

## HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING

Homelessness is a topic suggested by our members and is informational, not for consensus purposes.

### A. CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The fundamental reason that people are homeless is the lack of affordable housing; the high rate of poverty, coupled with the high cost of rent, endangers the stability of thousands. In its 2015 “Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S.,” the Federal Reserve Board reported in a 2014 survey of 4,000 people that “many individuals are ill-prepared for a financial disruption and would struggle to cover emergency expenses.” The economic situation in the U.S. is dire:

- Forty-seven percent of respondents say they either could not cover an emergency expense costing \$400, or would cover it by selling something or borrowing money.
- Twenty percent of respondents report that their spending exceeded their income in the past year.
- Thirty-one percent of respondents report going without some form of medical care in the past year because they could not afford it.
- Thirty-nine percent of non-retirees have given little or no thought to financial planning for retirement, and 31 percent have no retirement savings or pension.

In looking at Lane County income statistics, the vulnerability of people is obvious. The United Way of Lane County reports that in 2013 a family consisting of two adults, one infant and one preschooler required an annual income of \$54,516. These households which earn **more** than the U.S. poverty level of \$23,550 for a family of four, but **less** than the basic cost of living for the county, are called “asset limited, income constrained, employed” or ALICE households. The number of poverty households and ALICE households is a measure of the total population struggling to afford basic needs of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, taxes and miscellaneous expenses. The total Lane County population in 2013 was 356,212, representing 144,166 households with a median household income of \$43,459 households compared to an Oregon average of \$50,251.

The following chart shows the percentage of households in eight Lane County cities that were ALICE households or below the U.S. poverty level and thus vulnerable to unexpected expenses or loss of income in 2013:

Lane County, 2013 Data		
City	Total Number of Households	Percent ALICE & Poverty
Coburg	411	39%
Cottage Grove	4,010	50%
Creswell	1,851	41%
Dunes City	588	34%
Eugene	65,201	44%
Florence	4,399	51%
Junction City	2,044	47%
Lowell	385	45%
Oakridge	1,503	46%
Springfield	23,734	48%
Veneta	1,692	41%
Westfir	116	47%

This kind of economic frailty means that many people are in danger of missing house or rent payments and therefore losing their housing. For these at-risk households, a “Housing First” approach provides short-term assistance to find permanent housing quickly and without conditions. For those who are already homeless, the Housing First approach is even more critical. Initially people need a place to live before anything else is addressed, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, attending to substance abuse, or managing health issues.

Pearl Wolfe of Lane County Health and Human Services, upon release of the 2016 Lane County Homeless PIT Count, stated “We have learned that moving people from homelessness to permanent supportive housing makes a huge difference,” and added that “The upside for this year is that 644 homeless people could be found living in permanent housing designated for homeless people on the night of the count.” Homelessness affects all Lane County residents because people without shelter may require costly support services, such as these:

- \$237-\$1,900 cost of a visit to the Sacred Heart Hospital Emergency Room –Riverbend and University District,
- \$2,613-\$3,045 daily cost of care at Sacred Heart’s In-Patient Behavioral Health Unit, acute psychiatric care,
- \$800-\$1,500 cost of visit to McKenzie-Willamette Hospital Emergency Room,
- \$650 daily cost of in-patient detoxification services at Willamette Family Treatment’s Buckley Center,
- \$171 daily cost per inmate at the Lane County Jail,
- \$87 daily cost per inmate at the Springfield Jail.

## **B. THE SCOPE OF HOMELESSNESS**

### United States

Every year on a given night in January, American cities count their homeless populations as part of a federal Housing and Urban Development Department’s (HUD) “point-in-time” (PIT) survey. HUD defines a homeless individual as “a person who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” Volunteers and shelter workers search streets, cars, overpasses, parks, and tunnels to count how many of their city’s residents are living without shelter. The data is combined with a tally of various entities’ shelter beds to gauge the success of the previous year’s service efforts and to estimate how many people will need shelter in the coming year. In 2014, 1.49 million people used homeless shelters, and 578,424 were recorded as being without shelter.

Nationwide, homelessness has declined from 2014. The latest available PIT figures from January 2016 indicate that 549,928 people in the United States were experiencing homelessness. Of that number:

- 86,132 individuals, or 16% of the homeless population, are considered chronically homeless.
- 39,471, or about 7% of the homeless population, are veterans.
- 35,686, or 6% of the homeless population, are unaccompanied, single youth and young adults under the age of 24 who experienced a homelessness episode of longer than one week. Of the unaccompanied youth, 3,824 are under the age of 18.

### Oregon

Oregon is the state with the highest percentage of homeless families with children not living in a shelter, according to the HUD 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). HUD estimates that 59.1% of Oregon's homeless families with children spent the night in a place that is not normally seen as a sleeping accommodation. While the number of people experiencing

homelessness as part of a family with children decreased in 41 states from 2015 to 2016, Oregon's increase of 2.5% was the fifth highest in the nation.

Overall, 60.5% of Oregon's estimated 13,238 homeless people were unsheltered, the second highest after California. Almost 84% of chronically homeless people, 64.4% of unaccompanied homeless youth and 55% of homeless veterans live on the streets in Oregon, according to the AHAR. In November 2016 the Oregon Department of Education reported that the number of Oregon students who can't go home to a safe place they call their own has grown to a record 21,340, or 3.7% of the state's public school enrollment.

### Lane County

Lane County's 2016 homeless PIT count found 1,451 homeless people, a 1.5% decrease from 2015 numbers. Highlights of the PIT report show 405 individuals staying in emergency shelters, 112 individuals living in transitional housing (for a maximum of 24 months), and 934 men, women, and children lacking shelter. Of this total count, there are:

- 224 family members in homeless households with children: 129 sheltered and 95 unsheltered,
- 162 homeless veterans: 52 sheltered and 110 unsheltered,
- 574 chronically homeless people: 86 sheltered and 488 unsheltered,
- 434 people with a mental illness,
- 232 people with chronic alcohol/substance abuse issues, and
- 13 unaccompanied homeless youth (under 18).

### **C. SOME SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS IN LANE COUNTY**

Annual figures from the 2016 Lane County Homeless PIT report show that 12,167 individuals who sought services from local human services programs were homeless at some point during the year:

- 949 unduplicated individuals were served by St. Vincent de Paul's Egan Warming Center Coalition during 12 winter nights at multiple faith-based sites and Lane Community College during 2015-2016;
- 2,156 homeless students attended public school in Lane County during the 2014-2015 school year (Oregon Department of Education), which includes those doubled up with relatives or friends;
- 258 homeless youth were served at Looking Glass New Roads Access Center, (ages 16-21) in 2015;
- 165 runaway and homeless youth stayed at Station 7 (under age 18) during 2015; and
- 2,298 people stayed at the Eugene Mission during 2015.

Lane County's Poverty and Homelessness Board (PHB) was formed in 2014 to facilitate better-coordinated efforts among services to the homeless population. The PHB serves as the administrative board for the Lane County Community Action Agency and as the oversight board for the Lane County Continuum of Care. It provides advice to the regional Human Services Commission and the Lane County Board of Commissioners with the goal of reducing and preventing poverty and homelessness in Lane County.

### St. Vincent de Paul Social Services

St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP), Lane County's largest nonprofit service organization, with over 500 employees, helps more than 84,000 individuals and families each year with emergency and homeless services and affordable housing. It provides six core areas of service:

- Affordable housing: More than 1,400 units of housing have been developed since 1988, including Bascom Village in Eugene, Myrtlewood in Springfield, Alona Place in Junction City and units in Marion and Linn counties;
- Emergency services: In 2015 SVDP helped approximately 8,400 households and provided about 18,400 food boxes;
- Recycling programs: In 2015 SVDP diverted 25,367,976 pounds of reusable materials and 195,461 mattresses from landfills;
- Retail Thrift Stores: 15 SVDP thrift stores statewide (12 in the Eugene area) sell affordable used items and generate the majority of revenue for its charitable programs;
- Self-sufficiency services: SVDP helps about 1,100 people with job training, employment and placement each year; and
- Homeless services: The Egan Warming Center can serve 300 people during nights with below 30 degree temperatures. In 2015 Eugene Service Station and First Place Family Center provided day services for 8,009 adults and 540 families with 1,117 children; and Dusk to Dawn provided night shelter and safe parking for 1,100 adults and families.

A new strategy to provide additional housing is SVDP's recent acquisition and rehab of five mobile home parks including Oak Leaf in Portland, Tivoli in Junction City, Harwoods Manor in Santa Clara, and Hillcrest and Oakridge Mobile Parks in Oakridge. Financing is made possible through a State Affordable Housing Grant. As a condition for receiving the grants, SVDP must ensure that spaces are occupied by residents with incomes below a certain percentage of the area's median income. SVDP achieves its goals by partnering with the Eugene Mission, Lane Housing Authority, Food for Lane County, Catholic Community Services, Cahoots, and the Veterans Administration (VA).

Supportive Services for Veteran Families(SSVF) is a SVDP program assisting homeless veterans and those at risk of losing housing with the resources needed to become or remain housed. The VA provides financial assistance through grants.

In addition to the above, SVDP partners with Eugene, Bethel, and Springfield school districts and Hosea Youth Services to provide homeless high school youth with secure housing and social services. The conversion of a former church on Willamette Street in Eugene will house homeless high school students, ages 16-18, for up to two years as long as they stay in school.

#### Housing and Community Service Agency of Lane County (HACSA)

HACSA is the public housing authority for the City of Eugene, the City of Springfield, and Lane County. HACSA's Board of Directors consists of the Lane County Board of County Commissioners plus two board members who are residents of HACSA properties. It has 97 employees and is the second largest housing authority in Oregon.

HACSA's mission is to provide safe, affordable and energy-efficient housing for low income families, elderly citizens, and persons with disabilities. It provides housing and supportive services to approximately 4,300 Lane County families each year through the federal Section 8 and Public/Affordable Housing programs, as well as energy conservation by weatherizing 300 homes each year for low-income renters and property owners. The Section 8 Rental Assistance Program provides a voucher that assists the recipient in renting housing from a private landlord if the rent is reasonable and the unit passes a Housing Standard Inspection. Recipients pay approximately 30% of their adjusted monthly income for rent and utilities. HACSA pays the difference between the tenant contribution and the full rental cost. Waiting lists for this program are lengthy and often closed

because the need greatly exceeds the available vouchers. About 900 landlords participate in this program across Lane County, serving over 3,000 families.

HACSA owns approximately 700 public housing units in Lane County that were constructed with funding from HUD. It also owns approximately 800 units that were developed using federal low income housing tax credits. These units are located in Eugene, Springfield, Veneta, Florence, Junction City, Creswell, and Cottage Grove. A major concern is that many of its facilities are aging and require extensive maintenance not covered by operating revenue.

Another important program is the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, which uses housing assistance as a stabilizing force to allow families to invest their energies in other efforts such as employment and education. Families who complete their individual training and service plan can access a savings account created by HUD contributions to use toward education or a down payment on a house. A new HACSA initiative is the formation of Housing Plus, a non-profit that will provide additional services to some residents, such as helping them avoid eviction or clean out a unit made unlivable by hoarding.

HACSA collaborates extensively with other local non-profits. In general, such coordination has improved since the recent creation of the Lane County PHB. In partnership with Sponsors, Inc., which helps released felons re-enter the community, it is developing Oaks at 14th with 54 one-bedroom units to provide permanent housing for those completing Sponsor's transitional programs. HACSA is also working with SVDP on the Madrone project funded by a Lane County Continuum of Care HUD grant designated for housing cost assistance to the chronically homeless, including veterans. The Madrone project will also provide rent assistance for chronically homeless and disabled clients.

In partnership with ShelterCare, HACSA provides 28 units of emergency shelter and supportive services at the Family Shelter House and 16 units of supported housing at Signpost House. HACSA will partner with private developer Brian Obie to construct 50 low-rent apartment units as part of a project that will also include 131 market-rate apartment units to be built in downtown Eugene along 6th Avenue on a vacant parcel owned by Lane County.

### ShelterCare

ShelterCare helps prevent families on the verge of losing their housing by providing short-term financial assistance, counseling and other supportive services to help them regain stability. ShelterCare serves more than 1,250 individuals annually and has a four to six month waiting list of 60-65 families looking for sustainable long-term housing. ShelterCare works closely with other organizations such as Catholic Community Services, Eugene Mission, and the police.

ShelterCare provides several targeted programs:

- Outreach teams locate and engage with individuals experiencing homelessness, placing them in permanent housing and connecting them with support services.
- It provides temporary and emergency housing for people in crisis, including emergency shelter for families with children and transitional housing with case management for adults with psychiatric or medical conditions.
- The Medical Recuperation Program provides housing for people who are homeless after a hospital stay and still need limited care.
- Garden Place is a secure residential treatment facility providing a home-like residential setting for adults with severe, persistent mental illness.

- The Supported Housing Program provides services for people with psychiatric disabilities living in housing owned or managed by ShelterCare, as well as in apartments in the community.
- The Uhlhorn Program provides apartments for survivors of acquired brain injury who need training and support to prepare them for living in the community. Participants in this program may come from their home, from a rehabilitation unit or a nursing home. Referrals for this program come from across the state.

Financial support for the ShelterCare programs comes from a variety of sources: HUD, United Way, private donations, Medicaid, the Oregon General Fund match for Medicaid, state funds for Lane County mental health programs, and residents who pay 30 percent of their income in rent. Medicaid is the largest source of income for the programs, followed by HUD funding. One of the challenges of funding from diverse sources is that ShelterCare employees must track their time to a specific grant.

#### Cottage Grove Services: A Small-Community Example

Rural towns typically do not have the revenue to adequately offer social services to assist unhoused community members; however, Cottage Grove, with a population of nearly 10,000, offers many services for those who are without homes or on the brink of being homeless.

As in urban areas, the police are frequently the first to engage with those who are without housing and work closely with Community Sharing (Cottage Grove's food pantry), South Lane Mental Health (SLMH), Cottage Grove Community Hospital (ER), and South Lane School District (SLSD).

Some of the Cottage Grove services and agencies that work with the under-housed and those on the verge of losing their homes include Beds for Freezing Nights (similar to the Egan Warming Centers), Looking Glass (a rural support organization for youth), 90 by 30 (a regional child abuse prevention program), McKinney-Vento Act (which provides support for preschoolers through teens), Peggy's Primary Connection (with bilingual/bicultural services/education to families with preschoolers), free dental program to youth in SLSD (a community-supported nonprofit), Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act youth services—a federally funded program in SLSD that works with youth facing barriers, Parent Partnership (offering family services and programs) and Community Sharing.

Regardless of income or housing status, SLMH programs offer assistance for those who might otherwise succumb to homelessness because of their mental health issues. Services include: individual, family or child counseling; medication assessment, management and monitoring; referrals; crisis response; supported housing services; assistance in insurance enrollment. SLMH is imbedded in the schools throughout SLSD.

Community Sharing, serving over 5,500 unduplicated individuals in 2016, receives referrals from SLSD, Cottage Grove Community Services, Lane County Department of Health and Human Services, Senior and Disabled Services, Womenspace, Sexual Assault Support Services, Looking Glass, and other local organizations serving community meals. Community Sharing's general supportive programs (for which one does *not* need a Social Security number or SSN) include monthly and holiday food boxes, household goods and equipment, pet food, and a Latino liaison who developed the first culturally sensitive food boxes in Lane County. Throughout the growing season, farmers and home gardeners donate extra produce, while other community members donate clothing and household items throughout the year on shelves *outside* the doors of Community Sharing, making them available at all hours for many who are in need. Five days a week, six "community meals" are offered through a variety of faith based, philanthropic, and service organizations. An SSN is required, creating barriers for many undocumented and unhoused people to receive the following services from local businesses

and service organizations: assistance for costs with housing and prescriptions; special food boxes for those without cooking or cold food storage facilities; and funding for showers, laundry, propane and firewood.

The population of homeless youth in Cottage Grove has increased to 90 since August 2016. Many Cottage Grove services are focused on serving the needs of these young people, including the staff of SLSD's McKinney-Vento Act programs, Al Kennedy Alternative High School, Parent Partnership, SLMH, and Looking Glass. The Looking Glass rural program offers services for youth up to age 21 through a drop-in center which offers basic needs items, case management, family mediation services, and referrals to shelter at Station 7 in Eugene. In addition, they offer meals, bus passes, and computer use for job search and educational needs. Through a new Street Outreach Program, staff goes into the community to reach youth in need. In the future, Looking Glass hopes to offer youth support groups and regular meals.

Family Relief Nursery has operated in Cottage Grove since 1994 and works to prevent homelessness. Families who are often in crisis or at risk are given free programs such as therapeutic early childhood classes, infant classes, home visits for parents, parent education classes, respite care, crisis response, home-based support and services, Latino outreach, resource referrals, and advocacy services.

Housing projects include Habitat for Humanity, which has constructed homes for over 15 families in Cottage Grove, and is supported by a "Restore" (selling used household and building materials) and two community fundraisers each year. Another project is an affordable apartment complex, which is under construction near downtown Cottage Grove. Additionally, Cottage Village Coalition, in partnership with Square One Villages of Eugene through a Meyers Memorial grant, will offer 13 affordable tiny homes in a village setting to serve qualified individuals with transitional or permanent housing needs.

Lane County Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) includes goals and action steps specific to South Lane County. The goals are to decrease the proportion of low-income households that spend more than 30% on housing, to increase the number of supportive housing units (integrating behavioral health and primary care services), and to increase the number of services (e.g. nutrition, employment/training, physical activity, screening/healthcare) provided in supportive housing units. As leader of the action steps, SLMH partners with Cornerstone, HACSA, SVDP, and Habitat for Humanity.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

While this paper has addressed some of the existing needs and services for the homeless in Lane County, it is not an exhaustive list. There is a wide range of organizations and agencies assisting the homeless that have not been mentioned here. Major concerns shared by these organizations include losing government funds, the demographics of those needing services, and increasing housing costs. The study committee did not explore the extent to which homelessness disproportionately affects minorities and those who are otherwise marginalized in society, such as people of color, LGTBQ, single mothers, seniors, and people with disabilities. These are important topics for further examination.

## Discussion Questions

1. Which statistics about homelessness stood out for you?
2. What are the major causes of homelessness?
3. If some homeless people have drug, alcohol or health problems, how should they best be served?
4. How might homelessness be different in Lane County than in other parts of the country?
5. What differences exist between urban and rural approaches to homelessness?
6. What other services are you familiar with that address homelessness in Lane County.
7. What services are lacking in Lane County?

## Resources

### Websites

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[http://www.hacsa.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/hacsa\\_fy17\\_budget\\_document.pdf](http://www.hacsa.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/hacsa_fy17_budget_document.pdf)
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### Interviews

1. Susan Ban, Executive Director of ShelterCare, interviewed on November 29, 2016.
2. Jacob Fox, Executive Director of HACSA, and Ela Kubok, Administrative Assistant, interviewed on December 7, 2016.
3. Paul Neville, Director of Public Relations of St. Vincent de Paul Social Services, interviewed on December 15, 2016.