

Community Action Team: Houselessness *continued from front page*

She came to CAT last month to get some guidance because she did not know what to do to prepare for her anticipated life change. The good news is that the housing case manager had some ideas and resources to provide. The bad news is that the most significant resources, a subsidized Section 8 voucher and low-income housing units, have very long waiting lists. In some cases the wait may be two or three years. At least now Muthersbaugh knows she needs to get her name on all the waiting lists. She also learned about the records she needs to gather in order to get the maximum deposit refund from her current landlord.

There were a few more concrete resources CAT could present. When Muthersbaugh does need to move, she will probably qualify to receive financial assistance with the deposit expense for her new home. At her level of income she will also qualify to receive occasional financial assistance with her utility bills. Most importantly, CAT will meet with her again to help her create a plan. CAT's goal for all clients is to help them create and follow a plan that provides stability within their means. They assist with creating budgets and identifying other avenues to either increase income or decrease expenses.

The inflated housing market in Northwest Oregon is making it even harder to find a home. Housing of all types is in such high demand that affordable and market-rate rental units are nearly impossible to find. In a small housing market like Columbia County, it's even tougher. If a rental unit does become available, it is far more expensive than it was as little as six months ago. Now, previously stable households with two incomes are finding themselves unable to make ends meet. As

a result, the number of extended families living together has drastically increased in recent years. In addition, the benchmarks for who qualifies for benefits have been raised to better cover the most vulnerable populations. For example, unless someone is over 62 years old, a veteran, an adult with a disability, or a survivor of domestic violence, they cannot even apply for Section 8. Given the nature of the current rental market, CAT's first priority is to prevent houselessness.

As with all their services, CAT's approach is holistic. Housing is one of the many puzzle pieces needed to create an accurate picture of a client's situation. CAT has many wrap-around services to help people. Other puzzle pieces include transportation, food, mental health, and social supports. Across the county and beyond, CAT partners with many governmental, community, and faith-based agencies that mutually strive to implement a "No Wrong Door" policy. So even if a family's needs are outside the scope of support that agency can provide, their case manager can point clients in the right direction and help them navigate an often confusing landscape. CAT is always a good place to start.

* Name and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individual featured.

To find out more about how Community Action Team might be able to help, please call 503-397-3511 or visit www.cat-team.org. Office hours at 125 N. 17th Street in St. Helens are 8:30 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

Leanne Murray is the Program Operations Coordinator in the Human Investment Department for Community Action Team.

Where Do You Read the Voice?



Vernonia friends Veronica McGrane, Randal Harvey and Roxana Sherman-Heath, reading the Voice at Wallowa Lake, Oregon.

Barney Hayes reading the Voice during a recent vacation in Alaska with wife Lynn.



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