Grants Pass Daily Courier

Sunday, September 20th, 2026

Community Works offers escape from domestic violence (COMMUNITY BUILDER)

By Steve Boyarsky for the Daily Courier

Today's conversation is with Barbara Johnson, the executive director of Community Works. Based in Medford, Community Works is a comprehensive support program for individuals who are caught in domestic violence situations and provides support to start new lives.



JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier

Barbara Johnson, the executive director of Community Works, stands in her office in Medford. Community Works is a holistic program designed to provide resources and support for people who are caught in domestic violence situations.

Q: This is a quote from the Community Works website, "In moments of fear, uncertainty or crisis, Community Works is a steady hand that opens doors with an unwavering voice." How do you do that?

Barbara Johnson: Community Works serves over 2,000 adults and children annually who are experiencing homelessness or near homelessness due to domestic or sexual violence, stalking, or trafficking. We have a trained dedicated professional staff who are here to listen, provide emotional support, and resources. We recognize it takes great courage to reach out to us for help. We understand that each person has complex traumas because of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. We are here to let them know this is not their fault. We come from a place of no judgment and understanding that rebuilding a person's life is hard and takes time. We are here to be with them along their journey to healing.

Q: How do victims typically reach out?

Johnson: Survivors have multiple ways of connecting with us throughout the community, however the gateway for many of our services is through our 24/7 crisis line, 541-779-4357. Annually, we receive close to 12,000 calls from anyone in need. Of these calls, about a third are individuals experiencing domestic violence, sexual violence, dating violence, stalking, or trafficking. We are here every hour of every day to provide crisis intervention, emotional support, and resources.

Q: What services do you provide in Jackson County to the clients who come to you after that initial call? Where does it go from there?

Johnson: The initial request for help can lead to many different programs that our agency offers providing safety, stability, and long-term support for every person. We do this through a combination of programs both in the community, at our Dunn House Shelter, and our housing program. You will find us at 10 different locations where our staff are working at law enforcement agencies, Community Justice, courthouse, DHS Child Welfare and Self-Sufficiency, Rogue Community College, Southern Oregon University, Children's Advocacy and more. We're embedded throughout the community because we recognize that individuals calling us or coming to us, they're at that highest crisis. When they're in the courts and they need a restraining order or a stalking order, we're there to help them through that process. So, there's a lot of different stages in someone's healing process. We want to be there along the way.

For many it can be they are fleeing the violence and they need safety immediately. Our Dunn House Shelter, which is the only safe shelter for individual victimized individuals in Jackson County, serves 220 adults and children living with us each year. This is where individuals fleeing violence can be safe, stabilize, and consider options for their future.

To move from crisis to sustainability we offer a range of housing options, from supporting a person to live in their own home, or our agency has two housing programs for clients moving out of Dunn House Shelter, where

they can live up to two years while receiving ongoing advocacy on site. We also serve homeless youth and youth with children, and we have apartments for them to live and receive ongoing advocacy support.

Q: One of the statistics on your website that shocked me was that 50% of Oregon women and children have experienced abuse or neglect. Does this represent national statistics?

Johnson: Yes, this is a shocking statistic. This information comes from the Women's Foundation of Oregon who did a massive research project of women and girls in Oregon. They found that over 1 million Oregon women and girls had experienced sexual or domestic violence, which puts our state among the highest rates in the nation.

Q: Do law enforcement agencies refer victims to Community Works?

Johnson: We have a relationship with every single law enforcement agency in Jackson County. We work together along with the district attorney with a program called the Lethality Assessment Program. When a law enforcement officer is going to a domestic call, they connect the victim with us right away, and that's when we start the process. We have between 300 to 400 of those calls every year. The intention behind it is to provide early proactive intervention. We're trying to stop abuse from escalating to the point of homicide. We have a staff person, whom we call advocate, embedded in the law enforcement at Medford Police [Department] and one at the sheriff's office 40 hours a week. We work alongside them, including going out on domestic violence calls with the law enforcement officer.

Q: Community Works has been in existence in Jackson County for 30 years? How have your seen the services grow since you've been the executive director?

Johnson: This is our 30th year, but we've been doing this work for 55 years with grassroot efforts from community members. In 1971, volunteers started a 24/7 helpline for women in crisis and then in 1972 the first rape crisis program providing advocacy and resources for victims in the state of Oregon was formed in Ashland. Dunn House Shelter opened its doors in 1978 and served thousands of adults and children fleeing violence. All these programs merged in 1996 to become Community Works.

Our community-based programs have more than doubled in the last eight years. We raised funds to build the first apartment complex, Mary's Haven, for clients moving from our shelter. The funds were raised during COVID and 100% are from foundations, businesses, and individual donors with zero government funding. We opened in 2024 under budget and with no debt.

We are continuing to grow. We have plans to build a comprehensive Community Works Campus with expanded apartments, learning center, offices, private client rooms, and play area for children. This new complex will be located in Medford next to the district attorney offices.

Q: How did you get involved?

Johnson: I started as a board member in 2006, then stepped in as interim program director in 2013, then program director to executive director in 2015. It happened organically, and to have been a board volunteer to running Community Works has been an honor.

Q: Were you raised in Southern Oregon?

Johnson: Actually, I was raised in Texas. My family moved to Southern Oregon almost 30 years ago when my husband took a position at Harry & David. We discovered that it is a special place to live, and we have made close and meaningful friendships over the years.

Q: How did you get involved in this work? How did this strike a chord with you?

Johnson: I've always been someone who wanted to be involved and volunteer. I did quite a bit back in Dallas, involved in several organizations that were quite large as a volunteer and a leader. When we moved here, a community member asked, "Would you join the board and help us raise some money?" I've not historically been

one that wanted to step up and ask for money, but people want to hear our story. And once they do, it's so compelling. It's such a worthwhile investment and it really pays it forward. I said, "Sure, I'll help." And here I am today. You don't know what leads you to where you go, but when you look back, "Wow, there it was. There were the connecting points." But you don't know it at the time. I have friends who ask, "Why are you still working? You could retire." Maybe, but I found my purpose. I really did. I believe in life you have multiple purposes. It's opening yourself up to them. And I wasn't expecting that here. I love being able to solve problems. And when I heard how the staff felt, "We can't do this because we don't have money for that." It's like, "Don't worry about what we don't have. Tell me what you need and we'll make it happen. We'll figure it out." I love doing that. And then to see the clients and watch them change and grow, it's so rewarding. It's powerful work.

Q: So, what is needed to decrease domestic violence and abuse? If you could wave your magic wand, what would you wish for?

Johnson: We need to move the spotlight off the victim, and focus on the perpetrators, the abusers. Decreasing domestic violence means getting to the individuals before they become abusers by providing resources, education, and cultural change of communication. It is up to our community members to develop progressive programs that address the root causes and create change. This needs to be a subject that all of us are comfortable talking about. Imagine our community where young children are safe and families feel supported. This is possible when we come together.

Q: You've addressed some emotional and potentially dangerous situations. What gives you the strength to keep on working through these issues?

Johnson: I don't take that credit. It's my staff who are doing hard and emotional work. I listen to their stories and the difficult journeys they're walking with our clients. For me, I'm merely the vessel to listen to them share and hopefully give them some resources that we can help someone get safe, become sustainable, and feel whole. It's not easy to hear. It's not easy to witness, yet we have an obligation as humans. We just do.

Q: What do you want the public to know?

Johnson: Each of us can help by being open and available to a friend, family member, or child. You might be one of the first people they reach out to. Be present by listening without judgment or dismissing what they share. Let them know you are there for them; it's not their fault; and they do not deserve to be treated this way. Ask how you can help and that you will be there for them. By being there for someone early on, there is better likelihood that the abuse will be interrupted.

———

Steve Boyarsky has lived in Southern Oregon for almost 50 years. He is a retired teacher and school administrator. He remains involved in organizations that provide opportunities to young people.