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# The Register-Guard

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## CRISIS ASSISTANCE HELPING OUT ON THE STREETS RESPONSE SERVICE

### Three who can attest to impact of service

Caller, social worker, researcher share insights

**Alan Torres**  
Eugene Register-Guard  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Kelsey Moore called CAHOOTS when her friend experienced a mental health crisis. Stacy Bierma Welch called CAHOOTS for help for her clients in the White Bird Front Rooms. Jonathan Davis and his team studied CAHOOTS and found positive impacts on people experiencing a mental health crisis and Eugene as a whole: both in safety and in cost.



The service dedicated to Crisis Assistance and Helping Out On The Streets first contracted with the City of Eugene in 1989 and from September 2017 to June 2024, Eugene and Springfield residents could call the service 24 hours per day. Today, Springfield residents can call 12 hours per day and Eugene residents can't call at all.

#### CAHOOTS saved her friend

Kelsey Moore has been a resident of Eugene nearly all her life.

She has called CAHOOTS several times over the years seeking help for her friends or people she ran into on the street.

See **IMPACT**, Page 6A



**White Bird Front Room worker Stacy Bierma Welch speaks with Eugene resident Jimmy Johnson, right, near the Front Room Workers Rally in downtown Eugene.**  
HALEIGH KOCHANSKI/THE REGISTER-GUARD



**Mobile Crisis staff member Leslie Prieto, right, gives Sen. Ron Wyden, left, and Rep. Val Hoyle a tour of one of the mobile crisis vans at Lane County Behavioral Health. Lane County mobile crisis vans operate under the model outlined in Wyden's CAHOOTS act.** CHRIS PIETSCH/THE REGISTER-GUARD

## Model for crisis response left behind

Local, state and federal decisions that ended CAHOOTS service in Eugene

**Alan Torres** Eugene Register-Guard | USA TODAY NETWORK

Since 1989, the CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets) response service had been contracted by the city to help Eugene residents. Until this year, that is, when Eugene and White Bird Clinic, the nonprofit that ran the alternative crisis care, ended their relationship.

"CAHOOTS was such an innovative program and it's pretty sad to lose that in the place where it originated," said Stacy Bierma Welch, who often called CAHOOTS while serving unsheltered Eugene residents in the Front Rooms, another defunct White Bird program. "It's a huge loss."

One researcher said while costs to provide the service increased, Eugene held its funding levels steady, paying a smaller and smaller portion of the cost over time. Another potential source of funding, Medicaid, would require changing how CAHOOTS operates and approaches its work.

When the contract ended, city officials encouraged residents to call Lane County mobile crisis services instead. As Eugene concludes its third month without CAHOOTS, county officials said they're getting a fraction of the calls CAHOOTS previously reported. Officials with Eugene Police and Eugene-Springfield Fire said their calls have been flat.

With its funding options dwindling, the service is no longer on the streets of Eugene, though some hold out hope for its



**A Lane County mobile crisis services van sits in front of the county's behavioral health building in Eugene on April 10.** BEN LONERGAN/THE REGISTER-GUARD

eventual return.

#### How was CAHOOTS historically funded?

The City of Eugene and White Bird Clinic first contracted for CAHOOTS service in 1989.

See **PROGRAM**, Page 6A

## Group sets out to restore 'third arm of public safety'

**Haleigh Kochanski**  
Eugene Register-Guard  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new nonprofit is hoping to continue the legacy of mobile crisis intervention in Eugene. It's called Willamette Valley Crisis Care (WVCC), also described as CAHOOTS 2.0.

"We want to get back out there," Michelle Perin, former CAHOOTS worker and cofounder of WVCC, told The Register-Guard.

Mobile crisis refers to an alternate response model where health professionals are deployed to emergencies instead of, or in conjunction with, law enforcement. Founded in 1989, White Bird Clinic's CAHOOTS program has received national recognition as a pioneer of this model.

CAHOOTS stands for Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets and operates as an unarmed mobile crisis

intervention team staffed by the White Bird Clinic. In April, Eugene officials announced the city was cutting ties with CAHOOTS after White Bird failed to uphold its portion of funding support to the program.

Now, WVCC hopes to recreate and expand CAHOOTS services in Eugene, but separate from White Bird Clinic. The nonprofit's mission is to provide essential mobile crisis response for non-emergency public safety and wellness

requests, according to the organization's Facebook page.

"We feel pretty strongly that a CAHOOTS-like service needs to be the third arm of public safety and having it built into the municipal infrastructure shows a commitment by the city and an understanding by the city that it is as important as the other two traditional public sector services," Perin said.

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