

The Cost of Running the OSC

We've all heard it before: "Over half of the population of Orcas Island are seniors." This certainly explains why Orcas Senior Center (OSC) has become a pillar of the social services infrastructure of Orcas Island.

What many people do not know is that Orcas Senior Center receives no tax dollars of any kind from County or other government sources. While most senior centers in the United States fall under Parks and Recreation taxing districts, Orcas Senior Center is—and has always been—an independent nonprofit entity. We depend entirely on donations, membership fees, and grants for our operations.

Since its inception in 1976 as a district of the Senior Services Council of San Juan County (also a nonprofit organization, in spite of the name), Orcas Senior Center has grown from a few volunteers serving lunch in a basement to what it is today: A vibrant place where people of all ages come for intellectual and social engagement, a range of health and wellness services, and more.

With scores of classes and activities, several major programs, and a widening range of services, the costs for running the center have steadily increased over the last few years. Meals on Wheels expanded significantly during the COVID shutdown, and meal deliveries have stayed steady at the higher rate ever since. Currently, OSC and our partners prepare and serve or deliver more than 1,200 meals every month.

These low cost meals and other low cost or free services offered at OSC may give the impression that the cost of providing them is also low. Not so. Even though the center is run extremely efficiently by fewer than three full-time equivalent nonprofit staff, the cost of day-to-day operations is about \$400,000 per year. As the OSC building ages (it is now 23 years old), the costs of maintenance have increased. An additional \$100,000 per year will be needed for building maintenance over the next several years.

Patterns of philanthropy have changed since COVID, at a time when we remain highly reliant on donations. While OSC is seeking grants to fill in the gaps, grants for general operations are scarce and tend to be in low amounts.

Without the dedicated service of many volunteers, costs would be even higher. Volunteers do everything from answering the phone to staffing the front desk to helping set up and clean up the lunchroom, and so much more. Without the help of volunteers, it would be impossible for the center to offer the range of services that it does. Thank you, volunteers. We could not do it without you! If you're interested in volunteering with Orcas Senior Center, please contact Edy Hansen at Edy@orcasseniors.org or (206) 413-6167.