

SAFETY NET, from page 4

for varying reasons, such as incarceration, the suspension of benefits or death, said Mohageri.

The Social Security Administration has drawn criticism from the outset of its handling of the Safety Net debacle.

In March, 2014 – just days before Safety Net's closure – Disability Rights Oregon, Oregon Law Center and National Senior Citizens Law Center filed a complaint against the federal agency for not assigning Safety Net's clients new payee services to ensure their benefits would not be interrupted.

Shannon Singleton, executive director at JOIN, a nonprofit transitioning people living on the streets into housing, said many of her agency's clients who had been receiving benefits through Safety Net became responsible for managing their own money after the closure.

"There were a lot of people who really could use and needed that support that became their own payees," she said. "It wasn't necessarily what was best for them in the long term."

More than 200 of Safety Net's clients who were owed money are now deceased. As of November 3, only five of their estates had been paid, said Mohageri.

The deaths of clients for whom Safety Net still held money had occurred prior to 2008 up until July 2015. Safety Net retained funds belonging to estates of some deceased individuals long after they died.

Mohageri said Social Security has been unable to locate 158 estates of deceased beneficiaries owed money that was retrieved from Safety Net's

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SHANNON SINGLETON,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT JOIN

bank account.

While hundreds of client deaths may seem unusual, the mortality rate among former Safety Net clients is consistent with a rate of death determined in a 2013 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. It found that people who receive disability benefits experience a high rate of death for various reasons – from poor health to

socioeconomic disadvantages.

The report also noted "an unknown, but significant, number die during the five-month waiting period, when (disability) benefits are unavailable."

It is unclear whether or not Safety Net's closure and the ensuing difficulty in receiving benefits many of its former clients faced as a result played a role in any of these deaths.

Inquiries about where the money went and the nature of the accounting errors have gone unanswered. The U.S. Attorney's Office referred requests to the Social Security Administration, which referred back to the U.S. Attorney's Office's vague press release. A records request by Street Roots is currently pending with the Social Security Administration.

Instances of payee services mismanaging their clients' money isn't common, said Mohageri.

But on Nov. 5, the executive director of another payee service was sentenced in a Portland courtroom after he pleaded guilty to stealing nearly \$100,000 in disability benefits he was managing for clients in Idaho Falls, The Oregonian reported. Golden Barrett was sentenced to five years probation and ordered to pay back the money he stole.

Walkin' In A Fog

by Brent B. Lusted, while incarcerated in Delano Community Correctional Facility, 2005

I'd been walkin' in a fog for so very long;
Wherever I went the direction I took was always wrong!

I'd bump and run into anything
right in front of me,
Cuz I'd be so high and drunk
I could barely even see!

Burning down bridges was my specialty!
And I'd let down everyone who'd ever been kind to me!

But when the fog finally lifted
Jesus there you stood
You'd always been there but
I just couldn't see you so good.

Be Kind



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