

FUNDING FOR THE HOMELESS

by William Newton

On April 29, 1985 the Community Services Program of the Oregon Department of Human Resources sent a letter to all Community Action Agency and State Community Services sub-grantee organizations that the state legislature had in legislative bills FY86 and FY87 authorized expenditure of one million dollars, with another one million dollars in reserve, to be distributed in 1986 "contingent on a Department of Resources report to the Emergency Board which documents program activities and the need for additional funds" to assist families and individuals in securing safe emergency shelter. Proposals were to be submitted by September 10, 1985. Successful proposals would be funded on October 1, 1985.

Community Action staff and volunteers from Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia Counties drafted a proposal after doing a needs assessment in the three counties and submitted a proposal before the September 10 deadline.

On Friday, October 11, Dr. Charles Wilder, Director of Clatsop Community Action, was notified that the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project had been recommended for funding for thirty-three thousand dollars, which was twenty-four thousand dollars short of the proposed need for fifty-seven thousand dollars. The following Monday, October 14, Doctor Wilder was told that the project would not be funded.

The immediate reaction of the Community Action Team was "Why not?" Upon inquiry it was discovered that the Northwest Coast proposal had been tied in points with Lane County which was funded for one hundred and twenty-nine thousand dollars. They were tenth in the competitive point basis and so were we, but we were not funded.

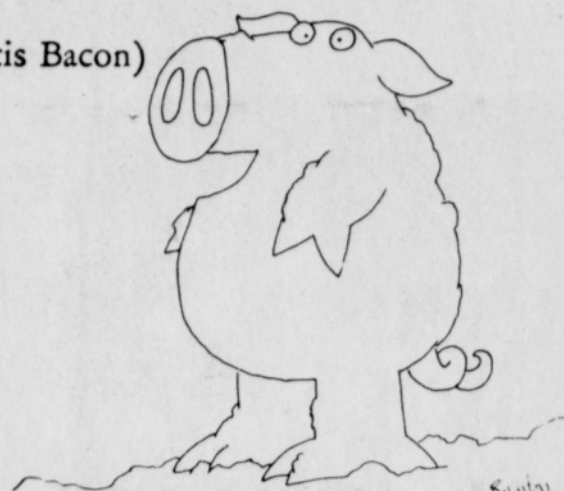
At this juncture the Community Action Team here on the North Coast and other parts of the state mobilized to implement further effort by the state to locate more monies to distribute to meet equitably the need throughout Oregon. Phone calls were made to state representatives, state senators, and to Leo Hegstrom, Director of the Department of Human Resources. Letters were written to state officials from Governor Victor Atiyeh on down. Personal contacts were made in an all out effort to persuade our state officials of the great need yet unmet by the state here on the North Coast which, according to the needs assessment, would be confronted in 1986 by roughly five thousand people facing emergency housing needs.

The situation that the legislature faced at that point was not an enviable position. Though the legislators had a seventeen million dollar fund to deal with budget problems in 1986 and an existant deviation plan to allow the Emergency Board to make minor adjustments to the state general fund, deficits totaling nearly half of the emergency fund made them very cautious about funding Community Action's request for emergency shelter funding.

We were told at that point "No one should get their hopes up until we look at these other problems." At that time the Emergency Board was hoping to acquire, somewhere, the three hundred thousand dollars to fund Agency requests and the whole state was criticizing the legislators for the way the first one million

"Money is like muck:
not good unless
it be spread."

(Sir Francis Bacon)



dollars for emergency shelters was distributed in the fall. Due to this, Representative Rick Bauman stated, "I'm sure you'll see much more concern about the distribution question. On the other side, if the budget problems are as bad as they may be, we have to take that million dollars back."

On Thursday, January 16, 1986, representatives from the Community Action Team on behalf of the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project went to the state capitol in Salem to lobby the Emergency Board members and seek their support in funding the North Coast. During eight hours of deliberations concerning all of the issues the Emergency Board faced, every opportunity was utilized to speak with legislators and further inform them of the dire straits the North Coast was in. The ride back to the coast from Salem was a long apprehension about funding: would we get the money to initiate twenty-four hour shelters for the North Coast?

On Friday, January 17, 1986, Doctor Wilder and I received word that the funding had been approved in the amount of thirty-two thousand, four hundred and twelve dollars for Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook Counties.

Also scheduled to receive the new money were Crisis Intervention Services in Jackson County (\$20,000); Josephine County Senior Services (\$8,000); Clackamas County Community Action (\$10,495); Central Oregon Community Action in Jefferson, Dechutes and Cook Counties (\$11,332); Oregon Human Development in Umatilla, Malheur and Klamath Counties (\$46,313); Marion County Health Department (\$59,976); Yamhill County Community Action (\$20,336); and Harney County Senior Services (\$1,816).

Having received this initial funding the work of the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project has just begun on a shoestring budget. Thirty-two thousand, four hundred and twelve dollars divided three ways is ten thousand, one hundred and thirty-four dollars per county to identify, obtain and open "shelter ready" a twenty-four hour shelter facility in each county, plus operating expenses.

Though hard to believe, identifying a shelter facility is not as easy as one would imagine. We had been combing Tillamook and Clatsop Counties in search of a five bedroom house with two bathrooms, a basement, yard and parking area. So far we have located one house in Tillamook County and are daily continuing our facility search.

Once a potential shelter facility is located, negotiations with the property owner to obtain the maximum dollar benefit for the minimum of dollar expenditure must take place. Property owners own property to make money, not give it away (though many can afford to donate, few will), and for this reason a charitable organization seeking charity in the form of a donated shelter facility have problems.

Once located and obtained, the facility must be made "shelter ready." This entails property rehabilitation to meet standard building and fire codes for mass shelters (more than five beds), obtaining essential consumable goods,

food (the shelter will serve three meals daily), furniture and office equipment, not to mention coming up with direct operating expenses for insurance, taxes, utilities, rent, etc.

Community Action Teams in the three counties are exuberant that the Northwest Emergency Housing Project has been funded for the initial cost of opening a shelter in each county, and are anticipating the fruition of their hopes and labors when homeless people are fed and sheltered.

Identifying, obtaining and opening a twenty-four hour emergency shelter facility in each county with ten thousand, one hundred and thirty-four dollars per county will not be easy but is feasible utilizing other funding sources, local community resources and a community's greatest wealth, its people.

The concept underlying the development of shelters for homeless people is People Helping People Help Themselves. The Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project seeks to assist homeless people out of their perilous, marginal existence into financial stability, affirmative employment, training and placement, and permanent, affordable housing.

The means through which these are accomplished are: lifeskills training, entitlement advocacy, counseling, psychiatric assessment, vocational and educational guidance, job development skills training and general information and referral.

Nationally, the escalation of the homeless population has forged new partnerships of public and private initiatives, mobilized the social service and private voluntary organization communities, and elevated into the public consciousness a complex political issue with broad economic consequences. The North Coast is beginning to experience this, and like the rest of the country, has its own homeless population to aid.

Homelessness is not as visible here as on Burnside in Portland, Magazine Street in New Orleans or in downtown Los Angeles, but it is as real here as anywhere else. As Clatsop Community Action has identified the problem, more than seventy percent of the North Coast's homeless population (three thousand, six hundred in 1985) are due to eviction. The other thirty percent are composed of single men and women, minority groups, recently unemployed, longterm unemployed, mentally ill, and the unemployable handicapped.

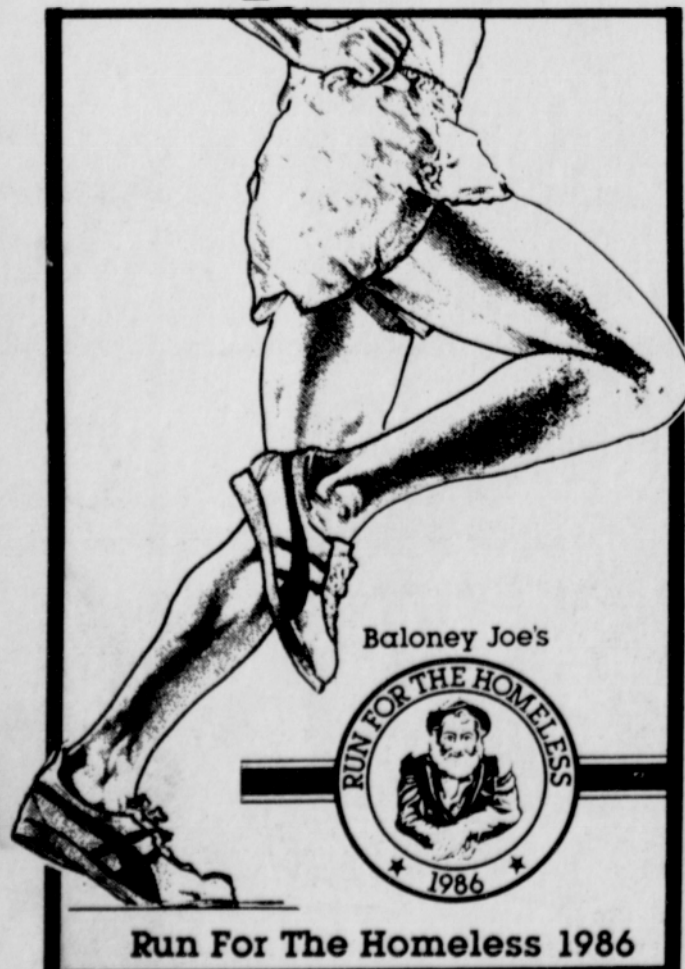
Whatever the cause, the fact remains that for any citizen of the United States to exist without shelter, nutritious food and an opportunity to better their lives is appalling.

If the people here on the Oregon North Coast who care about the homeless will act with us in working for the alleviation of human suffering on our own shores, we will see the homeless and hungry among us sheltered and fed and aided into a self-sustaining existence with the American dream of prosperity within their grasp.

Please help us.

William Newton, who is called "Mitch," is a former clergyman and is coordinator for the Northwest Coast Emergency Housing Project. He can be reached at Clatsop Community Action, 1250 Duane, Astoria, phone 325-6513.

April 20



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