

Stabbin Wagon on track to receive \$1.5 million for peer respite center

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https://www.rv-times.com/localstate/stabbin-wagon-on-track-to-receive-1-5-million-for-peer-respite-center-attorney-says/article_93ea2d64-4925-11ee-9a97-c796e01bcd50.html

Attorney says Local agencies reluctant to speak out for fear of retaliation by nonprofit's owner, who was arrested Aug. 3

An attorney representing Stabbin Wagon, a Medford-based harm-reduction nonprofit whose owner was recently arrested for allegedly interfering with law enforcement, said the organization has signed a contract with the Oregon Health Authority to open a facility for people in mental or emotional extremis.



Named for the clean needles the organization hands out for free with other supplies for safer drug use, Stabbin Wagon operates a mobile unit that rotates among a handful of sites, notably the Hawthorne Park area.

PICTURE - Stabbin Wagon employees Melissa Jones, left, and Samantha Strong, talk with attorney Sarah Alvarez at a hearing Aug. 24 challenging the city's ban from them being in downtown.

The health authority has confirmed receipt of the signed contract and, as of Friday, had not asked Stabbin Wagon for any further information or indicated any issues, according to Alicia LeDuc Montgomery, a lawyer at the law firm LeDuc Montgomery LLC.

As far as the nonprofit knows, Stabbin Wagon is on track to receive about \$1.5 million in state funds to establish a peer-run respite program in Southern Oregon, said Montgomery, who has a civil rights focus. The funds would cover two years of operation.

“Stabbin Wagon’s leadership and respite team is ready to successfully provide the peer respite supports to the community,” Montgomery said in an email.

In a message sent through Montgomery, Stabbin Wagon explained: “A peer respite is a non-clinical alternative to hospitalization and other interventions for people in crisis. People 18

years or older will be able to stay in a home-like setting for up to two weeks with no restrictions on coming and going freely from the respite. It will be staffed with peers, people who have navigated the mental health system, who are trained in Intentional Peer Support and are available 24/7 for those staying at the respite.

“This will be a groundbreaking, non-coercive resource for our Southern Oregon community that will support people as they determine for themselves how to turn their crisis into a learning experience and how to move forward.”

Stabbin Wagon had tentatively named the program Trillium Peer Respite in its grant proposal; it is now named Mountain Beaver Respite, the nonprofit said in a message. The program would serve up to six individuals for two weeks or less and would follow the “Peer Respite Handbook: A Guide to Understanding, Building, and Supporting Peer Respites,” the proposal said.

This book is largely authored by the Wildflower Alliance, a peer-recovery organization that runs a respite center in Massachusetts. The Alliance director of training wrote a letter of support for Jones, saying the organization would help train Trillium staff. Another letter of support came from a clinical assistant professor at Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing, Ashland Campus.

Tim Heider, a health authority spokesman, said in an email that OHA and Stabbin Wagon were negotiating the terms of the grant. He would not comment further.

The grants from the health authority are available through state House Bill 2980, passed by the Oregon Legislature in 2021 to establish in the state four mental health respite centers, including one in Southern Oregon.

Of several organizations evaluated for an allocated \$6 million, Stabbin Wagon is one of three awarded grants. One — Black Mental Health Oregon in the Portland area — has had its grant suspended amid a state Department of Justice investigation, The Lund Report reported last month.

In 2022, Stabbin Wagon, which acquired nonprofit status through the Internal Revenue Service the year before, received more than \$582,000 in Measure 110 funds for harm-reduction efforts. Last month, Stabbin Wagon’s founder and director, Melissa Jones, 46, [pleaded not guilty](#) in Medford Municipal Court to criminal charges stemming from an Aug. 3 confrontation with city police.

She is charged with interfering with a peace officer, second-degree disorderly conduct, harassment and resisting arrest, the RV Times reported.

A Stabbin Wagon employee, Samantha Strong, 25, also pleaded not guilty to charges of interfering with a peace officer and harassment, the RV Times reported.

During an “HIV Testing Party” that Stabbin Wagon hosted at Vogel Plaza — where the nonprofit gave out take-home HIV test kits, safe-sex supplies, snacks and merchandise — the pair allegedly tried to prevent officers from taking a female “runaway juvenile” into custody, [the RV Times reported](#).

On Aug. 28, the municipal court banned them from part of downtown through Nov. 11, an exclusion order they unsuccessfully challenged.

Jones, who advocates for houseless individuals and those with substance use disorder, is a polarizing figure in the local treatment world, often taking a combative posture toward city leaders and police. She and her staff express far-left views and align with social justice activists. At Jones and Strong’s court proceedings Aug. 24, over 20 supporters showed up in the courtroom. Afterward, police arrested a supporter for second-degree theft and tampering with evidence from the case, [the RV Times reported](#).

The RV Times reached out to other local agencies who work with the addicted population to get their perspectives on Stabbin Wagon and the prospect of its receiving a sizable state grant to run a respite center.

Although some were comfortable speaking on background, none would go on record. Some cited fear of retaliation from Jones — who has mocked and disparaged critics and ideological opponents on social media — and hesitated to put their agencies and staff through that. They pointed to Jones and her nonprofit’s social media posts and comments, which often target individuals — from elected officials and officers to private citizens.

Stabbin Wagon’s social media is awash in material vilifying law enforcement generally and the Medford Police Department, specifically. Posts frequently refer to officers as pigs and clowns, and use the acronym ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards). On Aug. 25, Stabbin Wagon shared a photo of a sharps container with the words “F--- MPD” affixed to it.

Asked about Stabbin Wagon’s approach, LeDuc responded in an interview: “What I would say ... as an attorney who practices civil rights and has represented other clients in Medford and Jackson County, is there are serious concerns within the civil rights community about the city of Medford retaliating against either advocates or nonprofits or organizations that don’t go along with the city’s agenda.”