

CLACKAMAS, from page 10

else," she said.

Alajmi, who oversaw the changes to how the meals are provided, said that she and her volunteers now have more control over meal preparation, balancing dietary needs, portion sizes, and ensuring that there is enough food to serve everyone who shows up.

Now, she said, "we get the plate right the first time. (They'll) get a fully balanced meal and it's enough of a portion."

Mason said the atmosphere during mealtimes has noticeably changed. "It creates much more of a calm," she said.

"All you'll hear are forks clinking on plates," Alajmi said. "People get to slow down."

The Clackamas Service Center's food pantry, which serves about 300 people each month, was also redesigned.

Previously, clients would fill out a slip of paper detailing what kind of food they wanted — beans, rice, yogurt and so on. The slip would be electronically sent to the pantry, which is in the basement of the service center. Volunteers would fill the boxes with the requested food, then the client would take the food box away.

It presented a variety of problems, Alajmi said. First, the boxes would sometimes weigh close to 40 pounds, which made it difficult for homeless people on foot or on bike to carry the boxes away. And clients did not necessarily have a lot of choice in the quantity of food they received.

Now, the Clackamas Service Center uses an "open distribution" model for its pantry. Still located in the basement, all the food — canned food, rice, grains, frozen meat and prepared dinners, fresh vegetables — are openly stocked on shelves and coolers. Clients pick out the food they want, and they also choose how much.

"This is obviously much more dignified," Mason said. "It's like when you and I go shopping. The intent was to make it as close as possible (to that)."

All in all, Mason said, the changes are having a palpable effect on the service center's clients. "The level of stress in our members is so much lower," she said. "You can tell just by the look on their faces that they feel safer."



PHOTO BY AMANDA WALDROUPE

Cory Elia used the Clackamas Service Center to get through a rough period in his life. Now he returns as a volunteer and helps at the agency's clothing closet. "I still see people who come here that I used to see on the streets," he said. "They're still friends of mine."

Ric Simpson, 75, a volunteer, agreed. He noted, at the end of a meal, how people bring their plates and cups to bus tubs near the kitchen to be washed. "We didn't ask for that," he said, adding that it's one example of how the center's clientele seems to be treating each other with a little bit more patience and kindness.

Boldt said more new programs and changes will be added in the coming months. Clackamas Community College has offered to hold classes in the agency's day space, and he hopes to offer art therapy and cooking classes. Clackamas Service Center still owns the food cart it bought to serve meals while the center's main building was under construction, and he hopes to offer a job training program for clients who might go on to work in food carts.

He also wants the agency to start offering more robust programs related to getting its homeless clients off the streets, including workshops on getting subsidized housing and getting onto waitlists. "A lot of our population has nothing going for them," he said. "They aren't on any lists."

Very few of the center's clients talked

about the fire and the center's year-long closure in any detail, as if it is a fact they wish to put behind them. Many of them, however, uniformly share stories of being welcomed at the Clackamas Service Center, no matter their circumstance.

Cory Elia, 29, grew up in outer Southeast Portland and knew about the Clackamas Service Center well before he would need the agency's services himself. Just out of high school, he dated a girl whose family was "impoverished," he said, and he often joined them during visits to the Clackamas Service Center to get clothes, food, and a hot meal.

Elia said he worked for Fed Ex when, a few years ago, he injured his back. He refused to take the opiate medication he was prescribed, choosing instead to self-medicate with marijuana. The drug was not yet legal in Oregon. A co-worker told Elia's boss.

Elia was fired. Unable to get another job due to what showed up on a background check, he became homeless. He started using methamphetamine, developing what he

describes as "a horrible addiction."

Camping near a MAX station, he remembered the visits to the Clackamas Service Center with his girlfriend.

"I came right up here," he said. "I was a known criminal and drug addict in this neighborhood. They never turned me away, for anything."

He started coming to the center every day. Dinnertime, he said, "was a block of time set aside to come in, grab dinner, catch up with everybody."

Elia was homeless for three years before getting back into housing and entering recovery. He is now a junior at Portland State University. Much of his coursework completed, he still comes out to the center nearly every day to volunteer in the agency's clothing closet. "I still see people who come here that I used to see on the streets. They're still friends of mine," he said. "There's nowhere else I would rather be."

Richard Pruiett, 48, has been homeless on and off for much of his life, and, like Elia, was drawn to the Clackamas Service Center even when he had housing. "Even when I had a place, I would come down and have coffee and doughnuts in the morning with the people," he said. "It would welcome people who had places to live or people were homeless. It didn't matter. They were helping everybody."

He now camps near Reedway and 104th. But he's trying not to call it that. "Living," he said, instead. "Staying alive." He said he is "greeted every morning" by coyotes. He walks three miles from where he camps to the Clackamas Service Center.

He does not like all the changes Mason and the rest of her staff have made. He said the day space now echoes, and that the new offices make the space smaller. But he still comes every day.

He carries the schedule of the service center's hours of operation and services with him wherever he goes. The creases are nearly worn, the edges of the orange and yellow half-sheets of paper worn. And, despite how much the former church space has physically changed, he sometimes still sees people he first met on the street years ago.

IMMIGRANTS, from page 7

"We believe there is an important aspect that Buddhist thought and practice can bring to activism," said Maila Davenport, an organizer with Buddhist Peace Fellowship Portland. "And I tell you, we are just so welcomed at IMIrJ and extremely appreciative about that, and they have been extremely inclusive in their public services to make sure that there is a Buddhist aspect."

There are three distinct parts to IMIrJ's work. Besides policy advocacy, IMIrJ also directly accompanies immigrants needing support, such as to an ICE check-in or a court hearing. The third part of its work is called prophetic action — its term for community action meant to amplify the voices of those most affected by anti-immigration policies and sentiment.

"I think when we think about prophets, we think about those who speak to a different future," Loose said.

Some of this "prophetic action" has been worship services and vigils at NORCOR, FCI

Sheridan, the Washington County Courthouse and the Portland ICE facility, showing solidarity and calling for the release of detained immigrants and the end of ICE contracts.

Some clergy members demonstrating with IMIrJ at the Portland ICE facility have been arrested while sitting and praying, blocking the main gate to the inside of the ICE facility, and refusing to move when ordered by police. One of them was the Rev. Janet Farrell, a retired United Methodist Church clergy member who served from 1985 to 2012.

"As a disciple of Jesus Christ, or my Christ — I think there are a lot of Christs — he set the example caring for the oppressed, and reaching out to people that are on the margins, and including people that society has somehow decided are not worthy to be included," Farrell said. "To me, that's the message, is to love others and love your neighbor, love yourself. ... It's sort of expressing the God within you, which is a loving thing."

IMIrJ looks forward to bringing on its



Demonstrators join hands at an Oct. 5 rally near the Federal Correctional Institution in Sheridan.

PHOTO BY SARAH CLARK

new executive director, Alaide Vilchis-Ibarra, in the new year. Vilchis-Ibarra has fought for tuition equity and has done immigration policy advocacy with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The organization also plans to continue deepening its involvement in different parts of Oregon and with more immigrant-led congregations.

"We also know that no matter what

happens in the election in November, that immigrants are still going to be living in fear, still going to be exposed to attacks from the administration and from ICE agents," Loose said. "So I think that even as we approach the election, kind of as the next marker in *la lucha* (the fight) that we also know that we continue to build power and community for the long haul."