

# Tent city part deux?

People living homeless in Clackamas County look to Portland's Right 2 Dream Too as a model for their own security

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On any given evening along the dark, wooded perimeters of the Springwater Corridor in Clackamas County, more than 50 homeless individuals tuck themselves in for the night and hope for the best – or, at least a good night's rest.

To many, uninterrupted sleep comes as a luxury in an area fraught with late-night camp raids, both from local authorities and predators. It is no surprise that conversations among those experiencing homelessness have turned to organizing around safety.

"What chance do we have when we can't feel safe in the only place we call home?" asks Hilary, a woman living with her husband under a nearby bridge. "It's always one step forward and two steps back."

The main haven for this community, Southeast 82nd Avenue's Clackamas Service Center, remains understaffed and out of space for the county's steadily growing homeless population. With free meals, health services, a free clothing room, and a future promise of public showers and laundry facilities, the service center is working on all cylinders – but staff still admits there's a large gap in their services.

"We are burning the candle at both ends here," says CSC volunteer staff member Trena Sutton, who fields safety-related calls and concerns from the center's visitors on a daily basis. "We need a location where people can be safe. A well-maintained camp would give them the safe, communal living many of



these folks need to move forward with their lives."

Despite her already full plate of responsibilities at the center, Sutton's paired up with Ibrahim Mubarak, the founder and head of downtown Portland's Right 2 Dream Too homeless encampment, to bring this idea into a reality. Their ultimate goal: Bring the Clackamas community together to support and create a second Right 2 Dream Too camp.

The original Right 2 Dream Too community – currently in the stages of a

much-debated move from its East Burnside grounds – has grown into a respectable and secure rest area since its creation in October 2011. Like R2DToo, Sutton's proposed second site would have a front desk with 24-hour surveillance and prohibit alcohol, drugs, violence and discrimination. Here, Sutton says, the people wanting to better themselves and dig themselves out of an anxiety-saturated livelihood would be protected from predatory individuals.

"I've seen people being victimized over and over again from predators on the trail,"

Trena Sutton sits outside the Clackamas Service Center, one of the few drop-in, resource centers for people experiencing homelessness in Clackamas County. There, negotiations have started to create a tent city, much like Portland's Right 2 Dream Too (shown below), for people who are homeless.

PHOTO BY ADRIENNE BARNETT

she says. "So many people are spread out and vulnerable, they have no way to truly protect themselves. I need a safe place for my folks."

Compared to inner Portland, Clackamas County's facilities and services for its homeless population are few and far between, ramping up the need for a solution. According to Sutton, the area only has three dependable homeless shelters specifically for women and families. One is closing at the end of the month. If you're single or without children, the closest shelter is more than 6 miles away – or a 45-minute bus ride.

According to a 2013 count of homeless people in Clackamas County, county homeless prevention programs had served 215 out of the counted 2,070 homeless individuals. Additionally, while the overall number of homeless decreased from a 2011 count, there was a substantial 22 percent bump in "chronically homeless" individuals.

Meanwhile, the property around I-205 and the Springwater Corridor has been targeted for camp sweeps by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

"This is a completely different situation than (downtown's) Right 2 Dream Too," says Mubarak. "I don't want to go fast in pushing the idea, we have to be smart about our approach."

Mubarak says he's only a consultant, and if and when the camp comes into fruition, it should be a local operation. "It's got to be run by people who know the people, know the community, to really succeed," he says.

To Mubarak and Sutton, and their team of supporters, this means talking one-on-one with each community group to gain their trust and confidence. So far, they have the support of homeless CSC visitors and the faith-based community. Next up, neighborhood and business associations. Only then, Mubarak says, can the team present their camp proposal to the County Board of Commissioners.

At this point, county health and housing representatives won't comment on the potential camp, mostly due to it being in such early stages. Once the group presents to the county, however, the larger discussion will be on the table. But it's unsure when that will be.

For now, Sutton, is working to maintain a steady, meditated push towards solidarity within Clackamas' social ranks, despite the urgent need for help at her doorstep.

"How are you supposed to find work when your possessions are regularly stolen? When you don't know when you're going to be woken up in the middle of the night?" Sutton says. "We've got to be able to offer them something more."



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