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Care at the heart of organization's work

Nonprofit's founder says healing the wounds of her community is mission of Odyssey World



Odyssey World International Education Services board member Rhetta Rubenstein, from left, administrative assistant Miracle Joslin, founder and executive director Karen Morrison, and board member Pandora Pierce stand for a portrait outside RichlandHub Coffee Shop.

By KELSEY TURNER The Columbian

Karen Morrison, founder and senior executive director of Washington-based nonprofit organization Odyssey World International Education Services, says she stands on the shoulders of great Black and African American women.

She said she learned at a young age that for white women, the ceiling is glass. But for Black women, it is concrete.

She said the encouragement of her grandmothers, mothers and daughters has given her the strength to connect with others over traumatic social issues, including houselessness, education inequalities, food insecurity, mental illness, domestic violence and racism. For Morrison, personal relationships are key to empowering communities.

"Rules without a relationship lead to rebellion," she said. "That's why it's important to connect individual to individual."

Odyssey World, founded in Spokane in 2006 before relocating to Vancouver in 2014, is primarily run by a volunteer staff of about 20 people along with two part-time employees.

The organization's acronym spells out "owies," which Morrison said speaks to the heart of her work: healing the wounds of BIPOC communities. BIPOC is a term that stands for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

"When you see Odyssey World International Education Services, you see my heartbeat," she said. "We are faced with so many challenges



"We are faced with so many challenges as BIPOC people living in Clark County and surrounding cities. It is imperative that we work together to eliminate the racist undercurrent that has been here for far too long. It is time to end it."

Karen Morrison Founder and senior executive director of Odyssey World International Education Services

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Climate Change and Health Care

Extreme weather imperils clinics

Report finds medical facilities jeopardized by wildfires, floods, more

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dr. Suzy Fitzgerald remembers looking out the windows as wildfire flames surrounded the hospital where she worked.

"We had fire in all three directions," Fitzgerald recalled. "I thought, 'Oh gosh, this is serious. We need to get these people out.'"

Fitzgerald helped with the evacuation of 122 patients from Kaiser Permanente's Santa Rosa Medical Center on that night nearly five years ago, as the blaze gobbled up homes and buildings across Northern California. The hospital, which had filled with smoke, closed for 17 days.

Medical centers around the country say that fires, flooding, heat waves and other extreme weather are jeopardizing medical services, damaging health care facilities and forcing patients to flee their hospital beds, according to a report released Thursday by the House Ways and Means Committee.

At a hearing, Dr. Parinda Khatri, the CEO of Cherokee Health Systems, told the committee that a pediatric clinic in Knoxville, Tenn., was forced to close for 10 days this summer during a heatwave after the air conditioning system broke down.

Nearly wildfires forced evacuations at facilities in Oregon during 2020, Elizabeth Schneck of Providence Health told the committee.

A majority of the 63 hospital systems and community health centers that responded to the committee's questionnaire say they have experienced at least one extreme weather event at some point in the last five years, with many of those saying they had experienced more than one.

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Dana Milbank: Study: GOP has gone to extremes

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War in Ukraine

Zelensky: Burial site contains torture victims

Investigators have found more than 440 graves so far

By VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

IZIUM, Ukraine — Investigators searching through a mass-burial site in Ukraine have found evidence that some of the dead were tortured, including bodies with broken limbs and ropes around their necks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Friday.

The site near the northeastern city of Iziium, recently recaptured from Russian forces, appears to be one of the largest discovered in Ukraine.

Zelensky spoke in a video he rushed out just hours after the exhumations began, apparently to underscore the gravity of the discovery. He said more than 440 graves have been found at the site but that the number of victims was not yet known.

Digging in the rain, workers hauled body after body out of the sandy soil in a misty pine forest near Iziium. Protected by head-toe suits and rubber gloves, they gently felt through the decomposing remains of the victims' clothing, seemingly looking for identifying items.

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Experts work during the exhumation of bodies Friday in the recently retaken area of Iziium, Ukraine. Ukrainian authorities discovered a mass burial site near the recaptured city containing hundreds of graves.



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Morrison

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as BIPOC people living in Clark County and surrounding cities. It is imperative that we work together to eliminate the racist undercurrent that has been here for far too long. It is time to end it."

Since relocating to Vancouver, Morrison and her staff have provided support to Vancouver's Black, Indigenous and people of color and low-income families in five service areas: youth engagement, food security and basic supplies, COVID-19 resources, homelessness prevention, and Black/African American women's peer support.

Recently, Morrison has made police accountability one of the organization's priorities. She and her staff are looking closely at who tends to be targeted by the police, while advocating for dashboard and body cameras for officers.

"We're leveling the playing field by taking this in front of people in power to demand justice," she said.

One of Odyssey World's biggest obstacles to addressing issues like police accountability—in addition to the racism that Black, Indigenous and people of color people experience in their daily lives—is fear, Morrison said. Minority groups might be afraid to stand up for themselves for fear they will be targeted by law enforcement in the future.

"You would be intimidated at the number of Black people who are still scared to come speak out for themselves here in Vancouver," said Odyssey World Treasurer Phantasia Pierce. Morrison aims to provide a support system for Black, Indigenous and people of color communities to help them overcome that fear. "We're all of a sudden in this huge collection of people," Morrison said. "Now our voice is louder, it's stronger."

Supporting youth, especially those in juvenile detention facilities, is one mission that is personally important to Morrison. In 2019, she knocked on the door of the county's juvenile detention center and asked how she could help the children.

The facility's manager said he would accept her help, but had no funding to pay her. Morrison told him money didn't matter.

"I don't think you should have to pay people to be kind," she said.



Taylor Balkom/The Columbian
Marcelle Joslin, right, administrative assistant with Odyssey World International Education Services, talks about her experiences at the organization as founder and executive director Karen Morrison listens.

"This is something that I want to do for youth that made some bad decisions that are not bad people."

This led to Odyssey World's Community C conversations program, which engaged Black, Indigenous and people of color youth at the detention facility in monthly conversations with guest speakers about future goals and self-reflection. Though the program had to stop due to pandemic shutdowns, Morrison aims to restart it as pandemic restrictions ease. She hopes volunteers will step forward to "share the stories of inspiration with youth that desperately need to have a sense of renewed hope," she said.

Last June, Morrison invited kids from the detention facility to help Odyssey World host the city's first large-scale Juneteenth celebration at Esther Short Park.

Juneteenth, a federal holiday as of last year, commemorates the day in 1865 that the last African American slaves were freed in the U.S., 2½ years after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

With more than 80 vendors and five musical acts, the event promoted Black-owned businesses and highlighted the importance of unity. Volunteers from the juvenile detention facility wore the same shirts as the other youth volunteers so that no one would know the difference.

"It was amazing to see the mix of people come together when they don't know your history,"

HOW TO HELP

Odyssey World is participating in Give More 24, a Southwest Washington 24-hour fundraising event Sept. 22. Donations can be made at the website, www.givemore24.org/organizations/odyssey-world-international-education-services-400612c-1375-4d56-9bee-4663c0c43a9

If you're interested in volunteering with Odyssey World, an online volunteer application can be found at www.odysseyworld.org/copy-of-partners-funders and clicking on the donate button.

Cash donations to Odyssey World International Education Services can be made through PayPal by visiting www.odysseyworld.org/copy-of-partners-funders and clicking on the donate button.

Morrison said. "They felt wanted, they felt welcomed, they felt safe and they felt significant."

Odyssey World is already scheduled to host next year's Juneteenth celebration at Esther Short Park, in partnership with the city's parks department.

The Juneteenth event catalyzed many more underprivileged youth events throughout the summer, including educational field trips, multiday camps and concerts in the park through partnerships with various city and nonprofit organizations.

Miracle Joslin, a 21-year-old nursing student and Odyssey World's administrative assistant,

helped coordinate many of the youth services events this summer for kids ages 10 to 17. It was "very, very enriching" to see the friendships made between kids in the programs, Joslin said.

Odyssey World's goal to support people from all walks of life is very meaningful to Joslin, she said. "Sometimes you can just see the relief on their faces from the interactions. You know that you were able to help and make a difference."

Morrison, by mentoring young people like Joslin, paves the way for more Black, Indigenous and people of color to take leadership roles and thrive in their community.

When she first founded Odyssey World, Morrison committed herself to working without a salary. Now 59, she still refuses a salary, instead living off her retirement funds. This enables her to pay younger staff members like Joslin, who help sustain Odyssey World's mission into future generations.

It frustrates Morrison that people in government-funded positions who work to address social issues earn salaries based on the trauma of low-income and Black, Indigenous and people of color communities.

"I'm tired of people benefiting from BIPOC trauma," she said. "And then asking us to volunteer—that's the clincher. Stop asking our people to do more and do more and do more."

Climate

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The health centers reported a wide range of economic impact from the weather events, with the emergencies they experienced costing between \$28,000 to \$22 million to cover building damages, closures, evacuations, overtime for employees or deferred elective procedures, for example.

The organizations are not necessarily representative of hospital systems nationwide and may overrepresent both "large health systems with more resources to implement high-cost interventions and small community-based providers on the other side with limited supports," according to the report.

The report indicated that medical facilities are investing more resources, staff are planning to prepare for emergency weather-related events.

Fitzgerald said officials at the Kaiser Permanente facility took a hard look at its plans after the 2017 wildfire evacuation and de-

veloped new policies, including a new information tag staff attaches to patients with details about their condition and needs during an evacuation.

"It made for a much more orderly response," Fitzgerald said.

Paul Biddinger, the chief preparedness and continuity officer for the Mass General Brigham health care system in New England, said they had hired climate scientists and engineers to examine its 30 buildings after watching hurricanes and floods devastate hospitals in New Orleans, New York City and Kentucky over the last two decades.

"Our health care system is clearly vulnerable," said Biddinger. "But many people, including leaders of the health care entities themselves, often do not appreciate the degree of vulnerability." Many of the facilities included in the report indicated that they've put together working groups or have staff dedicated to climate change issues.

New York's Northwell health, the state's largest health care provider, has an emergency command room where staff monitors the news across televisions. Two



Associated Press Files
With Kaiser Permanente's Santa Rosa Medical Center in the background, a flame from an open gas valve burns at the Journey's End mobile home park after a wildfire swept through the area on Oct. 9, 2017, in Santa Rosa, Calif. Dr. Suzy Fitzgerald helped with the evacuation of 122 patients from the hospital, which had filled with smoke and was closed for 17 days.

of the screens are always turned to the weather.

From flooding that's made it difficult for ambulances navigating roads to gusty winds and snow that have threatened power, the

health care system has had to deal with more than 20 weather events in the last five years, said Donna Drummond, Northwell's chief expense and chief sustainability officer.

"I want to see something done. Even if it's something small. That one small thing could be the one thing that people need in order to make it."

Karen Morrison
Odyssey World International Education Services

The Council for the Homeless held a community forum at the end of August to gather input for Clark County's 2023-2028 Homeless Action Plan. Morrison attended the forum, but questions this long-term approach.

"When I moved here, they were on a 10-year plan. They finished that. So I worry about the things that just give birth to more plans," she said.

Morrison constantly wants to know: what is getting done? Sometimes people turn that question around on her and ask: After 16 years with Odyssey World, what have you done?

"What haven't we done?" Morrison responds. "We've marched, we've rallied for any injustice. We're out there."

In addition to its youth organizations and peer support groups, Odyssey World has provided food and supplies directly to homeless communities, helped Black families with COVID-19 rental assistance applications, gone on worldwide service trips to Kenya, Tanzania and Haiti, advocated in response to the nationwide missing and murdered Indigenous people crisis, initialized a study out of Portland State University to research the impacts of COVID-19 on Clark County's Black families, and more.

Odyssey World has also hosted events for LGBTQ, blind, deaf, Hispanic, Ukrainian, immigrant and refugee communities.

Above all, Morrison hopes to spread kindness through what Odyssey World calls "CARE," which stands for collaboration, advocacy, resource referrals and education. She serves communities with "care" by inviting everyone to the table—especially those who have been personally impacted by injustice.

"I want to see something done. Even if it's something small," she said. "That one small thing could be the one thing that people need in order to make it."

Kelsey Turner: 360-735-4536
kelsey.turner@columbian.com

Extreme weather is also a consideration when Northwell constructs a new facility or hospital, she said.

"Climate change is here, it's happening, it's impacting us," Drummond said. "We need to be resilient. Our facilities need to be able to withstand storms and that we're prepared for these events."

The health care system itself is a driver of climate change, accounting for an estimated 10 percent of the carbon dioxide emitted annually in the U.S. President Joe Biden has set a goal of cutting U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by at least half by 2030.

House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass., urged the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid to release guidelines for health care centers to track and report those emissions.

"It's clear more climate-related weather events and rising emissions will continue to worsen health care outcomes, and the time for action is now," he said.

Roughly half of the facilities responding to the committee said they are tracking their carbon footprint or using programs to reduce their carbon footprint.

Ukraine

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Associated Press journalists who visited the site saw graves marked with simple wooden crosses. Some of the markers bore people's names and had flowers hanging from them.

Before digging, investigators with metal detectors scanned the site for explosives, and soldiers strung red and white plastic tape between the trees.

Zelenskyy said hundreds of civilian adults and children, as well as soldiers, had been found near Izium's Pishchanek cemetery after being tortured, shot or killed by artillery shelling.

He cited evidence of atrocities, such as a body with a rope around its neck and broken arms. In another sign of possible torture, one man was found with his hands tied, according to Serhiy Bohdan, the head of Kharkiv police investigations, and Ukraine's commis-

sioner for human rights, Dmytro Lubinets.

Ukrainian authorities warned that their investigation was just beginning, and the scale of the killings could rise dramatically.

"The harsh reality indicates that the number of dead in Izium may be many times higher than the Bucha tragedy," Oleg Kotenko, an official with the Ukrainian ministry tasked with reintegrating occupied territories, said on Telegram.

Bucha is a Kyiv suburb where authorities have said 458 bodies were found after a 33-day Russian occupation. Authorities say they have uncovered the bodies of more than 1,300 people elsewhere, many in mass graves in the Kyiv-area forest.

Zelenskyy, who visited the Izium area Wednesday, said the discoveries showed again the need for world leaders to declare Russia a state sponsor of terrorism.

Meanwhile, in his first public comments on Ukraine's recent battlefield gains, Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to

press on with the war and warned that Moscow could ramp up its strikes on the country's vital infrastructure if Ukrainian forces target facilities in Russia.

"If the situation develops this way, our response will be more serious," Putin told reporters Friday after attending a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Uzbekistan.

Russia has reported numerous explosions and fires at civilian infrastructure sites near Ukraine, as well as munitions depots and other facilities. Ukraine has claimed responsibility for some of the attacks and refrained from commenting on others.

The "liberation" of Ukraine's entire eastern Donbas region remained Russia's main military goal, Putin said.

"We aren't in a rush," he said, adding that Russia has only deployed volunteer soldiers to fight in Ukraine.

Some hard-line Russian politicians and military bloggers have lamented manpower shortages and urged the Kremlin to follow

Ukraine's example and order broad mobilization to beef up its ranks.

Russian officials forced access to the site near Izium after recapturing the city and much of the wider Kharkiv region in a lightning advance that suddenly shifted the momentum in the nearly seven-month war. Ukrainian officials also found evidence of torture elsewhere in the region.

The U.N. human rights office said it would investigate, and the human rights group Amnesty International said the discovery of the mass burial site confirmed "our darkest fears."

Most of the people buried at the site were believed to be civilians, but a marker on one mass grave said it contained the bodies of 17 Ukrainian soldiers.

Russian officials distanced themselves from responsibility for the site.

The Kharkiv region's Russian-installed governor, Vitaly Ganchev, told Russia's state-run Tass news agency that Ukrainian, not Russian, forces were responsible for

civilian casualties in Izium. Tass also quoted a member of Russia's parliament, Alexander Malkevich, claiming that Ukrainian troops had abandoned their dead, so Russian forces buried them.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, the war continued to claim lives and wreak destruction.

Ukraine's presidential office said Russian shelling killed five civilians and wounded 18 in a 24-hour span. Missile strikes were also reported, with Zelenskyy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih among the targets for a third consecutive day Friday. Air raid sirens howled in the capital, Kyiv.

More of the targeted pro-Russian separatist officials were reported in areas under their control. Separatist authorities said a blast killed the prosecutor-general and his deputy of the self-proclaimed republic in the Luhansk region. Moscow-backed authorities said two Russian-installed officials were also killed in Berdiansk, a city in the Zaporizhzhia region occupied earlier in the war.