

## **CSBG Recovery Act Success in Oregon**

A Klamath Falls, OR resident was recently awarded over \$100,000.00 from the Social Security Administration as a retroactive award from a claim that was approved in 2007 but never processed.

The claimant, a physically and mentally disabled woman, was originally denied her disability claim but appealed and eventually had the denial overturned by the Social Security Appeals Council, the final appeal in a labyrinthine administrative review process that every disabled American is subjected to if they are denied benefits in the first stage of the claim. Although the claimant received a letter informing her she had won her appeal, the paper file was lost and Social Security Administration never processed the benefits.

Walt Davis, a Benefits Specialist at Klamath and Lake Community Action Service, helped the claimant get the mistake straightened out after she sought his help through their program which offers free application assistance to qualified disabled homeless and low-income people who wish to apply for disability benefits.

Said Davis, "Because the file was lost and Social Security was not aware of the appeal decision, they gave her the latest information they had in their computer which was that she had been denied by an Administrative Law judge. Even though she had an award letter, the mentally ill claimant accepted this and did not further question the decision."

It was not until four years later that a relative, sensing something was not right, urged her to seek Davis' help. Fortunately the claimant had hung on to the award letter even though most of her other belongings had been lost or stolen over the years. After being pressed by Davis, a sister of the claimant was able to find the letter.

"This type of miscommunication is common in that you have a mentally ill person trying to assert their rights to someone they perceive as being in authority," said Davis. "Sometimes they are immediately intimidated and shut down, other times they take too long to get their point across and end up shutting down out of frustration. This claimant was so traumatized by her experience and the years it had taken to even get a hearing that she did not want my help if it meant having to start the application process over. Fortunately, I was able to avoid re-applying by talking to a very helpful Social Security worker who took the time to look into the case. The worker was as happy as I was when told the case was being processed for payment."

If you know of a severely disabled, homeless or low-income person who may qualify for Social Security Disability and who needs help navigating the application process in Oregon, contact Klamath and Lake Community Action Service at (541) 882-3500 and ask for an appointment with the SSI/SSDI Benefits Specialist.