



Spring 2025



The Next Chapter for Orion Begins....

On March 17th, Orion's Board of Directors and Staff were excited to welcome Margarita Mirkil as their new Executive Director. Margarita's diverse experience is well suited to lead Orion's mission of supporting vulnerable neighbors. She served as the Executive Director of La Comunidad Hispana (LCH) in Kennett Square and has led finance, development, operations, and Spanish reading and communications initiatives serving nonprofits in the region. Margarita is fluent in Spanish and holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MBA from Columbia University.

"I am thrilled to join Orion", Margarita said. "The work being done here is so important. I look forward to helping Orion deepen its strategic partnerships and continue to build on the incredible legacy and critical services it contributes to the community."

Ellen Scott, President of Orion's Board shared, "Margarita's dedication to Orion's mission will assure that Orion, its programs and community will prosper as a result of her steady hand and non-profit acumen. We couldn't be happier to have her lead the Orion team."

We hope many of you will meet Margarita in the coming months at an event, community festival, or stopping by the office when you are in Phoenixville. We are looking forward to introducing Margarita to our wonderful community!

Bridges Out of Poverty Workshop

Empowering Communities
Through Education and Support

Friday, April 25 9-12:30
St. John's Lutheran Church
355 St. John's Circle, Phoenixville



Everyone welcome!

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Two familiar faces were visiting Orion Communities on one of those first spring days of March. The young man has been experiencing homelessness in Phoenixville and had stopped by the office to pick up his mail, where he encountered another guest who was passionately sharing her frustrating job search with Orion's receptionist.

The gentleman engaged his new acquaintance in conversation and took her under his wing and encouraged her to apply for a job at Wawa, where he is currently employed. They worked at Orion's Tech Center as he helped her through the online application process and eased some of her frustrations. You just never know who is going to assist who at Orion!





End of a Great Program as we Look for New Options

Since 2019, Orion’s ROOFs program has provided hotel stays and focused case management to help families transition from homelessness to permanent housing. 304 households received an average of 6 weeks in a hotel and 52 families received assistance with security deposits as they moved into their new homes.

The program has been rewarding for many families – as one client put it, “We just needed time to think and not worry about the next meal for our kids or sleeping in our car one more night, thank you.”

However, it has become apparent that because of the decrease in affordable housing, individuals and families have continued to struggle to find permanent housing by the end of their hotel stay. As a result, the ROOFs program has ended.

Orion will continue to work to support those in need of stable housing and fight for more affordable housing in our community. We would like to thank our clients, funders, and the community for working to get the best outcome for our neighbors in need.

Did you know that the Federal government considers a family of four earning nearly \$100,000 as ‘low income’ in Chester County?

HUD guidelines specify that affordable housing costs should not exceed 30% of gross household income. And housing that exceeds that threshold is considered **financially unsustainable**.

The Fair Market Rate for a two bedroom unit is \$1737, meaning the household needs to earn \$69,480, yet 40% of workforce earns less than \$61,000/year.

Habitat for Humanity of Chester County

Sheer Determination

In December a woman with an infant called requesting security deposit assistance. She was escaping a domestic violence situation but with no childcare and few resources, the young mother had to cut back on work and remove herself from the toxic situation.

Mom had leaned on friends and family as much as she could and now was determined to get herself into a place of her own before the holidays.

She found an apartment but could not afford the \$2500 security deposit so she started making calls and connected with Human Services and Orion. Together, both agencies took part in the assessments and agreed to cover the entire amount.

This woman is working towards full time hours and beginning her new chapter with her baby in daycare and a place they can call home. She is very grateful and excited for this new lease on life.

Orion’s Case Manager reported, “Mom took initiative every step of the way, initiating group emails to all parties that needed to be involved – the landlord, Human Services and Orion. She was determined to advocate for herself and for her child and kept her eye on the goal the entire time. The time from the first contact with Orion to having the deposit was just 48 hours. It was nothing short of a pleasure to be a part of her success.”



Sent by a friend who asks - Who says there's no affordable housing in Phoenixville? Creek front property, close to downtown shopping and entertainment. Jan, 18, 2025



We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say it's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem. Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.

Fred Rogers



From Nora Alvarez, Orion Board Vice President

My path to becoming a volunteer and a donor originated long before I became either. As an immigrant who lived in three different countries by the age of 9, I realized early that everyone needs, and deserves, a hand at some point in their lives. This can take many forms, from a winter coat through the local church (for which we were eternally grateful our first winter in Spain) to the 4th grade teacher in the United States who saw me as so much more than someone struggling to adapt to a different culture and a confusing language.

My parents instilled in us a love of knowledge, kindness and respect toward others and a sense of obligation to help those we meet along the way. Every experience I have had led me to Orion Communities, an organization I am proud to be a part of. Neighbors helping neighbors, in all ways.



Local Father Secures a New Home With His Children

Last month, an Orion Case Manager helped a divorced single dad with a security deposit. He has three children and they had been living at his parent’s home but were ready to move into a new place for a fresh start.

He will be able to support himself and his children going forward but just could not afford the whole security deposit of \$3,500! The Case Manager knew Orion could not contribute the full amount but the client secured support from personal contacts and other resources. Once Orion had confirmation that other people were involved, the Case Manager reached out to additional partners that are available for emergency situations - the full balance was raised. The client was able to sign the lease on Valentine’s Day and the family happily moved to their new home on February 22nd.

In 2024, with your support, Orion was able to provide financial assistance to over 300 local households with critical housing needs!



Third Annual Casino Royale was another success!

New friends, new sponsors and donors, plus lots of laughter assured that a good time was had by all! This year’s event included the musical talents of Chuck Miller aka Keezus and DJ Moshe, the Spin Therapist, which were enjoyed by everyone.

Some in attendance tried their luck at the tables, others seem to skip the games and focus on the fabulous food, auction items, and dancing. Whatever your preference, the evening created by Orion’s wonderful Staff and Volunteers is more fun every year!



