the potential impacts on business operations.

1. Identify hazards and potential disruptions to your operations and their consequences.
2. Identify and prioritize critical business functions.
3. Consider cyber security measures for important records.
4. Create a communications strategy, including a media toolkit to communicate with the public and/or key stakeholders.
5. Maintain an up-to-date emergency contact list for employees, vendors, suppliers, and other key stakeholders.
6. Take steps to mitigate risks to equipment, buildings, facilities, inventory, and employees.
7. Meet with an insurance agent to discuss what type of coverage your business needs.
8. Back up and store vital records and data so they can be accessed off-site.
9. Create an Emergency Preparedness Plan.
10. Exercise, test, and update your plan at least annually.

Find more resources on the MCEDD website: mcedd.org/ready



Not enough care: Oregon is a child care desert

The COVID-19 pandemic made a bad situation worse

If you have young children in Oregon, it doesn't matter if you live in the mountains or the coast, chances are you are living in a desert — a child care desert. Defined as an area where there is only one child care slot for every three children who need care, child care deserts exist in all 36 of Oregon's counties.

A 2019 study by Oregon State University found that, statewide, there are eight infant and toddlers for every slot, and three preschool-aged children for every slot in that age range.

Devastating implications

The implications are devastating, since access to affordable child care is the key to restarting the economy. Without reliable child care, employees cannot return to work.

The problem is especially acute in rural areas. "Rural communities tend to have less child care available," confirms Megan Pratt, coordinator of the Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, which conducts research related to child care policy at the local and state levels. "Even beyond that, rural areas have a hard time creating



The shortage of child care has devastating implications: Without reliable child care, employees cannot return to work.

and maintaining child care options and are more likely to use home-based and family, friend, and neighbor care. For example, grandparents often fill the gap."

The pandemic has made the situation even worse as centers closed, then reopened under new restrictions. At the outset of the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of child care providers said they could not survive a closure that extended longer than one month.

"Child care works on super slim margins," Pratt says. "The majority of revenue comes from parent tuition, and when you have half as many clients, and you are supposed to have more staff for children, it's very hard to stay open. It's just a scary situation right now."

Public-funded slots pay a critical role in creating and maintaining child care supply. Head Start, Preschool Promise and Baby Promise make up a substantial portion of the existing supply for children 0-5 years old in rural Oregon communities. Programs with contracted slots, which continue to receive payments regardless of child attendance, appear to be weathering this crisis better than those that fully rely on parent tuition, Pratt says. "These funds have helped keep many programs afloat as they cope with reduced enrollment and increased costs due to increased staffing and sanitization demands."

Consultant Heidi East McGowan identifies three areas of challenge for rural providers:

Care for infants and toddlers is costly because of low staff ratios, and centers that serve fewer than 100 children are rarely able to make it pencil out.

Workforce requirements are challenging, particularly if you have a small population to draw from. That is especially true for education requirements for caregivers in the 0-3 age range. "You would ideally like to draw from the substitute teacher pool at the school where the child care center resides, for example, but child care qualification and the elementary school staff requirements do not align," McGowan says.

And finally, co-pays for child care subsidies are disproportionately high in rural areas.

Innovative solutions

McGowan sees great promise in a shared services model that provides support for caregivers by offloading business functions such as invoicing, scheduling and, most importantly, fee collection. The Shared Services Alliance project, in the Coos-Curry counties region, is supported by a grant from the regional Oregon Community Foundation Council. A small group of licensed child care providers are working in close partnership with the South Coast Business Employment

Corporation, which provides back office support so providers can focus on the quality of their programs.

"Providers will receive access to a platform that supports billing and fee collection, as well as scheduling and marketing," explains Taya Noland, the Child Care Resource and Referral director who is overseeing the project. "Child care is barely viable with the current situation, because what parents can pay does not align with the cost of providing care. In our region we've seen a lot of child care centers close down. This program can help stabilize providers who work close to the edge."

Pratt also sees some innovative solutions popping up. In Corvallis, Oregon State University created a shared Google sheet where parents and caregivers can match needs.

In Central Oregon, the Bend Chamber of Commerce, along with a consortium of regional businesses, early learning and health organizations, last year hired a "child care accelerator" to work on creating more options for those looking for quality, affordable child care.

Many communities are crafting collaborative solutions. In Douglas County, a large, diverse group of community

partners are working together to develop a collective plan for child care solutions. In the near term, the Douglas County Child Care Coalition hopes to increase the number of school-age slots available by helping providers meet new requirements through donations of supplies and funds.

When McGowan did a fiscal analysis for Wild Rivers Coast Alliance, the grant-making arm of Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, she found there was no way a small center could sustain itself if it were to provide infant-toddler child care. "So the community came together to provide

support for it," she says. Thanks to a coalition of businesses and organizations, the Bandon Community Child Care Center is now open at Ocean Crest Elementary.

The pandemic is expected to have a long-term impact on the availability of child care, which is already in such short supply.

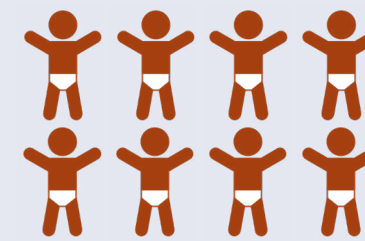
"It's going to be hard to rebuild," McGowan says. "We are going to have to see an increased investment from the public sector, philanthropy and also from businesses. But we can build it back stronger than it was before. This is a great opportunity for that, if we can collectively be responsive." ■

...rural areas have a hard time creating and maintaining child care options and are more likely to use home-based and family-funded neighbor care.

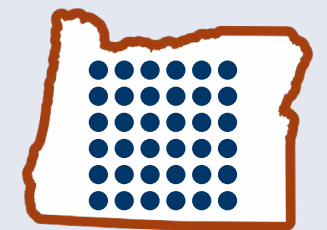
— Megan Pratt

Source: Oregon State University, College of Public Health and Human Sciences Oregon Child Care Research Partnership

Across Oregon, there is inadequate regulated child care supply — especially for infants and toddlers



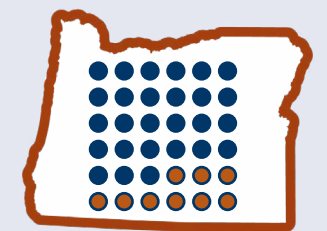
There are eight infants and toddlers for a single child care slot in Oregon



All 36 Oregon counties are child care deserts for infants and toddlers



There are three preschool-age children for a single child care slot in Oregon



All but nine Oregon counties are child care deserts for preschool-age children



A child care desert is a community with three or more children for a single child care slot

Scholar played key role in public health

Charity Dean led the virus testing task force for California

As one of the top leaders for the state of California's early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ford Scholar Charity Dean is a study in success. As she regularly shares with new Ford Scholars, her secret is simple: She has failed all the way to where she is now.

Dean always knew she wanted to become a doctor, but growing up in Junction City, she says she had few academic opportunities and was discouraged by school counselors to pursue a career in medicine. She remembers sitting at the kitchen table with her mom, looking at the letter announcing her Ford scholarship and realizing she was holding her future.

After graduating from high school in 1995, Dean attended the Ford Scholars banquet at the Benson Hotel in Portland. "Kenneth Ford was there," she remembers, "and they took a

I heard all the stories of [Kenneth Ford's] hard work. So, I made the decision that I would not give up my dream.

—Charity Dean



Charity Dean freely shares stories of the failures that led to her success today as a respected public health expert. "The beauty of failing is you aren't afraid of it anymore," she says.

photo of him handing me my award." That photo, she says, is still on the wall in her house.

She then entered the pre-med program at Oregon State University. It didn't go well.

"I was a terrible failure," she says today. "I got Cs and Ds in science classes. It was not uncommon for Ford Scholars, who often come from poor, rural communities and can't pay for tutors and all the stuff that comes with privilege. Now that I am a privileged doctor raising kids, boy do I get it."

At the end of the first year, Dean met with the OSU counselor, who told her she had no chance to get into med school

and removed her from the pre-med program.

Inspiration needed

Dean received the inspiration she needed to take the next step at Kenneth Ford's funeral. "I heard all the stories of his hard work," she remembers. "So, I made the decision that I would not give up my dream."

It took Dean an extra year of schooling to get her GPA up, and she graduated from OSU in 2000 with a degree in microbiology. A longtime obsession with pandemics led her to attend medical school at Tulane University; she earned a medical degree and a master's degree in public health.

After a stint in West Africa

doing tropical surgery, she did her residency in Santa Barbara, California, ending up in public health.

"I loved working in county clinics, which serve the most vulnerable," she says. "Those are my people."

In 2018, Dean became assistant director of the California Department of Public Health.

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she quickly became part of the executive team that ran the entire response for the state of California. She says she often reflects on her trajectory.

"I was kicked out of pre-med," she says. "But here I was, number two for the state

of California. I think it's really important for students to hear about my failures as well as my successes."

'not afraid'

She led the state testing task force. "We devised a strategy that ended up exceeding the government goals set for us. It was a very public fail-or-succeed task," she says. "But I wasn't afraid to take the chance."

And that, she says, is because she is used to failure. "I am familiar with the taste of dirt in my mouth. The beauty of failing is you aren't afraid of it anymore."

Dean resigned as assistant director for the California Department of Public Health in June, during a time of public backlash against restrictions and mask requirements.

"I felt that strong nudge that it was time to pivot," she says. "My intention was always to have an impact on protecting the community and the country, and that's what I intend to continue to do." ■

We devised a strategy that ended up exceeding the government goals set for us. It was a very public fail-or-succeed task.

—Charity Dean

Scholars respond to COVID-19

Bory Kea, Ford Scholar Class of 1998, Portland

OHSU's Dr. Bory Kea is active with the Women in Science group, which sought mask donations to give to patients in need. She is also involved in multiple COVID-related studies, including rapid COVID diagnostic test development, presence of COVID with mask reuse, evaluation of the public's mask-wearing behavior, health care worker's use of PPE, a Phase 3 COVID vaccine study, and lastly, a randomized-controlled trial of convalescent

plasma for the treatment of mild COVID.

Ali Lape, Ford ReStart Scholar Class of 2016, Corvallis

When Oregon hospitals limited the number of people in labor and birthing rooms, Ali Lape, a certified doula, began working as field team lead for the TRACE COVID-19 study out of Oregon State University. In one instance, the data she collected from Hermiston showed 17% community prevalence of COVID-19 with only 20% of those people having symptoms. Oregon Gov.

Brown used the data to guide decisions about contagion control in Umatilla County.

Melissa Bellm, Ford Scholar Class of 2002 Jackson/Josephine counties

As the manager of quality and accreditation for Asante Health Systems, Melissa Bellm staffed Asante's drive-through testing clinic, fit tested her fellow health care workers with the N95 mask, and supported inpatient units and patients at the bedside. She is now also the interim manager of infection prevention. ■

Vaccine trial comes to rural Oregon



A volunteer receives a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine inoculation from Audrey Kuehl, a study coordinator at the Clinical Research Institute of Southern Oregon.

Inside the offices of the Clinical Research Institute of Southern Oregon, Dr. Edward Kerwin and his staff are part of the race to save the world. Kerwin was tapped in the spring to lead one of the nearly 90 U.S. clinical trial sites taking part in the large-scale, Phase 3 test of a vaccine produced by biotech startup Moderna to fight the virus that causes COVID-19. The clinic, located in Medford, attracted test subjects from throughout southern Oregon and beyond to determine the efficacy and safety of the Moderna vaccine. The clinic is the only COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial site in Oregon. The trial will track 700 participants for two years. ■

Virus hits food-processing sites hard

People of color more likely to get sick, and when infected, die

It is harvest time in the Hood River Valley, and orchardist Erin Roby is busy getting crews geared up for the eight-week picking season on her family's 330 acres of pears. With the emergence of COVID-19, things look a lot different this year.

The number of pickers — 90 in a typical year — is down to 65. That's due to new housing restrictions, which required her operation, Legacy Orchard Management, to reconfigure units to accommodate distancing requirements. This year, workers will operate in small teams that live, travel, eat and work together. Sanitizer and handwashing stations have been added in the housing units and in the field. And, armed with community-produced multimedia resources, orchard supervisors are engaged in a continuous process of educating workers and each other.

It's all part of what has been a highly collaborative effort in the Columbia Gorge agricultural region to keep workers safe. Most of the region's largest workplace outbreaks have taken place in rural areas. Food packing and agricultural worksites, where people work and live in proximity, have been hit hard, as have correctional facilities. And that disproportionately affects people of color, who are overrepresented in these



Most of the region's largest workplace outbreaks have taken place in rural areas. Food processing and agricultural worksites, where people work and live in proximity, have been hit hard.

settings. Oregonians who are Black, Latino or members of Native American communities are more likely to get sick, and when they're infected, they're more likely to die.

High risk

Roby's workers, like many in the agricultural field, are mostly Hispanic. They tick off all the high-risk boxes for COVID-19: They live in close quarters and work in situations where handwashing and physical distancing are difficult.

Roby credits the collaborative work of many regional groups for helping agricultural businesses cope with the pandemic. Resources aimed at providing workers with information, including videos and

Community leaders are taking extra steps to include disproportionately affected communities in response and recovery strategies.

printed material, have been produced by a host of community partners. Orchard supervisors, for example, have relayed concerns that workers may resist reporting illness for fear of losing their jobs. Resources

developed by groups such as Hood River's The Next Door Inc. give them the information they need to reassure workers that their jobs are protected.

And community leaders in rural Oregon are taking extra steps to include disproportionately affected communities in response and recovery strategies. The Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, for example, is using equity as a focus in the recovery.

"The pandemic has highlighted the cracks in our economy where some people fall through," says Jessica Metta, MCEEDD's executive director. "As we work on recovery, building on the longtime success of partners like The Next Door, Inc. and their work with farm workers and Native American communities during the pandemic will help us rebuild a stronger economy for everyone."

Doing business and keeping employees safe amidst a global pandemic takes a lot of effort, and Roby says it is an unprecedented group effort that offers hope for the future.

"Sometimes there is a little bit of a barrier between the community and agriculture," she explains. "But all these community partners are coming together now.

"That is what has made the difference here. We have broken down that barrier. All of these different groups are providing resources for us to be successful and our workforce to be successful. It's amazing."



Virus

Continued from page 1

where children and families can thrive are encouraged by this response. Rural leaders have reported to us that they have been able to use the connections, capacity and culture developed through the community building process to effectively take action.

The virus has exposed structural flaws in our systems and worsened them, but it also has provided us with a rare opportunity. It has revealed, more clearly than ever, the places where we must invest urgently for the well-being of the residents and communities of our region. We can use this time to identify strategies to make progress on them so we are prepared for whatever the future might bring. ■

The extent of the pain and suffering is almost unfathomable, and we at The Ford Family Foundation send love, support and courage to all of you.

Resources offer insights

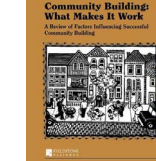
A book encouraging children's community building efforts. A book about talking about race. A practical guide to community building. A resource for groups focusing their collective vision. These and other resources are available through Select Books from The Ford Family Foundation. We provide these books at no charge to residents of Oregon and Siskiyou County, California.

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo, 272 pages. ©2019. Available formats: book, Kindle eBook. This best-



seller targets people of all races who want to engage in more informed conversations about race in the United States. The writing is straightforward, sometimes biting, and very insightful. The author grew up in the Pacific Northwest attending schools where she was often the only Black person.

Community Building: What Makes It Work by Paul Mattesich, Ph.D. and Barbara Monsey, M.P.H., 99 pages. ©1997. Available formats: book, Kindle eBook. This



practical guide shows you what really does (and doesn't) contribute to community building success. It reveals 28 keys to help you build community more effectively.

Collective Visioning: How Groups Can Work Together for a Just and Sustainable Future by Linda Stout, 198 pages. ©2007.



Available formats: book, Kindle eBook. This book teaches readers how to create a vision of what they want the world to look like, and then how to work together to make it happen. The author, a longtime community builder, uses a practical

Get one of these books for

FREE

www.tfff.org/select-books

Log on and choose a book. Then, order. It's that simple. The full list of Select Books offers more than 70 titles. Questions? Please contact us: selectbooks@tfff.org

approach to examine how to bring a group together effectively to meet common goals. ■



Formats for Select Books

We make it easier than ever to access the resources on the Select Books list. We offer versions in Kindle e-book and audio CD, and provide Spanish translations when available. To access the book list, go to the Select Books web page (www.tfff.org/select-books), click on "Browse Books" and choose your preferred method of delivery. All titles are free to residents of Oregon and Siskiyou County, California, in return for your book review. ■



Two ways to read

Printed copies of *Community Vitality* are available on request. Send an email to: communityvitality@tfff.org



Community Vitality is online. www.tfff.org/cv
Receive email notifications when a new online issue is available. Sign up at: www.tfff.org/cvsubscribe

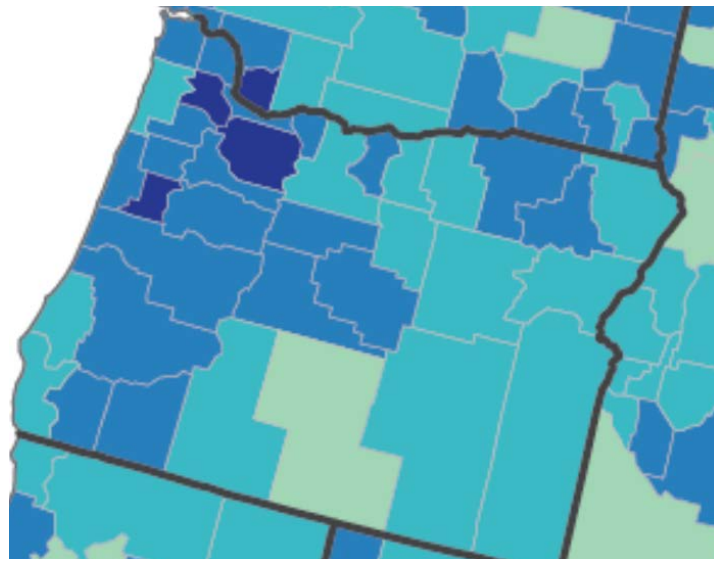
Rush to online

Lack of high-speed internet creates far-reaching problems

When schools across Oregon went virtual last March in the wake of the pandemic, rural areas faced a special problem: Geographic and economic limitations meant many households had limited or no access to the internet. Stories abound of students unable to access online classes. The lack of high-speed internet in rural Oregon has been a serious concern for a long time, but COVID-19 has highlighted the problem.

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center report, 37 percent of rural Americans have no broadband internet service at home. Access also varies by demographic, with minority households at a disadvantage.

Coalitions of schools, foundations and organizations have sprung into action to connect students to their classrooms.



Percent by County

Percentages of households with subscription to any broadband service varies dramatically throughout the region.

"A year and a half ago, not even half the town had the ability to get hooked up," says Lincoln Monroe of OnlineNW. Willamina was the second rural project for Online NW, which also offers high-speed service in Dayton.

Some communities have used municipal infrastructure to create affordable new networks. In 2007, for example, Independence partnered with the neighboring city of Monmouth to form their own company, MINET, to build multi-city broadband infrastructure.

How to get help

The federal CARES Act includes funds to help rural communities connect to high-speed internet. Oregon has \$10 million available for broadband projects, with priority given to projects that provide broadband access to K-12 students. In addition, the Oregon Legislature recently passed a cell phone tax to fund expanded broadband service in remote parts of the state. ■

In Crook County, the school district used a pair of school buses as mobile hotspots. Soon, thanks to the generosity of the community, all of the district's 30 buses will be hotspots, allowing it to expand the wifi schedule.

The Ford Family Foundation is providing support to several Douglas County school districts so they can provide hotspots and the needed technology for families in remote areas to access distance learning. The Foundation also helped Malheur County bridge the internet divide with a grant that supports access for families in remote areas.

In Crook County, the school district used a pair of school buses as mobile hotspots, and parked them around Prineville and in the tiny towns of Juniper Canyon and Powell Butte. Students brought chairs and their computers, or did their homework in family cars parked near the buses.



PHOTO: CROOK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Innovative approaches

Businesses and neighborhoods find ways to respond

Challenging times often bring out the best in people, as they respond to the needs in their communities. Here are three of the many stories that surfaced as businesses, neighborhoods and regions worked together to deal with the pandemic.

'It was a game changer for us'

Last March, popular craft distillery Denny Bar started giving away bottles of product to its rural Siskiyou County neighbors. The two-ounce bottles weren't full of the hand-crafted spirits the historic Etna distillery is known for. It was something even more sought after — hand sanitizer.

During the height of hand sanitizer shortages, the distillery took advantages of relaxed state regulations to switch from making high-proof spirits to making ethanol. Distillers followed World Health Organization recommendations to craft a Denny Bar-branded hand sanitizer, which included the corn-based ethanol, glycerol and ingredients such as aloe vera and lavender oil.

The distillery created its first batch of 400 bottles in mid-March and gave them all away to an appreciative community. "It was in very high demand, and we got a lot of positive feedback," says Lance Banks, Denny Bar's marketing manager.

Employees spent about two months busily making the sanitizer and filling orders from across the country, at a time when the company's other business was stagnant.



Denny Bar in Etna, California, switched from producing hand-crafted spirits to hand sanitizer to help alleviate the shortage caused by COVID-19.

PHOTO: DENNY BAR

"It was a game changer for us," Banks says. "When the restaurant and everything else slowed down, to be able to keep employees employed and keep the lights on was a lifesaver."

Other distilleries also joined the effort. Hood River Distillers, for example, produced about 12,000 gallons of alcohol-based hand sanitizer at its Clear Creek Distillery. The company worked with the Oregon Health Authority to distribute the product to those on the front lines of the health care and food service industries throughout the state.

'This isn't about popcorn'

Owners of the hometown favorite Columbia Theater in St. Helens came up with an innovative way to survive when COVID-19 shut down theaters across the state — drive-up popcorn sales. The community support was immediate.

that they wanted it to be here, it's overwhelming," co-owner Leah Tillotson told Oregon Public Broadcasting. OPB produced a short video about the theater.

"It's not about the popcorn, it's about the community," said one patron.

'There's got to be something that we can do to help'

A pair of Oregon Institute of Technology students decided to spend their spring break doing something to benefit the medical community. Mechanical engineering students Davia Fleming and Jacob Allemann, aided by several of their professors, began producing face shields and respirator adapters to provide to hospitals in Oregon.

The pair worked from their homes with 3D printers supplied by the school to print the medical items, producing about 130 protective shields for frontline medical workers and more than 100 adapters, which enabled machines that treat sleep apnea to be converted into ventilators.

"We're an engineering school, so I thought that there's got to be something that we can do to help," says Fleming, a senior at Oregon Tech's Portland-Metro campus in Wilsonville. ■

On opening night, some people waited for an hour to buy \$5 buckets of popcorn. Over the next few weeks, popcorn sales totaled as many as 400 buckets a night.

"The support and the love that they showed this theater,



Columbia Theater in St. Helens came up with an innovative way to survive when COVID-19 shut down theaters across the state — drive-up popcorn sales.

PHOTO: ERIC SLADE

Connections pay off

Report finds 'nothing is more important than community building in times of need'

Communities that participated in this report: Adrian, Applegate, Bonanza, Dorris, Harney County, Hornbook, the Illinois Valley region, Malin, Merrill, Molalla, Sisters, the Siuslaw Region, Tulelake, the West Valley region, Woodburn

How has community-building enabled communities to respond to COVID-19? That's the question the Ford Institute for Community Building set out to answer, some four months after the pandemic hit Oregon. In June of 2020, 35 community builders from 15 communities in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California, were interviewed, with three follow-up meetings conducted. The resulting report identified three primary findings.

Community building expertise was leveraged during COVID-19

Communities that had experienced the community building

process were stronger, nimbler, and more capable of meeting residents' needs.

"My impression is that the effective community responses to Covid-19 ... have been helped significantly by having community structures and relationships already in place."

Validating community building

Connections, capacity, community-led action, culture — study participants agreed that the four core elements of community building were validated.

"We knew people. We literally knew people and had contact information. And we could just reach out really quickly. And because we had built those bridges, people were responsive. Because we had done all of this outreach, we would hear back from people so we could make those connections and get things moving to help people."

"Con el apoyo de este grupo, ahora sabemos que podemos seguir adelante, buscando los medios." ("With the support of this group, now we know that we can move forward, searching for our own solutions.")

The partnership with the Ford Institute helped communities respond to the pandemic

The data clearly shows the impact of the presence and support of the Ford Institute staff; the commitment, flexibility, and responsiveness of funding; and the value of being co-learners with the Ford Institute.

"Due to the strong leadership and encouragement in relationship building within communities that is present within [the Ford Institute], Greater Applegate has been able to form really strong bonds between our business community, nonprofits and local residents and without those strong connections, none of what we have done in response to COVID would have been possible."

The report concludes that the data confirms the value of long-term community building investments to bolster resilience, stability and responsiveness in rural communities in the face of crises and emergencies.

"This pandemic has shown that the [Community Building] framework really passes the test and stands up for what it says it's going to do. We were able to pivot pretty seamlessly because of all the work that has led up to this point."

"The people see us as leaders now during the pandemic. We actively give priority to those who need the most help. We couldn't have done that without this work."

"When the COVID hit, we were luckily already prepared. We had all the networks necessary to activate immediately. We were able to set up an emergency food distribution system really quickly because we already knew everyone in town that was working with other people and had a lot of contacts." ■

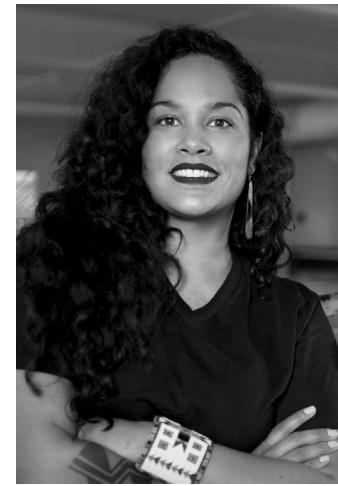
View the report: <https://learn.tfff.org/CBSummary>.



PHOTO: IMPACT OF RURAL COMMUNITY BUILDING REPORT

Communities that had experienced the community building process were stronger, nimbler, and more capable of meeting residents' needs. Said one interviewee: "We had all the networks necessary to activate immediately. We were able to set up an emergency food distribution system really quickly because we already knew everyone...." View a video that highlights key findings of the report: <https://vimeo.com/440469820>

Artists from Chiloquin, Eugene, Portland honored



Natalie Ball, Iván Carmona, Donald Morgan

PHOTO CREDITS: WALTERS PHOTOGRAPHY (BALL); SAM GEHRKE (CARMONA, MORGAN)

A jury of five arts professionals from within and outside of Oregon selected Natalie Ball of Chiloquin, Iván Carmona of Portland, and Donald Morgan of Eugene as the 2020 Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts. They were chosen from a competitive pool of 180 applicants. Each received a \$35,000 unrestricted award and will join 40 of their peers selected over the last 10 years as Hallie Ford Fellows.

"These three artists approach their craft in personal and deeply studied ways," says Anne Kubisch, president of the Foundation. "Each is masterful, and each contributes to an ever-expanding artistic landscape in this state."

The 2020 recipients were selected in June based on the following criteria:

Quality of work: Artists exhibit artistic excellence, exemplary talent, and depth of sophisticated exploration.

Evolution of work: Artists stand at a pivotal point in their practices and would benefit from a Fellowship at this point in their careers.

Impact of work: Artists' goals are consistent with Fellowship goals, and they show potential for future accomplishment and capacity to contribute significantly to Oregon's visual arts ecology.



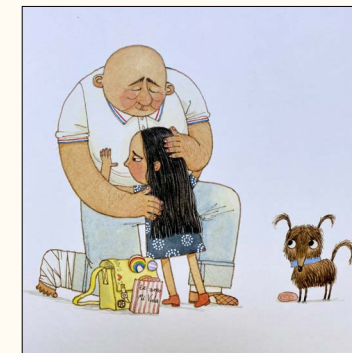
Sofia and her grandfather make regular visits to help their household neighbors.

Kids making a difference

Continued from page 16

turn the landfill into a neighborhood park? On Sofia's journey to make this happen, she encounters problems familiar to community leaders. Everyone wants a park, but they want someone else to do it. No one thinks Sofia, a second-grader, can do it. Sofia must step outside her comfort zone.

*And that was the moment when Sofia first knew
Being brave means doing the thing you must do,
Though your heart cracks with fear.
Though you're just in Grade Two.*



Sofia and her grandfather

But every problem Sofia faces has a solution, all of it illustrated with 40 colorful, interactive pages. The diverse characters that populate the pages are characteristic of the work of author Andrea Beatty and illustrator David Roberts. They are the creators of the New York Times bestselling Questioners series, populated by STEM picture books *Ada Twist, Scientist*, *Iggie Peck, Architect* and *Rosie Revere, Engineer*.

Young readers have the opportunity to make their own contribution with a separate, double-sided activity sheet, where they can create their own picket sign or doodle ideas on how they can help their own neighborhood.

This book is available for free to residents of Oregon and Siskiyou County, California, through the Foundation's Select Books program. See page 11. ■



BOOK REVIEW

Kids making a difference

Rhyming picture book helps children realize they can be community builders

A bright, engaging book about a can-do young person, *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* is a quick read with a lasting message: Even kids can make a difference. The rhyming picture book begins with a word portrait of the second-grader that young readers can identify with:

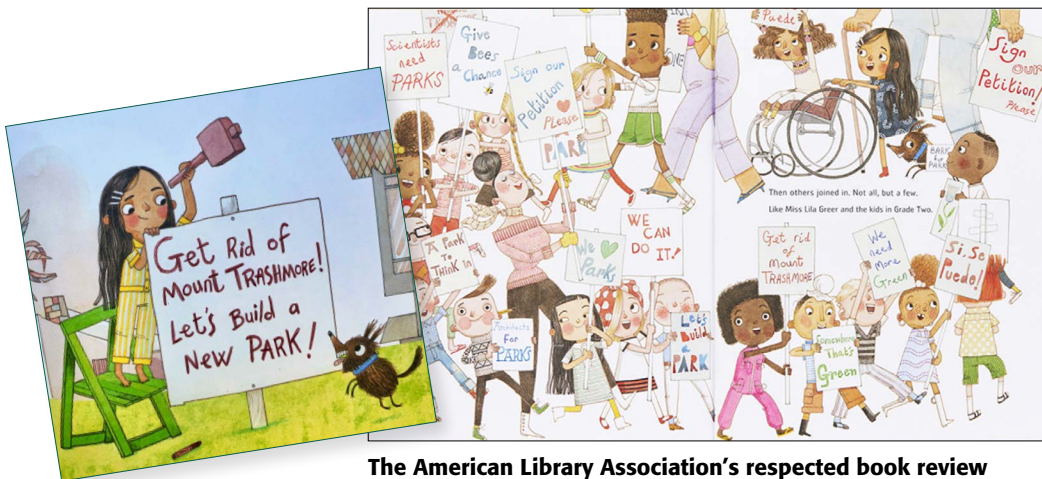


Author Andrea Beatty

*Raking the leaves, taking pets for a walk,
Or just dropping by for a treat and a talk,
Sofia Valdez did as much as she could
For her family and friends and her whole neighborhood.
A dreamer. A doer. A real-life go-getter.
Most people like good,
But Sofia liked better.*

When Sofia's grandfather injures his foot at a local landfill while walking her to school, the opportunity presents itself: Why not

Continued on page 15



The American Library Association's respected book review publication, *Booklist*, calls *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, "an inspiring story about how one voice can make a difference and how people can come together not just for something good but for something even better."



This book is yours for the asking

www.tfff.org/select-books



We believe everyone has the potential to succeed in life.

We believe in the power of rural communities.

We believe in finding common cause and mobilizing collective effort.

SOFIA VALDEZ ILLUSTRATIONS: DAVID ROBERTS