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and social service providers in Central Oregon alike, as the only place in Central Oregon where homeless people can receive a comprehensive span of services in one place.

"This is a huge hub in the community," Britta Schroeter Phillips, the community outreach advocate for Thrive Central Oregon, a social service agency, said. "There's so many services."

Schroeter Phillips works in the café, and on this day met with nearly a dozen homeless people in less than three hours to talk about housing. "This is my craziest site," she said, referring to the level of need and amount of people she sees.

The Back Door Café is low-barrier, meaning that anyone, regardless of their criminal history, drug or alcohol use, can come to the café and use its services, as long as they're not belligerent or disruptive.

There are very few low-barrier services in Central Oregon. The largest shelters in the region, the Bethlehem Inn, requires people seeking shelter pass a breath analysis test, a drug test, and cannot be a registered sex offender. The other year-round shelter in Central Oregon, the Shepherd's Door, has similar requirements.

"You just come as you are," Witte said.

DOZENS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE walk up to Witte with all manner of concerns, questions, asking for help. One man tells her he needs \$11.89 for a prescription refill. He's also received a utility shut-off notice from the city of Bend because he owes \$52.

Witte signs him up for Compassionate Care, a fund Witte started and generated from the church's Communion donations, which pays up to \$100 for emergency needs: buying gas, propane for heating, back utilities payments to avoid shut off, fees for getting state-issued identification or birth certificates, even rent assistance.

"We'll see what we can do to help you out," Witte assured the man.

Another homeless man, who Stacey recognizes from camp visits, walks up to her office doorway.

Conversations about camping – where people are camping, if it's safe – is one Stacey is having more and more frequently, as more people, unable to afford housing, become homeless and are forced to camp outdoors.

"They're steadily increasing," Stacey said. "We got a whole group of folks that were barely making it and now they've just fallen off to the other end (to homelessness)."

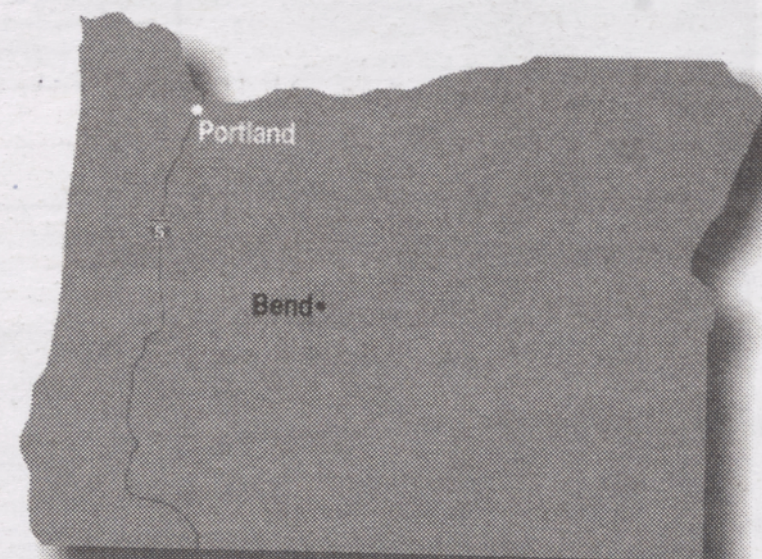
She is always assuring people that she can help, that something can be done. She rarely says no.

Witte is energetic – she is constantly walking around the café space to say hello to people, give them gentle hugs and check in on them, as does her cadre of volunteers. She has a quick and infectious smile and laugh, a buoyant personality that is a balm to the homeless people she encounters.

She works half-time as Bend Church's director of homeless outreach and spends the other half of the time going out to the homeless camps around Bend.

"I think her work probably never ends," Janet Brynteson, 64, a retired teacher who volunteers at the café, said.

Witte will often drive people to their appointments – often the hospital, the DMV

**About this series**

This article is part of Street Roots' Housing Rural Oregon series. It is the fourth in a collection of stories looking at Central Oregon. Read previous articles from the series at news.streetroots.org/ruralhousing

or other state agencies. She readily gives out her cell number and often texts with people throughout the day and night.

Ellis Lay, 76, began volunteering at the Back Door Café soon after she and her husband moved from Austin, Texas last summer. Each Wednesday, she hands out mail. "There's a great need here," she said. "I like to make myself useful."

People most frequently receive mail from the State of Oregon, whether it's from the Department of Human Services, a new

piece of identification, or something perhaps less unsavory. "Sometimes they really don't want what they get," she said. "Every once in a while there's a personal letter that comes through."

"I have seen a lot of pain in people's faces," Lay said of the café's customers. "You can tell that they need help. That they're scared or don't know what to do."

"I have seen a lot of love shared (between) these people," she continued. "They really cared about each other."

The Back Door Café was started years ago by two members of Bend Church. With a background in nursing and social services, Witte has built the Café up to the robust entity it is today.

Brynteson remembers once watching Witte interact with a person who had never come to the Back Door Café before. Brynteson remembers that Witte said what she always says when someone new comes in – "What is your name?" and "I'm so glad you're here."

"As soon as she said that, their whole face changed," Brynteson said, realizing that someone cared about them.

And she knows everyone's names.

"She always knows my name," said Kate Bennett, a 61-year-old woman and Back Door Café customer who suffers from dementia. "I don't remember my name 'til noon sometimes. I mean, she is just on it."

That morning, Witte had spotted Bennett outside of her office. "Kate!" she called. "I have something for you." Witte hands her two crossword puzzle books.

Bennett does crossword puzzles, which she and her doctors believe help prevent her dementia from worsening. "You are the

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Rules of the road for medical van: 'You go to where they are'

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

Lisa Kuettle never gets what she calls "caregiver fatigue" – the feeling a doctor or nurse may get after a day of seeing patients, a feeling of depletion and emotional exhaustion from witnessing so much illness and trauma.

Kuettle is a family nurse practitioner who provides health care to Central Oregon's homeless in a medical van operated by Mosaic Medical, the federally qualified health center in Central Oregon.

Over the years, she has found her homeless patients to be resilient, energizing, funny. They're more honest than other patients she's had.

"They're right out there," she said, laughing.

And they have many needs, she said. "But they're not needy."

The medical van is the size of a large RV, and each day Kuettle drives it to various sites around Central Oregon to deliver basic primary care for acute and chronic illnesses.

The van is at Shepherd's Door, a men's shelter, on Monday mornings; in the afternoon, at Oregon State University's Cascade campus to serve the campus' students. On Tuesdays, the van visits J Bar J Ranch, a 28-bed ranch and residential

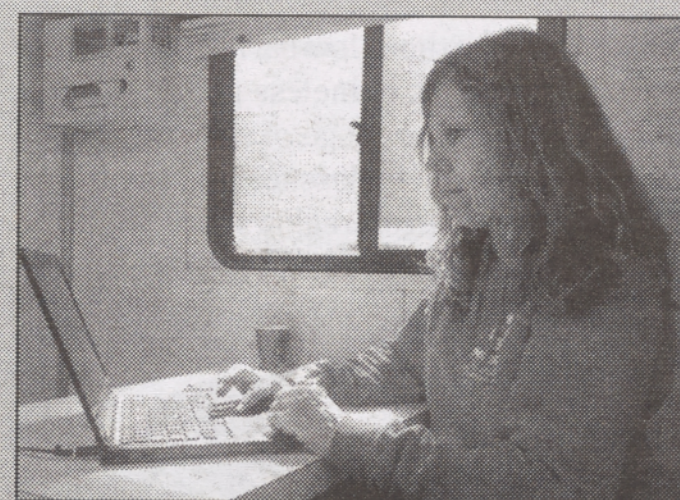
facility for young male offenders, and the Loft, a shelter and service center for homeless youth. Thursday morning, the van is at a homeless shelter in Sisters and then drives to Redmond in the afternoon to another church where a weekly dinner is served.

Bend Church homeless center is the only site the van stays for day-long sessions. It's been serving clients there each Wednesday since January 2015, treating between five and 15 people in each visit.

At Bend Church, Kuettle and her medical assistant eat breakfast with the diners at the church's Back Door Café, which serves breakfast and also acts as a day center for nearly 150 people experiencing homelessness.

Kuettle said she has been providing services to more homeless families lately, including homeless parents with children. "We have a lot of people priced out of the rental market," she said.

The van is equipped to provide basic primary care, including giving physical exams, providing well-women exams, birth control, and pap smears, screening for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), repairing lacerations, performing biopsies and excisions, and treating emergency conditions such as the flu, impacted ear



Lisa Kuettle, a family nurse practitioner, provides medical care through the Mosaic Mobile medical van.

infections, dog bites or frost bite. "We do an awful lot," Kuettle admitted.

Dental infections are among the most common conditions Kuettle treats. She also sees the full gamut of respiratory problems – upper respiratory infections, sinus infections, bronchitis, and pneumonia – driven, she said, by smoking and simply living outside in the cold and damp.

Mental illnesses are common. Scores of patients come to her showing signs of depression, anxiety, and psychosis. "People just feel overwhelmed with homelessness and things in their life that are hard," she said.

Illnesses that cannot be treated in the

van, like illnesses that cannot be treated in a regular primary care clinic, are referred to specialty care.

Most of all, Kuettle said, she does a lot of listening. "That's probably my best skill," she said. "And encouraging."

The van's presence each Wednesday has helped the homeless people who go to the Back Door Café feel more comfortable and willing to access medical services, Kuettle said.

"We hear all the time from our patients here at the clinic, 'before you guys were here, I was in the ER all the time,'" she said.

Portland has few mobile medical services: Cascadia Behavioral Health operates a mobile mental health clinic and Outside In, a homeless youth agency, operates a mobile medical van that visits various agencies and sites around Portland. Portland Street Medicine, a new organization that intends to provide mobile medical services, has yet to start seeing patients.

In Central Oregon, people can live miles away from the nearest clinic. During the winter, people can be snowed in at their camp, or unable to take the bus because it's not running.

"You go to where they are," Kuettle said.