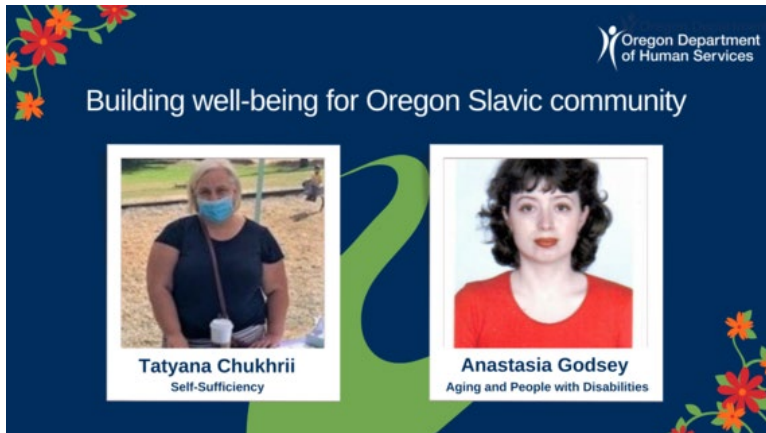


A chance meeting turns into a community partnership for better well-being for the Oregon Slavic community



“The Universe sometimes delivers just in time,” Anastasia Godsey said as she opened her email one morning. She is a Translations Specialist and Russian language Subject Matter Expert for the Equity Strategy Unit, Oregon Department of Human Services, Aging and People with Disabilities program.

The email was from Russian Oregon Social Services offering to partner with on [Slavic Family Radio](#), (1040 kHz, online radio) to tell people about Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) programs. Recently Godsey and Tatyana Chukhrii, Self-Sufficiency Program’s Community Partnership Coordinator, were at Silver Years, a Beaverton adult daycare center, telling people there what ODHS services and benefits are available. This is important because there are many misconceptions and a lack of knowledge in the Slavic community about ODHS.

The Slavic community includes people from the former Soviet Union. Many of them speak Russian and/or Ukrainian. It is the largest refugee-based community in Oregon.

The universe may have been working overtime because just the day before Godsey had participated in a Building Well-being Together presentation. She learned that this Oregon Department of Human Services’ initiative is all about the well-being of people, families and communities, especially those being left behind due to race, age, disability, identity, limited English, etc. It’s a call to action for all of us to work together to ensure that everyone has the services and supports they need. Partnering with a Russian Oregon Social Services, a community-led organization, and being on Slavic radio is a great example of Building Well-being Together.

"We love our community, and we want it to thrive. But the situation is that according to a recent study from the Coalition of Communities of Color and Portland State University it was found

that our community is in rather a dire situation. We have childhood poverty. Many children must work to support their families instead of going to school. It's hard to get out of poverty when you lack an education," Godsey said. She is also the chairwoman of the Slavic ODHS Employee Resource Group.

Many Slavic people have come to this country as refugees. They had been mistreated by the government in their home countries so they may mistrust anything to do with the government in the U.S. There is also a language barrier. Many recent refugees and immigrants may not know English at all and need someone to guide them through getting available resources.

Another issue is that there is not good population data available. It's estimated that there are 20,000 Slavic people in Oregon. But that number is believed to be severely undercounted. The reason for that is because the Slavic community has been conventionally included in the White category, which does not then separate out the issues facing this group of people. The report lists challenges in both economic and social areas, especially noting disparities in education, jobs, having health insurance, home ownership and home equity. As the report states, "All of us – Whites and communities of color – hold a "shared destiny." Our progress as a region is help back when pronounced inequality exists."

"Education of the Slavic community about the programs and opportunities provided by our agency is very important to help dissolve misconceptions, to let people know what they can apply for, to provide different resources and assistance with things such as housing, utilities, food benefits, escaping domestic violence, and so they can ask us questions," Chukhrii said. She conducts culturally-specific outreach to diverse organizations to tell people about what ODHS has to offer. She speaks Russian and Ukrainian.

With these outreach efforts and with partnering with the community to bring accurate information about what resources are available – that is truly helping to bring well-being to the Slavic community in Oregon.