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Special-needs housing is often neglected by the private sector. Through constant communication with citizens and government, a group of Oregonians is picking up the slack.

Interview by Zach Baliva



In 1951, the Yamhill County Board of Commissioners in Oregon passed a resolution that created the **Housing Authority of Yamhill County** (HAYC). Today, the organization operates as an independent, local government agency under federal and state law and manages more than 500 affordable-housing units in 16 developments. Additionally, HAYC's programs and services, including a housing choice voucher and a homeownership program, provide additional options for renters and prospective owners. **Elise Hui**, executive director of HAYC, shares how her organization strives to meet affordable-housing needs in Yamhill County.

At a Glance

Location:
McMinnville, OR
Founded:
1951
Employees:
41
Specialty:
Affordable housing

What are the major properties and programs you offer?

Elise Hui: We have 1,343 housing-choice vouchers, a family self-sufficiency program, a homeownership program, 54 units of farmworker housing, 243 units of family housing, 42 units of special-needs housing, and 190 units of senior housing. We have a nonprofit arm, the Yamhill County Affordable Housing Corporation (YCAHC), which

was formed in 2001 to promote homeownership opportunities for low- and moderate-income citizens.

How does that program work?

EH: YCAHC contracts with the housing authority to operate a revolving loan fund of over \$3 million to provide housing rehabilitation loans to low- or moderate-income homeowners. Zero or two percent interest

Right: The community garden on the second floor of the apartments at Village Quarter in McMinnville, OR, sits below a green roof that recaptures rainwater for flushing toilets. Middle: The 3rd Street view of Village Quarter shows retail on the ground floor and living spaces on the top two floors. Bottom: Each of the units in Village Quarter also has a simple, spacious kitchen/dining area.



rates on loans of up to \$25,000 help individuals repair existing homes, and then we also obtain real estate that we can offer back at discounted prices.

How do you best identify the needs of your community?

EH: Communication. We're always talking to the cities in our county about what they see. We also conduct market studies any time we

are ready to develop a property so we are sure to respond well to what the community needs.

8

million

The number, in US dollars, HAYC pumps back into the local economy.

Serving 2,000 families, the group also provides amenities like yoga classes, potlucks, and other social activities at its 16 locations.

Sometimes this includes caring for individuals with special needs. How and why has this been a focus over the years?

EH: Special-needs housing is rarely considered by the private sector because of the need to provide social services along with the housing. We

have been fortunate to be able to develop five effective special-needs properties by collaborating with community partners to provide services for this type of housing.

Is there any specific property that you're especially proud of or that personifies a change in direction for HAYC?

EH: We operate Village Quarter in McMinnville's historic downtown area. The development has 50 affordable-housing units paired with supportive services for low-income seniors and 9,400 square feet of ground-floor retail space. The development works because it provides a unique social environment. We designed it to encourage





Above: The community room at Village Quarter has computers, a library area, and public meeting space.

“[Village Quarter] works because it provides a unique social environment. We designed it to encourage interaction between residents and the retail community.”

ELISE HUI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

interaction between residents and the retail community, and this is enhanced by an immediate connection to a vibrant downtown area that our residents help support economically.

We had to let Village Quarter both blend in and maintain density, so the building is three stories on one façade and four on another with an outdoor plaza. There are private gathering areas and public spaces like a library, computer lab, and activity rooms. Village Quarter boasts many green and sustainable features from storm-water management to a green roof to energy-efficient HVAC and lighting systems.

Village Quarter sounds much more residential than stereotypical institutional public housing. Is this an important distinction?

EH: We think it is important to develop housing that does not have an institutional feel and does not make the housing stand out in a negative way in the community. We look at what will fit into the neighborhood and look good in the community. That’s why we worked with the McMinnville Downtown Association to design a building that would fit in to the existing downtown. But we also made sure Village Quarter was modern and something that people would want to live in and be proud to call their home.

You also focus on health and well-being. Tell me about that.

EH: We work with families to become self-sufficient by referring them to other community services as well as providing educational classes on financial literacy,

home buying, and other topics. We also cater resident services at our 16 properties. Our senior properties have things like yoga classes, potlucks, and other social activities, whereas at our family properties, we may bring in the extension service to teach the families about nutrition, or we may hold art workshops or plan summer activities for the kids.

How many people do you serve each year?

EH: Between the Housing Authority of Yamhill County, the Yamhill County Affordable Housing Corporation, and the Yamhill Housing Resource Center, we are able to provide assistance to almost 2,000 local families monthly and put over \$8 million dollars back into the local economy annually. **ABQ**