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The Grants Issue

December 2020



What a year this has been!

Our Ojai Community experienced unprecedented times and challenges during 2020. Before we had fully recovered from the effects of the Thomas Fire, we were hit this Spring with the COVID- 19 pandemic and the struggle many of us endured to stay well and make ends meet.

Our Ojai Women's Fund Steering Committee recognized this challenge. We hoped that the pandemic would soon be behind us, but realized that we had to carry on and help our community recover from COVID's far reaching effects. We also knew that the non-profits serving the Ojai Valley would need our collective support so they, in turn, could help those in need. We are so pleased that we chose to support and help the Ojai Valley now.

How did we make it happen? Each member of the Ojai Women's Fund Steering Committee and the Giving Circle Group Leaders reached out to our membership and the Ojai community. We explained to all who listened that we required a huge group

effort for in Helen Keller's words, "Alone we can do so little, but together we can do so much."

We are humbled and grateful that our amazing 374 members and 45 "giving circles" listened to us and gave generously, especially in this difficult year. Due to their outpouring of love and support, the Ojai Women's Fund donated \$80,000 to seven deserving non-profit organizations serving residents of the Ojai community.

We are delighted that you will learn in this Newsletter about each of our wonderful 2020 Grantees. We are so proud of our members and our grantees. Enjoy!!

Judith Hale Norris and Marquita Flemming
Co-Chairs, Ojai Women's Fund



Sincere thanks to our Grants Committee members for making a difference. We are grateful for your hard work and commitment to changing lives.

Co-Chairs

Sue Gilbreth & Kathy Zotnowski

Team Leaders

Arts - Michelle Sherman

Education - Victoria Bortolussi

Environment - Marcy Toscher & Therese Hartmann

Health - Chris Malzone

Social Services - Catherine Meek

Committee Members:

Lisa Casoni	Lynne Goldfarb	Lynn Julian	Jackie Sherman
Gabi Cesena	Pamela Grau	Nancy Michali	Jane Spiller
Harriet Clise	Barbara Harvey	Janet Owens	Betsy Watson
Cindy Frings	Anna Lee Hicks	Darlene Patrick	Marguerite Webster
Jeanne Fuller	Barbara Hirsch	Suzanne Scar	Phylene Wiggins

We also thank Marquita Flemming as her term as OWF Co-Chair comes to a close on December 3rd. We are grateful for her superb leadership over the last 2 years.



BWF's 2020 Top Five Category Grant Award Winners

Education Through Music: Ojai Festivals, Ltd.

Though Ojai Festivals, Ltd. is renowned for having staged the Ojai Music Festival in June of each year since 1947, this non-profit organization is active throughout the year, bringing music into the lives of valley students, seniors, and disabled adults through their BRAVO Education and Community Program. This year, in response to the lack of funding for structured music instruction in the lower elementary grades in public schools, they designed and set out to implement the Education Through Music (ETM) program. Establishing a total project cost of \$62,000, they requested and received an Ojai Women's Fund grant for \$15,000, which represents a little less than a quarter of the overall budget and 83% of which will directly impact the delivery of ETM instruction to students. The funds will be used to provide a stipend for a teaching artist, supply students with printed materials and other supplies, defray videography expenses, and contribute to the salary of the BRAVO program director.

The benefits of music education, and early music education, in particular, are often misunderstood and under-appreciated as evidenced by their being among the first to suffer when budgetary cuts are made. However, these extend far beyond the euphemistic 'well-rounded education.' These benefits are essential to brain development. Music lessons and participation in orchestra or band have been shown to enhance students' language capabilities (after all music is a language in and of itself) while improving memory, eye-hand coordination, and study habits. Music education also enhances mental processing and problem-solving skills. All this while teaching students how to engage in teamwork.

ETM will provide these benefits to 750 students in kindergarten to grade 3 in four public elementary schools in the Ojai Valley. Approximately 45% of these students come from low-income families for whom professional music instruction would be prohibitively expensive. Normally the weekly ETM musical lessons would be offered in the classroom, however, with schools closed because of Covid-19, Ojai Festival Education Director, Laura Walter, produced a series of 2-3 minute videos to be presented in virtual classrooms but still requiring students to be actively engaged, not merely sitting in front of their computers. As we ease out of the distancing requirements the pandemic has imposed, ETM will move back into the classrooms, where it has been conducted for the past decade.

The elements of the ETM program include classic game songs to teach concepts of rhythm, pitch, and ensemble; interactive play to develop song, movement, motivation, intelligence, literacy, and emotional stability. When in-person attendance

is allowed, 30-minute lessons will be given by Ms. Walter in the classroom each week for 32 weeks. She will also provide a morning Movement with Music program to children in on-campus daycare. The OUSD Superintendent of Schools is fully supportive of the program, and OUSD has provided ETM with a Zoom account and the ability to upload its videos to Canvas, the school district's online platform, so teachers can easily include the program in their curriculum.

Life in Ojai Valley has been enriched for more than seven decades by the presence of the Ojai Music Festival. Their adjunct programs are an added bonus, helping to grow and develop the community's love of music. ETM, in particular, will help develop the self-confidence and skill sets young children of the Ojai Valley need as they set out on the paths to their bright and promising futures.

"Oh, thank you all, what a blessing you are in the community!" ~ Laura Walters

"We are all living in tough times and the good that you do throughout the community is such a needed and deeply appreciated counter-balance to all that we face." ~ Ara Guzelimian



Anti-Bias Anti-Racist Initiative for Early Childhood in the Ojai Valley: Secure Beginnings

The mission of Secure Beginnings is to nurture healthy relationships for families with children 0-5 through classes, groups, and programs supported by educators and professionals in the field. This local non-profit believes that developing empathy and a sense of justice at an early age helps children grow into adults who work to create a more just world. The \$15,000 Ojai Women's Fund grant will be used by Secure Beginnings to develop an Anti-Bias Anti-Racist curriculum and support program with early childhood providers in the Ojai Valley.

This initiative will provide adults, teachers, and parents the necessary education and support to explore, learn, and practice how to talk to and teach children about social justice in a way that is developmentally appropriate. This grant supports public and private schools in a pilot effort to launch an improved understanding of social justice issues to enrich the lives of all Ojai Valley families. The OWF grant will provide funding for the pilot project start-up costs, including curriculum selection, partnership launch with local childhood providers, parent education materials, coordinator salary, consultant fees, teacher support, curriculum materials, teacher/parent circle facilitator, and bilingual translation. The goal of this Secure Beginnings pilot program is to identify and ultimately prevent the harmful emotional and psychological impacts on children from societal prejudice and bias.

The first-year effort will be a pilot program, starting with willing partners in the teachers, parents, and administrators from three Ojai Valley Schools including the Ojai Unified School District's A Place to Grow, and private schools of Monica Ros and Oak Grove School. The project will create or select a pilot curriculum that is well respected and successfully used for early childhood education. Peer-based support will be provided for teachers to integrate learning in their work and share

with professionals to incorporate practices. Also, parent circles will be actively supported to complement the curriculum. The goal is to have a community approach to a foundation of anti-bias and anti-racist perspectives and practices. This collaboration of public and private schools, as well as city and state public efforts, will serve an estimated 385 people.

"We are honored and inspired to be awarded this grant!" - Renee Mandala, M.A.



Trail Adopter Program: Ojai Valley Land Conservancy

Among the Ojai Valley's many attractive attributes, our open spaces and spectacular views are at the top of the list not only for residents but for visitors from far and wide. But without ongoing conservation and maintenance efforts, many of our trails would soon become inaccessible, making the vista points we cherish out of reach. In the past, the Forest Service maintained trails and oversaw conservation, but funding cuts have curtailed their efforts. The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (OLVC), a volunteer organization, has stepped up as a community leader in championing outdoor recreation, providing volunteer maintenance, and conserving our open spaces.

As a non-profit organization, OLVC relies heavily on volunteer efforts and, to encourage volunteer participation, they requested and received a \$15,000 grant from OWF to fully fund their new Trail Adopter Program. The grant will pay for tools and supplies to build storage boxes that will be strategically placed along trails in areas easily accessible to volunteers. These boxes will house trail maintenance tools, gear to maintain the tools, and a registry to record work done and volunteer hours donated. Supplies will include personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, and first aid kits. Volunteers will choose to do trail maintenance and restoration work or both. Information about the work to be done on the project they have chosen will be sent by email, including details about the safety gear needed, directions to the project site, and instructions on how the project will be managed. Short instructional videos, produced by OLVC staff, can be viewed on mobile phones both before starting work and, as needed, while in the field, which will minimize the need for in-person training.

Trail maintenance tasks will include manual brush clearance, tread work on steep grades, drainage repair, and the removal of tripping hazards. No power tools will be used, and chemical weed killers are never used on the trails. Restoration of oak circles at the Ventura River Preserve and the Ojai Meadows Preserve will entail hand weeding, mulching, repairing oak cages, and monitoring and reporting progress.

The success of this volunteer program depends on the number and dedication of volunteers attracted to it. Publicity and outreach within the community will help ensure this success. In addition to the direct benefit of providing safe, well-

maintained trails, the success of this program will also allow OLVC to better assess its stewardship needs. Furthermore, they will be able to redirect staff time to new projects that will expand our trail system, open and conserve new areas for our enjoyment.

"That is fantastic news and we are so grateful and excited to work on our Adopter program with OWF funding support." ~ Brendan Taylor



The Children's Resource Program: Ventura County Medical Resource Foundation

For a child whose vision is impaired, the classroom blackboard or the teacher's visual aid cards might as well be a hundred miles away. For a child with dental problems, pain makes paying attention difficult and impedes learning. These are real issues for an estimated 150 Ojai Valley children who require vision and dental services but do not have access because their families have no insurance or are unable to cover the costs. Fortunately, the Ventura County Medical Resource Foundation (VCMRF) provides relief by raising funds to support their Children's Resource Program and by coordinating with medical and dental professionals who donate their services. The countywide cost for this project is \$130,000. VCMRF requested and was granted \$5,000 by OWF to subsidize these services for children living in the Ojai Valley.

In the Ojai Valley, Children's Resource Program (CRP) clients face multiple obstacles to seeking and obtaining medical or dental care. For some, it is financial circumstances and a lack of insurance to help defray costs. For others, it is a lack of transportation or language barriers that they are unable to overcome. Others may fear their citizenship will be revoked or believe they will be deported if they apply for or accept government insurance. To overcome this reluctance to seek help, CRP staff reach out to marginalized communities by working with churches, agri-business employers, and schools to extend assurances to them that vision and dental check-ups and care are available for their children at no cost.

CRP staff coordinates transportation to scheduled appointments, and the program strives to provide free services to 90% of the eligible children referred to the program. Services include vision exams and glasses; dental exams including x-rays, fillings, and preventative education. On average, each child receives between 5 and 20 services. All professional services are donated.

While the grant amount requested from and provided by OWF is a small part of the overall CRP project cost, it will help ensure services are provided to our Valley's most vulnerable children by helping fund salaries for the program's coordinators.

"We are truly grateful for the OWF's support and look forward to expanding outreach services and receiving referrals for low-income, underserved children, who have no other choices and need dental and/or vision care services in the Ojai Valley." - Victoria Chandler



Shower Vehicle: Ojai Valley Family Shelter

Being clean and having clean clothes, nourishing food, and safe shelter are taken for granted by most of us. However, these are the gifts that the Ojai Valley Family Shelter provides for friends and neighbors who are in need. Having access to a warm shower is important in maintaining an individual's morale and self-esteem. It enables clients to feel better about themselves and to interact with the community with dignity. Furthermore, mobile showers also support public health. OVFS currently provides showers via a 35-year-old van with only one shower stall. In September, they were finally able to purchase a new vehicle, and thanks to the Ojai Women's Fund grant of \$15,000 in the social services category they will be able to retrofit the new vehicle to serve the members of our community who have no access to sanitary bathing facilities. This newly transformed, well-designed shower vehicle will serve the community for decades to come by providing a clean, reliable, and private place to shower, not only routinely for homeless community members but as an emergency facility in the event of a disaster. The vehicle will contain two shower stalls (one of them ADA compliant), dressing rooms, and storage. Having two showers will make it much easier and faster to provide service, not only to OVFS clients but also in the event of a disaster.

As an advocate for all homeless individuals in the Ojai Valley, the Ojai Valley Family Shelter provides shelter, food, and resources during the winter months of the year. OVFS feeds everyone who comes to the shelter, even if they do not meet the requirements to stay the night. The total number of overnight stays for the 2020 season was 1,878. 80% of their clients received some form of government assistance; 59% were older than 45 years of age. Almost half have a physical or mental disability that prevents them from obtaining work.

"We are so honored and excited to receive the grant. We are thrilled beyond measure. Thank you." ~ Martha Ditchfield



Topping off Our Grants Total to \$80,000

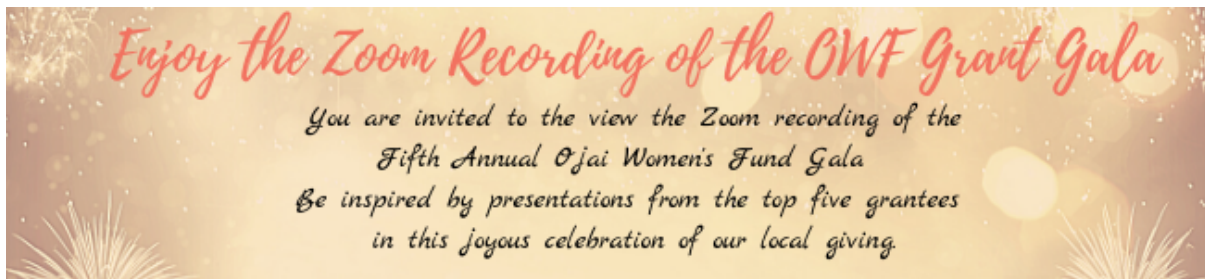
Thanks to the generosity of our members, OWF was able to extend partial grants to the two project proposals that received just slightly fewer votes than the top five awardees. Each was awarded \$7,500. While the Grants Committee did not award the total amount requested by these organizations, the Committee felt the funds would provide significant support for the proposed projects.

Reins of H.O.P.E.

In fulfilling its mission of providing free mental health services to underserved youth, military personnel, and their families, Reins of H.O.P.E. provides its clients with the skills necessary to build healthy relationships and to communicate effectively, thereby giving them tools to overcome traumas that may lead to self-destructive behavior. Using Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, they aim to help clients thrive rather than merely survive the challenges presented by a mental illness, drug abuse, and bullying. The OWF grant will help pay salaries for program staff, who will work with students from OUSD's Chaparral Alternative High School.

The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Ventura

Boys and Girls Club programs give Ojai Valley students, ages 6-18, a safe, after-school place to learn and have fun at the same time. Until the pandemic restrictions and distancing rules came into play, Ojai Valley students met in Oak View but, because that facility could not accommodate the necessary distancing requirements, the Ojai Valley program was moved to the Robert Addison Center in East Ventura. This presented insurmountable transportation problems for many program participants. The OWF grant will be allocated to transportation costs, staffing, equipment, and program materials so Ojai Valley students can continue to benefit from the homework help, computer instruction, social and emotional support, and behavior modeling provided by the Boys and Girls Club staff at the Robert Addison Center and the Oak View facility once it is allowed to reopen.



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Communications & Marketing Co-Chairs

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