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elaborate quickly responds, "let's not talk about that."

The women are surviving on food stamps and Tiffany's sporadic work driving school and charter buses with First Student, as well as her \$261 unemployment checks for the weeks when she has no work. Rent is \$250 per week, which leaves little for diapers and gas, just two of many items an Oregon Trail card can't buy.

Tiffany expects things to improve once school starts up again and she has more bus shifts. Patricia, for her part, is attempting to get certified as a licensed caregiver through the state so she can get paid for taking care of Caden, but is still waiting for her paperwork - submitted in late May - to be processed.

Some motel inhabitants, like Tiffany and Patricia, pay their own rent; others rely on Short-Term Rent Assistance (STRA) in the form of emergency vouchers funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the state of Oregon, Multnomah County and the cities of Portland and Gresham. They are distributed locally by the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP).

Ian Slingerland, HAP's rental program assistance manager, said that of the \$2.73 million allocated to Oregon STRA for fiscal year 2009-10, \$2.45 million went to direct client assistance, with the rest covering administrative expenses. The state's STRA budget increased 60 percent over the previous fiscal year because of increased funding by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Slingerland says that emergency vouchers generally are used in two situations: for people with emergency health or domestic violence situations that make them either ineligible for shelters or in danger if they sleep outside; and to obtain temporary shelter for people such as Tiffany and Patricia, who are waiting on permanent or transitional housing that is not yet available. Occasionally, vouchers will be issued to families who cannot live in a shelter.

The consensus among Portland service providers is that distributing motel vouchers is a last resort.

"I personally have only used vouchers for motels very few times simply because they are not really a bridge to housing," says Brad Taylor, a homeless outreach worker.

Indeed, Dawn Jones, who works the front desk at the Unicorn Motel on 82nd Avenue, says that although some people are completely content living in a motel room, others become trapped there because they can't save up enough money for a deposit on an apartment while paying weekly or monthly rent for their room.

"The primary purpose (of renting a motel room) is for people to stay here long enough till they can accumulate enough money to leave," says Jones. "But by that time they've been here for years."

"The only times we do [vouchers] are for families, if being in a shelter isn't a good option for them," says Erica Silver, the deputy director at the homeless service agency Human Solutions. From July through December 2008, only 2 percent of Human Solutions' STRA funding went toward emergency vouchers.

"They eat up our STRA funding because they're so expensive," Silver says.

The average rate at a Portland budget motel, according to multiple service providers and an informal survey of 10 motels, is \$60 per night or \$300 per week. The amount a family would pay for a month in a motel is likely more than they would pay for an apartment rental, a reason that long-term stays in Portland motels are on the decline.

This shift comes at a cost to hotel managers, who have begun to realize how dependent they became on longer-term occupants for income.

Anu Patel, who owns the Econo Lodge on Columbia Boulevard, said that weekly and monthly business "is the slowest it's ever been," and has no doubt that the economy is

to blame.

"It started slowing down last September, and each month since has been worse than the last."

The story is the same over on Interstate Avenue, where Phil Patel, the manager of the Economy Inn who says he is "somehow related" to Anu Patel, is struggling to stay afloat.

"The last couple months, we've been dead," said Patel. "Our business is off almost 50 percent from this time last year." Long-term occupants used to be a key component of the Economy's relative success, but Patel says most rooms are currently being rented nightly.

However, this does not mean that

2008 numbers in children up to age 5 being served by emergency shelters. Even more sobering was the number of households turned away from overflowing shelters: 313.

Slingerland at HAP says that "some combination of the one-night shelter count and the one-night street count is probably the best, though imperfect, way to (measure) unmet need for shelter and emergency vouchers," though he notes that this may not fully capture the unmet need for such cases as domestic violence-related assistance.

Amplifying a national trend, HUD reports that Oregon had a significant increase - over 30 percent - in newly homeless families through September 2008. Given the

because of her less-than-stable housing situation. The eldest lives with her father - one of Tiffany's two ex-husbands - while the two younger children live with a friend of Tiffany's parents.

"It's so close to the beginning of the school year for the kids that even if I got into a place big enough to have all my kids, I'd leave them up there so they didn't have to transfer at the beginning of the year," Tiffany says.

As a result, she has minimal contact with them and remains a secondary figure in their lives - a fact she seems to have accepted, especially because Caden is a handful on his own. No one knows this better than Patricia, who takes care of Caden when Tiffany is at work.

"I don't do anything else," Patricia says with no small amount of resignation. "I almost never leave this room."

The space is less than ideal for Caden, the women say.

"He has nowhere to play outside, so we let him crawl around on the floor," Patricia says.

"But he's got dirty knees and feet from the floor here," Tiffany says. "And we have to be careful with opening the door. He likes the door open, but he'll crawl right outside. There's stairs there" - not to mention Sandy Boulevard.

There are no other children at the motel, and no adults the women want to befriend. Plus, notes Tiffany, "I really don't think we'll be here that much longer, so what's the point of talking?"

The women connected in mid-July with a mentor at Human Solutions who has found them an apartment in outer Southeast that they can move into later this month. The agency will provide moving assistance, and the women will be eligible to apply for energy assistance to lower their utility payments.

Patricia and Tiffany are grateful for the help, but they both feel that it shouldn't have taken so much time and strife to find a place to live.

"Our credit is shot, and that's what caused us to have such a hard time finding a place we could get into," Tiffany says.

Lack of rental history also proved an obstacle for the women.

"I had one place tell me, 'Oh, well, you don't have a rental history at all,'" Patricia says. "I'm only 20; I really haven't had a lot of experience with renting." She feels as penalized for what she hasn't done as what she has.

"You look at the fact that so many people have trouble getting into a place, and that adds to the homeless problem," Patricia says, adding that she thinks renters should be more forgiving of those who have made past mistakes but are now trying to start over.

"My boyfriend has a felony, and I know that it's really hard for a lot of people to look past and realize, people do change," says Patricia. "He's not like that anymore. He made a mistake, he paid for his crime" - "And they're making him pay for it for the rest of his life," Tiffany says.

Patricia hopes the apartment move happens soon and that it's a good place to make a home for her child.

"I'm five months pregnant, and in four months, Patricia says, "there'll be a little baby." I want to be in an apartment, and know that there will be a roof over my child's head. I don't want to bring my child home from the hospital to..." She pauses, gesturing at her surroundings. "...To this. It's better than living in a car or a homeless shelter, which I've done before. But it's not a stable home. If we don't pay rent one week because we can't afford it, we're out."

"It's that insecurity, that not knowing," Patricia says. "I don't want my child to grow up with that."

Caden, seated on Tiffany's lap, looks up at his mother with huge, expectant eyes, as if waiting for an answer from her which she doesn't have. Tiffany holds him and says, as much to herself as to her baby, "we'll be out of here soon."



Tiffany Shepard stands with her son Caden, with Patricia Schafer on the porch, outside the motel they've been calling home..

financially strained families are resettling in cheap apartments. Because many of them have poor credit ratings, evictions or even foreclosures in their recent history, landlords are unlikely to rent to them. Thus, service providers speculate, many homeless families likely are living with other family members or in cars or tents and, along with the hotel homeless remain uncaptured by the city and county, they are a statistically invisible but ever-growing segment of the homeless population.

The economic downturn has sent Oregon skyrocketing to the top of dubious national rankings, including homelessness. The Annual Homelessness Assessment Report for 2008, released last month by the federal Housing and Urban Development agency (HUD) showed that a higher percentage of Oregonians are experiencing homelessness than in any other state. The results of Oregon Community Housing Services' statewide one-night homeless count in January found 17,122 people experiencing homelessness, up from 12,529 people in 2008.

The one-night shelter count in Multnomah County undertaken by the Department of County Human Services on Jan. 28 showed a 54 percent increase over

rapid acceleration of the economic crisis since then it's not altogether unlikely that the figures are higher now.

There are benefits to motel life, Tiffany says as she picks at a large hole in the arm of the tattered couch. "Don't have to pay electric or water, we've got free cable..."

The list ends there.

Tiffany's phone rings, and she takes the call in the cramped kitchenette, the one place where sunlight streams through a small window. Patricia puts Caden in a toy-laden baby bouncer, and he jumps up and down, transfixed by the jingling bells and brightly colored plush animals.

Tiffany flops back down on the couch. "That was my boyfriend," she says. He and Patricia's fiancé both work for the traveling carnival company Funtastic, which puts on Portland's Rose Festival and the Oregon State Fair in Salem, among other events.

"If we can't quite make rent one month, then part of their money goes toward helping us pay for here," Tiffany says. Their traveling schedule means that Tiffany and Patricia rarely see them. Patricia's fiancé hopes to get a Portland-based job by October so he can be in town for his child's birth.

Tiffany has three other children ages 11, 8 and 5, but none of them live with her

Cobblestone Streets
 By Diane Tamassia

Place your feet upon cobblestone streets
 Where you meet
 Gypsies wearing worn, torn and tattered clothes
 Tell their tale of woe
 In the song of old
 Crying for people to buy
 Can't you see why?
 Tired by the way they weep
 Carrying their goods up and down cobblestone streets