



# The HUB

Helping, Uniting and Building

## Getting to know us!

- Introduction
- Housing Initiatives
- Connections and Collaborations
- Events and Workshops
- Success Stories
- Resource Corner

We look forward to keeping you informed and connected through this newsletter!



## Introduction

By Danicka Ransom

We are thrilled to introduce the first edition of our quarterly newsletter from the Housing and Community Services Department. This newsletter aims to keep you informed about the latest developments, programs, and initiatives that directly impact our community.

At the Housing and Community Services Department, our mission is to build a better community by encouraging civic engagement, providing excellent customer service, and creating economic empowerment that leads to sustainable communities. Through this newsletter, we hope to foster greater transparency, communication, and engagement with you as you learn about the department and our services.

### In each issue, you can expect to find updates on:

- **Housing Initiatives:** Details on upcoming housing projects and developments in our community.
- **Connections and Collaborations:** Highlights on how we partner internally with other County Departments as well as community partners.
- **Events and Workshops:** Announcements of events, workshops, and seminars relevant to housing and community events.
- **Success Stories:** Inspiring stories of individuals or families positively impacted by our services.
- **Community Programs:** Information about programs designed to support and empower residents.

A special **Thank You** to **Ms. Harley Ryan**, (Graphic Design & Digital Content Creation Specialist, Communications Department), for her time and creativity in getting us started with this design and template.



# Fair Housing Month

By Danicka Ransom

April is Fair Housing Month, a time dedicated to reflecting on and advancing the principles of fairness, equity, and inclusivity in housing. It is essential to recognize the strides made and the work still required to ensure that every individual, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, familial status, or disability, has access to fair and equitable housing opportunities. Fair Housing Month is not only about remembering past achievements but also about committing to future progress. Inclusion in housing is vital for creating diverse, vibrant, and equitable communities.

By working together to eliminate discrimination and promote fairness, we can build a society where everyone has the opportunity to live in a community that supports their well being and aspirations. Osceola County BOCC proclaimed April 2024 as Fair Housing Month by presenting the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and the Osceola County Association of Realtors with a proclamation.



## 2024 Fair Housing Bus Tour

By Vanessa Lopez



Osceola County, as the lead agency, partnered with the City of Kissimmee to organize a bus tour showcasing recent Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects throughout the County. This tour aimed to provide key stakeholders with a firsthand look at the impact and scope of these initiatives within the community.

The tour highlighted successful CDBG-funded projects, demonstrating how public funds were utilized to enhance infrastructure, support affordable housing, and improve community facilities. In efforts of spreading fair housing awareness, a video was presented, valuable information including literature was disseminated, and activities were conducted. By engaging stakeholders directly through this tour, Osceola County and the City of Kissimmee effectively illustrated their commitment to improving and building a more sustainable community. Click here to view:

<https://vimeo.com/984984130>



## Dillingham Apartments

By Mireya Vasquez

A complex considered a first of its kind here in Osceola County, Dillingham Apartments is partly the result of a funding effort between the Osceola County BOCC and the City of Kissimmee. In collaboration with Park Place Behavioral Health Care, the complex will provide low-income residents of Osceola County with special needs earning 22-60% of the area median income (AMI) with access to supportive services. These services include mental health care, case management, peer specialists, agency resources, and support in accessing social services available within the community. The three-story building will feature 30 apartment units, as well as a combined entertainment room, community room, computer room, and classroom. The grand opening and ribbon cutting occurred on June 5, 2024.



## Cameron Preserve Phase II

By Mireya Vasquez



The Osceola County BOCC celebrated the opening of 84 new affordable rental housing units at Cameron Preserve Phase II on August 28, 2024. Cameron Preserve Phase II is an affordable housing community for low-income families and individuals earning at or below 60% of the area median income (AMI). Phase II shares recreational facilities with Phase I, which includes 100 affordable rental housing units and amenities such as a community pool, gym, and a building with classroom space. Resident programs such as employment assistance, health and wellness services, financial management programs, and an on-site food pantry are available. Phase II included an \$8.2 million financial commitment from the Osceola County BOCC and a partnership with Florida Housing Finance Corporation. The units will remain affordable for 50 years.





## Community Resources Network Events

By Arleen Fernandez



Throughout this past year, Osceola County Housing and Community Services has proudly led the organization of Community Resources Network Events across every district in Osceola County. These events have been pivotal in connecting residents with vital information, assistance, and resources aimed at addressing a wide range of community needs. With strong support from the Osceola County BOCC and the active participation of over 40 key partner agencies including the Osceola Library System, Florida Department of Health, Community Legal Services, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Florida Department of Agriculture. These events have served as a crucial platform for delivering up-to-date services and information to those in need.

Each event was tailored to ensure residents received timely access to resources such as healthcare, legal assistance, veterans' services, and agricultural support, among others. By working collaboratively with our partner agencies, we were able to ensure that all residents, regardless of their specific needs, were delivered up-to-date information and access to services. The success of these events speaks to the dedication and coordinated efforts of all involved.



## ELDERLY SERVICES

By Wilda Belisle

The County is dedicated to supporting the needs of older adults in our community. Our office, with the help of knowledgeable coordinators, provide information and referrals to various support services tailored for seniors.

In addition to referrals, the office offers several specialized programs designed to promote health, wellness and social engagement for seniors aged 55 and older.

**Zumba Classes:** Available at the Robert Guevara Community Center. These classes provide a fun and safe way for seniors to stay active and improve their fitness through dance and aerobic exercise.

**Senior Smile Program:** Recognizing the importance of oral health, this program serves seniors aged 55 and older who need dentures or partials. It includes the initial dental examination and the provision of necessary dentures.

**Eyeglass Program:** This program addresses vision care for seniors who lack insurance coverage for eyeglasses. It covers the cost of eye exams and eyeglasses, ensuring that seniors have access to necessary vision care.

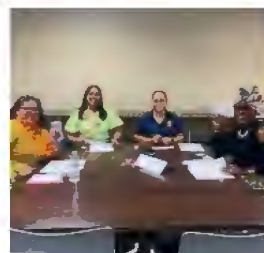




## Teambuilding Day

By Danicka Ransom

In a world often dominated by headlines of discord and division, it's easy to overlook the quiet, powerful moments that weave kindness into the fabric of our everyday lives. Random acts of kindness, those spontaneous gestures of goodwill, have a unique way of transforming not only the recipients but also the givers and everyone who witnesses the act. In July, the staff participated in our annual Teambuilding Day which included a challenge of performing "random acts of kindness" around our office. This included staff donating used items to Goodwill Industries, picking up trash in the parking lot, complimenting a stranger, or paying for a lunch at a local eatery. Cultivating a culture of kindness starts with each of us. By making a conscious effort to perform and encourage acts of kindness, we contribute to a more empathetic and supportive community. It's about creating moments of connection and spreading goodwill, which, in turn, can lead to a ripple effect that reaches far beyond our immediate surroundings. The teambuilding day also included a day filled of other collaborative activities and training.





## Staff Recognitions



Congratulations to **Ms. Lizette Pagan** on 30 Years of Service to Osceola County.



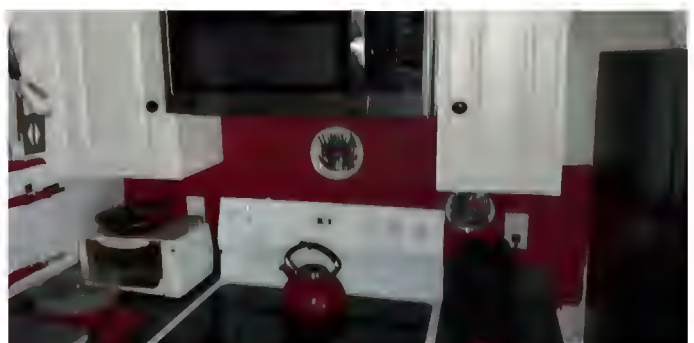
Congratulations to **Ms. Vanessa Lopez** on successfully completing the Leadership Osceola Class of 2024 Program.



## Our Community

Yadira Gonzalez, single mom of two, was a returning applicant from the prior year. Ms. Gonzalez was unable to secure a home the first time she applied. Rather than giving up, she used this setback as motivation to change her strategy. Ms. Gonzalez started saving money monthly in preparation of becoming a homeowner one day. She treated her personal savings account as a “bank”, to mimic what it would be like to be a homeowner one day. When the purchase assistance program reopened in spring of 2024, Yadira re-applied. Yadira was able to secure a single-family home where she could continue to raise her boys. Yadira’s journey is a powerful testament to resilience and hope. Her story is proof that dreams of homeownership are within reach, and we were thrilled to see it unfold before our eyes!

When Ms. Cain first applied for the Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation program, her hope was to make her home more accessible for her husband. As an elderly couple who had weathered many life challenges together, the upgrades represented ongoing independence. During the preliminary phase of the project, her husband passed away leaving Ms. Cain alone in the home. Ms. Cain later shared with staff that the OOR project gave her something to look forward to although her husband would never be able to benefit from the upgrades. The addition of the new appliances and the refurbished front porch brought life to Ms. Cain. Since her husband’s passing, she has been able to spend most of her day outside on her rocking chair. Ms. Cain continues to show her appreciation of the program, in attending our CDBG Community Meetings and giving her testimony to others.





## Community Assistance

**1-800-96 ABUSE (800-962-2873) for  
Children / Elderly Abuse**

**Children's Advocacy Center Osceola**

704 Generation Point, Ste. 301, Kissimmee, FL 34744  
407-742-1545

**Help Now, Inc.**

108 Church Street, Kissimmee, FL 34744  
24 Hour Hotline: 407-847-8562  
24 Hour Text line: 321-306-0677  
Shelter: 407-847-0128 / Outreach: 407-847-3286

**Your Mental Health Matters**

Need someone to talk to?  
Call, Text or Chat call 988 or online at 988lifeline.org

**Park Place Behavioral Health**

206 Park Place Blvd., Kissimmee, FL 34741  
407-846-0023

**Senior Resource Alliance**

3319 Maquire Blvd. Suite 100, Orlando, FL 32803  
407-514-1800

**Community Legal Services - Helpline**

800-405-1417  
[www.legalaccessforall.org](http://www.legalaccessforall.org)

**The Early Learning Coalition of Osceola County**

1631 East Vine Street, Ste. E, Kissimmee, FL 34744  
321-219-6300

**Osceola Career Center**

Valencia College, 1800 Denn John Lane, CIT Building, Suite 300,  
Kissimmee, FL 34744 (Parking Lot G)  
[www.careersourcecentralflorida.com](http://www.careersourcecentralflorida.com)  
[www.employeflorida.com](http://www.employeflorida.com)  
800-757-4598

**Resource Center**

# Housing and Community Services Contacts



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## **Warren Houglund**

Assistant Director, Housing and Community Services

Community Service Programs

- Homeless Prevention
- Rental Assistance
- Healthy Seniors Initiative (Eyeglass Prescription Program and Senior Smiles Dental Program)

Email: rentalhelp@osceola.org



## **Jennifer Heron**

Financial Compliance Manager

Community Service Grants

Betterment Grants

Email: ochcs@osceola.org



## **Vanessa Lopez**

Community Grants Manager

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Home Investment Partnership Program

- Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation
- Eviction Prevention / Rental Program
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance; Mortgage Foreclosure Assistance
- Down Payment Assistance Program

Email: cdbg@osceola.org or Email: ship@osceola.org



## **Lizette Pagan and Cheryl Leonard**

Section 8 Program Coordinators

Housing Choice Voucher Program

- Section 8 Program / Rental Assistance Program

Email: housing@osceola.org



## **Antonio Quinones,**

Veterans Services

Office: (407) 742-8455

- Disability Claims Processing; Education Claims Processing
- VA Home Loan Program; Pension & Widows Pension Processing
- Burial Benefits Claim and Appeals

Email: veteranservices@osceola.org



## **Arleen Fernandez**

Social Services Coordinator

- Health Care Responsibility Act
- Indigent Direct Cremation

Email: socialservices@osceola.org



## **Wilda A. Belisle**

Senior (Elderly) Affairs Program Coordinator

- Eyeglass Prescription Program and Senior Smiles Dental Program
- Free Prescription Drug Discount Card

Email: seniorservices@osceola.org



## **Natalie Ortiz**

Homeless Coordinator

- Homeless Prevention
- Rental Assistance
- Rapid Re-Housing; Case Management

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