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organization on housing and homeless services for sub-agencies in the tri-county region. Workers at CAT, which is based in St. Helens in Colombia County, and its partner organizations, are now networking locally and statewide for a solution to the crisis.

"People are coming to our doors but we don't have the funding to help," says George Sabol, the executive director of Clatsop County Community Action Team. New faces are arriving now, Sabol said; people who have never been in such a situation of need. Clatsop County had more than 100 tenants receive termination letters from NOHA. Sabol calls the situation a disaster, as much as if a flood or hurricane had come through and taken the homes of more than 300 men, women and children. As such, he's looking at any and all emergency plans.

"One of the things we're looking at doing is possibly renting a gymnasium like they do for disasters," Sabol said. "People are saying it's not a disaster but come July, it will be."

The fact that the crisis comes at the end of many agencies fiscal year aggravates their ability to pick up the slack. "The trouble is it's the end of our fiscal year," said Rocky Johnson, the executive director of CAT. "We don't have funds left."

Some aid could be on its way through HUD's Housing Prevention/Rapid Rehousing stimulus program, Johnson said. But that's not expected until September at the earliest.

Other housing authorities across Oregon, notably Polk, Klamath and Yamhill counties, are feeling the pinch and have sent out some termination notices, but no where near the numbers in NOHA's district, Jones says.

In the state of Washington, the Walla Walla Housing Authority also had its voucher funding reduced from HUD and has recently announced that it is considering cutting as many as 150 families and individual recipients from the program, possibly through a lottery system. The authority provides monthly rental assistance to more than 700 eligible families in Walla Walla County.

"This is not the only housing authority in the state of Oregon or in the country that is facing a problem of this time," Jones said. "Unfortunately, the magnitude of the problem at this housing authority is significantly higher."

Families who lose their housing as a result of the Section 8 termination face perils beyond homelessness. The loss of housing may be breaking a contract with a landlord that can affect a person's rental record and credit report, jeopardizing future rental opportunities, Tierney says. It also can sour landlords on Section 8 tenants altogether, and Oregon allows landlords to refuse leasing to Section 8 tenants. The instability of not having a home can also jeopardize employment or a person's ability to get a job. There also are adverse, long-term effects on children in families that have to leave their home, live in uninhabitable situations or have to leave school districts - if not school -

altogether, Tierney says.

Dona Bolt, Oregon Department Of Education Homeless Education Coordinator, reports that in school year 2007-08 the school districts in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties had 540 homeless students, of whom 460 were in families.

"From our point of view, this is also a crisis of wasted investment," says Jim Tierney with CAT in St. Helens. "Because if we're going backward, for a year or little more than year, essentially is an awful lot of investment of our staff getting people off the streets and into housing. The money and time used is now potentially getting washed away."

"The struggle to get people out of homelessness is a difficult one, and there are real barriers no matter how hard we work to get them out of the situation," Tierney says. "We lose ground on all of those. And if we find some way to fix this problem, it uses up resources that would have gone to serve the next in line. It backs everything up."

Jeff and Jennifer's income is \$700 a month. Their rent is nearly \$1,000, but they have a home because they receive \$884 in rent assistance through the Section 8 voucher program. It's a shortfall their landlord Maureen Taylor, while sympathetic to their plight, cannot afford to cover.

"I can't pick up \$884 in rent," Taylor said. She had intended to sell the home Jennifer and her family now live in, but as the economy soured, so did the buyers. The house sat empty for a year in a stagnant market. And there is little relief to be seen in Tillamook County's forecast. On June 6, Hampton Lumber Mills completed a mass layoff of 85 employees.

"That's the second groups of layoffs they did and that's like a major employer here. Go down to the unemployment office right now and go online and look for jobs: It's all \$9 and \$10-an-hour jobs. There are no livable-wage jobs. There are four jobs open at the cheese factory. That's it."

Mike Cook with NeahCasa, a nonprofit based in Manzanita that works to secure affordable and emergency housing for people in need, said landlords have been meeting to discuss what they can do to salvage the situation. Cook works with NeahCasa's student program, supporting homeless coordinators in each of the schools. In the Neah-Kah-Nie School District of about 700 students, about half qualify as living in poverty, and about 50 are classified as homeless, Cook says.

"When things are fragile anyway, and then we get bad economy and then we're hit by something like this," Cook says. "It's just a slap in the face."

Cook said the landlords are sensitive to the needs of the people, "but it is a lot to ask them to have to pay 75 percent of the rent. Or only receive 25 percent of the rent for their units. They've offered suggestions like doubling up, bringing in renters. The problem is there hasn't been a forum to create a solution for this. This

is a government program. There are people who are really hurting and we can't forget about them.

"I think there needs to be a wave of concern here," Cook says. "I think armed with some community outrage, our congressional representatives need to be alerted to the situation and need to do something about it. This is their stimulus package, but they're the ones who put this whole thing together. You can't blame it on some housing little housing authority in Oregon."

NOHA, Sims said, is doing it all it can to alleviate the pain of the situation. When funding is available, the terminated recipients will be brought back on Section 8 immediately and will not have to go back to the waiting list, which currently has a 18-month to two-year wait.

And the vouchers are transferable to housing authorities in the state that can absorb them financially. Sims says the Coos-Curry, North Bend and the Malheur housing authorities have said they can absorb some of the vouchers. Some people already have said they were going to move, according to Sims. Others have said they will be doubling up in other people's homes or apartments. (Occupancy standards set by HUD don't apply if the people are not receiving paid assistance.)

Jennifer said she and her family moved to Garibaldi because of the quality of the education and that moving back in with her

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— GEORGE SABOL
 CLATSOP COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM

mother would mean a return to schools where her boys struggled and a house inadequate for the family. She considers living in a tent or a camper somewhere, or worse.

Sims says they also are working with state and federal representatives to correct the \$600,000 shortfall.


"We here at NOHA are doing the best that we can do help as many as we can that are in need. It's unfortunate that this did have to happen and we're doing everything we can to mitigate what has happened by working with HUD and working with community partners to put people back on as soon as we possibly can."

But it didn't have to happen, according to Michael Anderson, executive director of the Oregon Opportunity Network, an affordable-housing advocacy organization.

"This whole crisis underscores how broken the funding system is that provides housing opportunities for the lowest income," Anderson says. "We have a system that at the time when we need it most, is exposed for its weaknesses. A major challenge of the Obama administration is going to be getting our housing programs right, because they haven't been for 30 years."

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