



Housing Rural Oregon

Outer limits

A look beyond Portland's boundaries into Oregon's rural housing crisis



WIKICOMMONS

Street view in Lincoln City, with more than 500 vacation rental dwellings and a lack of affordable housing for residents.

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Elizabeth Reyes grew up in Lincoln City. The small tourist town on the Oregon Coast is her home, where she works full time and spends her money, where her children go to school. She's a proud second-generation member of the Lincoln City community.

"I grew up here. I lived in low-income housing for quite a few years. I took some free classes on how to become a homeowner. It took a couple of years before I was able to buy."

But she can't afford to live in her hometown. Instead, Reyes and her children live in the small, unincorporated community of Otis. From there, she commutes to her job as the executive director of Family Promise of Lincoln County, where she works to provide shelter, case management and supportive services for families and youths experiencing homelessness. Last year, nearly 600 individuals used their services, most of them victims of high rents, low vacancy levels, and the feast or famine of seasonal wages.

"A vast majority of the people that come into our program have full-time employment," Reyes said. "They do not have a drug and alcohol problem. They have simply lost their housing because they were renters."

Generational poverty also accounts for many of Family Promise's clients, Reyes said, including a lack of financial planning skills or basic savings accounts. Reyes recalled the day a woman she had gone to high school

with walked through her doors.

"She and I sat down, and we cried a little bit. The vast majority of people in this community that work in this community are easily one paycheck away from being homeless. This woman had two children. The father quit paying child support. She had her own house cleaning business. She would clean the vacation rentals. She was very good. One of her children was special-needs.

"And then her car broke down."

For want of \$100 to pay for car parts, she lost everything, including her home, Reyes said.

In the past five to 10 years, the housing issue has grown from concern to a full-on political, economic and social crisis across rural Oregon.

"In a rural community, everything is magnified, and there's no avoiding it," Reyes said.

"It also forces us to deal with it, because they're not sweeping it someplace else. There's no pretending it's not going on. It affects all of us one way or another."

It's the case across all of rural Oregon. Up the coast in Manzanita, Marzano's Pizza closed its dining room service because "for the first time in 15 years, we were unable to staff our summer crew," according to the owners' notice. "We've received a lot of interest from people who would love to come to work for us, but they can't find housing."

In Central Oregon, Bend and neighboring

About this project

This summer, Street Roots received funding from Meyer Memorial Trust's Affordable Housing Initiative to develop dedicated reporting on rural housing issues. The goal is to broaden our views around housing policy to promote better understanding of the issues communities face across the state. We also intend to highlight the common ground that we all share, and the solutions we can all get behind.

This report is the introduction to our Housing Rural Oregon series, with many more stories to follow.

Altogether, Meyer awarded 12 grants totaling more than \$700,000 to support organizations for the next two years in raising the curtain on the state's housing crisis and crafting sustainable solutions at both the local and state levels.

Despite Oregon's liberal reputation, the vast majority of Oregon's 36 counties are rural and conservative. Unlike Oregon's bustling urban centers, many rural economies are still struggling a decade after the 2008 recession. Employment levels are still below their pre-recession peak, and youth and working-age populations are declining, further dampening the promise of future economic growth.

Our hope is that this work – among all organizations – will have long-term impacts, amplifying the voices, concerns and needs of rural Oregonians. We look forward to hearing their stories.

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