



FACES OF THE HOMELESS

Point-in-Time tally helps to show that their lives count, too

Staff reports Statesman Journal

They're sad, lonely and scared, emotions heightened by their circumstances. Many harbor regrets for past actions and decisions that contributed to their plight. But they also have expectations and hope.

Dozens of homeless people spoke to us Wednesday during the annual Point-in-Time homeless count in Marion and Polk counties. Most were brutally honest about their living situations and their pasts, and what they need to no longer be homeless. "Most of them do want to talk to somebody and tell their story," said count organizer Diane Merry of the ARCHES Project of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency.

Some talked freely about their criminal pasts and substance abuse problems. Others talked about the lack of services for their needs, even the misconceptions the public has about them.

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Above: Robin sits on a bench in Salem on Wednesday.

CONNOR RADNOVICH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Top, from left: Clarissa, 28

ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Michelle

MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Augustin, 44

ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Kerry, 24

ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Left: Preston, 58

BROOKE JACKSON-GLIDDEN/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Homeless

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•Not everyone on the street is an animal, said 55-year-old Anthony, a heavy equipment operator who is trying to find a job after being laid up with a broken leg.

•Were not uncouth, said 36-year-old Melody, who is living in a car with her husband.

In the midst of trying to overcome barriers to finding housing, many of the homeless in our community stood up to be counted on Wednesday. Here are some of their stories:

Adrian

•I used to be a drug addict. Adrian matter-of-factly created that information to a stranger on the corner next to the Union Gospel Mission, as if he were sharing his city of residence or his occupation.

What makes him stand out is that he chooses to be homeless, at least for now.

•I have places to go, he said. •But I want to be here. There's two chapels every day, and the people are wonderful. I'm away from drugs now.

Adrian, 51, participates in the New Life Fellowship program at Union Gospel Mission. It's a 15-month Christian recovery program, providing participants counseling and discipleship.

He said he's nine months into the program this go-around, which isn't his first.

•Jesus is here. I feel Him, Adrian said.

Faith-based organizations, like the UGM, are often on the front lines of the homelessness crisis.

Researchers at Baylor University did a study across 11 major U.S. cities, including Portland, and found that 60 percent of emergency shelter beds were provided through faith-based organizations.

These organizations focus on an individual's loss of relational and spiritual capital, not just the loss of housing and other material items.

Adrian has lived in Salem most of his life and struggled for years with addiction. Recent HUD homeless counts report one in five people experiencing homelessness have a chronic substance use disorder.

Adrian, though, sees the UGM as his home.

•Everything I want is here and everything I need, he said. •I have places to live, but I don't want to go there. I don't want to relapse. I want to stay here where I'm safe.

Capri Lynn

Sara

Homeless on and off for several years, Sara was sent to prison for thefts related to homelessness.

When she got out, Sara found shelter at Shellys House, which provides transitional housing for female offenders. But she relapsed into addiction after her father died.

Sara's prison record makes it impossible to rent a home, she said, and without a home, she lost her three children.

•I begged the courts to put me back on probation so I could get housing, the 41-year-old said.

Keeping a job is difficult, too, she said.

•How do you wash your clothes? How do we not go in smelling like camp?

Myah, 19, stands outside the motor home she shares with her niece in the WinCo parking lot on Lancaster Road SE in Salem on Wednesday. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Now, she lives in the woods and Wallace Marine Park and gets by on food stamps and food boxes, and by selling and buying bikes.

Sara's hope of someday finding a home and reuniting with her children was undermined last summer, when she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Recently, someone burned down her tent, with all her belongings. Her homeless family helped out with a new tent, but she still needs clothes and other supplies.

•I didn't think it would be this hard. It's depressing. It's frustrating, she said. •I'm just taking it day by day.

Tracy Loew

Ben

At nearly 6 foot 6 inches, the 18-year-old was all smiles Wednesday, telling everyone he just passed his GED and has begun a part-time job at Cinebarre MovieLand downtown.

He joked that he is perhaps the coolest kid ever. And that's what those around him said, too.

Ben grew up all over the country, from Utah to Alaska, but he became homeless last July. He's been staying with a friend for the most part and has big plans for his future.

He has a long list of careers he'd like to pursue, including acting and screenwriting. •I just want to appreciate the freedom I have now but also see what my limits are, he said.

Ben first heard about the HOME Youth & Resource Center in Salem when a friend asked him to walk there to get something. That was nearly four years ago.

•I've been here since, he said.

Jeff, 54 BROOKE JACKSON/GLIDDEN/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Adrian, 51 LAUREN REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Christa, 36 LAUREN REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

James, 57 ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

But when Ben became homeless, he saw the center a bit differently.

•There are necessities here I didn't need before, like hygiene products, he said. •Their burritos are great.

Ben's job at the movie theater is his first real job. But it's part-time, and what he really needs to get out of being homeless is more money.

•The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams, he said, quoting Eleanor Roosevelt.

•That's not my quote, but it's true.

Instead, Ben created a quote of his own, a creed he lives by and something he thinks could help others who read about his journey.

•Every good and bad thing that happens to you in life is a lesson to be learned, he said. •Whether you choose to take the time to learn from the experience or repeat the mistake is in your hands.

Natalie Pate

Sara, 41 TRACY LOEW/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Ben, 18 CONNOR RADNOVICH / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Christa

Not only is Christa homeless, she's on the verge of losing custody of her 15-month-old daughter.

•In two months, they're going to adopt her out if we don't have a place, she said.

She and the father of her baby are desperately trying to work with the Oregon Department of Human Services to get their daughter back.

They both receive Supplemental Security Income, but she's having difficulty getting new identification.

They were at ARCHES on the day of the homeless count, hoping to get assistance.

•I never thought we'd be in this situation, said Christa, a 36-year-old native of Salem. •We used to have a

Robin, 60 CONNOR RADNOVICH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Jeremy and his dog, Bear, at the Polk County Homeless Connect event on Wednesday at Valley Life Church in Dallas during the Point-in-Time homeless count. Jeremy recently became homeless and now lives in a food shed. HES HAD BEAR SINCE HE WAS A PUPPY. [HES] THE LOVE OF MY LIFE. MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

James MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

•It's hard, hard in this town. Hard when you're living in the streets ... Not all the homeless are idiots. We just play them in the movies.

Jeff

•We got kicked out everywhere ... We got kicked out at transit and got a trespassing charge. We just want to get warm. We're not causing problems.

Christa

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Sara

place

Now they're scrambling to tap into community resources that might help them find housing that is available and that they can afford.

In the meantime, they worry about the obstacles they face daily while trying to stay safe and protected from the inclement weather.

•We got kicked out everywhere, Christa said. •We got kicked out at transit and got a trespassing charge. We just want to get warm. We're not causing problems.

A future court appearance on the trespassing charge and a potential case are now added to the list of obstacles they face.

Christa clings to hope that ARCHES will come through for them, trying not to think about the possibility of losing custody of her baby girl.

•We can get her back if we get housing, she said.

Capri Lynn

Robin

Outside the vacant Honda dealership on Commercial Street near downtown, soon to be the site of Salem's new police headquarters, Robin sat on a slab of cardboard and a canvas age blanket he'd arranged on a bench.

The 60-year-old has been homeless for 11 years, having previously worked as a construction worker and in the classified department of the Statesman Journal.

He turned over in his fingers his lighter and medical-marijuana pipe. Next to his seat was a grocery cart that held food, pans and a rewood, among other things. This was his typical spot, but it's where a homeless count volunteer found him Wednesday morning.

•I don't smoke, I don't drink, and I don't do drugs, he told the volunteers, saying marijuana is the exception. Robin has a double disability in his legs, he said, but no mental health issues or chronic health conditions.

Volunteers gave him a brown bag of food, gloves and hand warmers.

•I was hoping someone like you would come along, he said.

Robin has three children and 14 grandchildren. •They love me, he said, displaying his toothy and bright smile. His brother is a law enforcement officer in the area.

He's been trying to get back into the workforce for a long time but said 100 percent of his wages were being garnished for child support. Robin said he was released from jail a few days ago, where he was held for non-payment.

He's been tucking away any money he can into savings.

•You learn to survive, he said. •I'm sleeping outside, but I want to get to a place of working for my rent, remodeling apartment complexes.

Natalie Pate

Jeff

A recovering methamphetamine addict, dad, convicted felon and former gang member, he talked like the narrator in a film, voice gravelly and slow.

While sitting in the lounge of the HOAP building Jan. 31, he stood up, walked to the front of the room and said, •I'd like to say something.

•I'd like to see a shelter that's not showing a certain brand of religion down your throat, he said. •Where two people who are married can't find a certain semblance of normalcy even if they didn't get married under your God.

Many of Salem's overnight shelters have strict restrictions surrounding who gets in. Union Gospel Mission serves men, while family shelters like Salem Interfaith Hospitality Network serve families with children.

He has been in the area for 10 years, around the time he was convicted on three counts, including endangering the welfare of a minor and possession of methamphetamine. He's 90 days sober.

•It's hard, hard in this town. Hard when you're living in the streets, he said.

He said what he needs is no longer be homeless is a felony-friendly job.

•Not all the homeless are idiots, he said with a chuckle. •We just play them in the movies.

Brooke Jackson-Glidden