

Housing Rural Oregon

In search of shelter

With no year-round shelters in Lincoln County, people on the streets struggle to survive while dedicated advocates piece together relief

BY EMILY GREEN
SENIOR STAFF REPORTER

At 65, Richard Bailey is tall and slender. He takes his strides slowly, revealing a pronounced limp that stems from an ache in his right hip. The pain has increased over the years, making work difficult for a man who's almost exclusively held labor-intensive warehouse jobs since his early 20s.

Bailey doesn't smoke, doesn't drink and said he's never used illicit drugs. He places great importance on cleanliness, and for the past five years, he's kept his small, first floor apartment in Newport impeccably spotless and free of clutter.

He sits calmly, sipping his coffee from time to time, as he provided details from the 11 years he spent living on the streets in the small coastal town.

He had moved to Newport from Costa Mesa, Calif., in the mid 1990s to live with his parents, a devout Southern Baptist couple who owned a big house on Yaquina Bay Road. He soon found work operating a forklift for Wild Planet seafood, where he was employed for about 10 years.

Home life was difficult – his deeply religious parents didn't approve of his less traditional ways, and in 2002, they kicked him out. With nowhere else to go, Bailey moved into the Summer Wind Budget Motel, where he paid a weekly rate, he said.

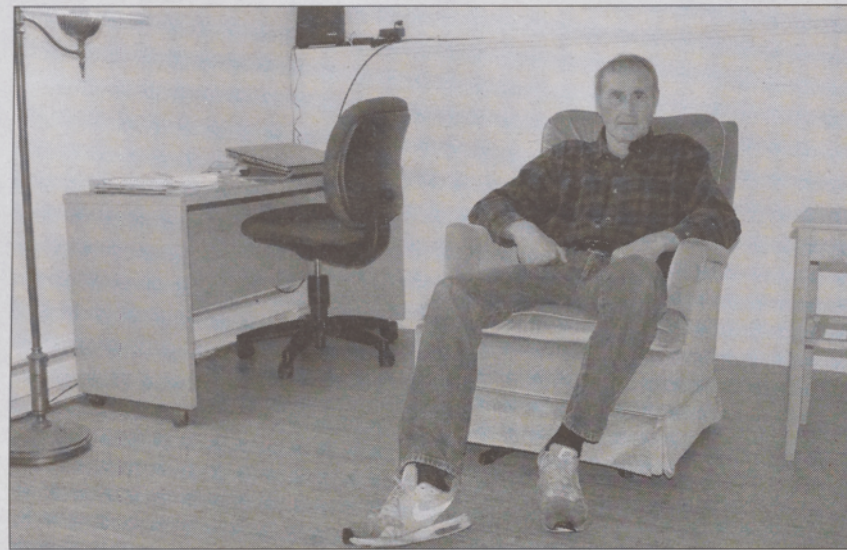
It wasn't too long before the cannery where he worked moved its operations to Coos Bay. Bailey thought life down south would be "too fast," so he decided to stay where he was, in Newport. Plus the pain in his hip had progressed to the point where warehouse work was becoming unmanageable. He soon ran out of money and that's when, for the first time in his life, Bailey found himself without shelter.

He remembers his first night outside "just like it was yesterday," he said. He slept in a cardboard recycling bin near Pacific Tire and Brake. He said if there were a homeless shelter in Lincoln County, he would have happily stayed there.

Lincoln County's 2017 Homeless Point in Time Count identified 160 unsheltered homeless individuals. Point-in-time counts, however, are largely acknowledged as vast undercounts up and down the coast because of methodology and limited resources.

Over the next decade, Bailey slept under porches, hidden in wooded areas and in the backs of empty semi-trucks, all within a town of about 10,000 people that spans just 9 square miles of Oregon coast.

With 70 inches of annual rainfall, Newport gets 30 more inches per year than Portland. Brisk gusts of coastal winds regularly blow through the streets. Living outside in Newport can be numbingly cold and endlessly damp.



Richard Bailey in his apartment. He was homeless in Newport for 11 years before he discovered he was eligible for permanent supportive housing.

Coastal Crossroads

Part V Shelter Shortage

Oregon's coastal communities are struggling with a housing crisis all their own – one that's gotten worse every year following the Great Recession. Short-term vacation rentals, generational poverty, an increasingly visible wealth divide and aging populations have all pushed coastal communities to an irrevocable reckoning. For these communities to have a viable future, something has to change, but what?

The emergency-only warming shelter offered refuge when temperatures dropped below freezing, but the rest of the time Bailey fended for himself.

He took odd jobs when he could get them – landscaping and washing cars. He never had enough money to stay in a motel room for very long, and he didn't have a tent. He would spend his days at the library or, if he had earned a little money, he might spring for a cup of coffee at Oceana, a local food co-op.

He obtained a food stamp card, but was unaware of any other resources that could help him, such as Section 8 housing assistance or disability benefits. He survived mainly on snack foods, but when he could find a place to build a fire, he would roast meat over the open flames. He was homeless for five years before he learned he could apply for Social Security, but when he got his stipend, it wasn't enough to rent an apartment.

During 2004's rainy season, he broke into an abandoned house infested with dry rot. "I knew I wasn't supposed to be there," he said. "It was really kind of unsafe to occupy, but it was raining, and it wasn't warm, but at least it was dry."

He stayed there for about a month until he was arrested. He was assigned five days on a work crew as punishment, according to Lincoln County court records.

Finding a safe place to sleep was a daily priority. One night, Bailey thought that place might be in the woods behind the library.

But then he awoke with a forceful kick to his face.

Dazed, he looked up at his assailants,

who he described as a couple of drunken lunatics.

"You'd be surprised with how much pain you can inflict on somebody with just a tennis shoe," he said. A woman repeatedly kicked him in the head, and when she was done, Bailey said, the man who was with her took his turn beating on him before throwing him down the steep ravine behind the parking lot.

"I was told not to camp back behind the library, but I went and did it anyway," Bailey said, "So to an extent, it was my own fault."

He said when he came to, he alerted police and was taken to a hospital. A victims' fund paid his medical bills, but he had to figure out how to pay for the pain medication he needed for his hip, which had been aggravated by the attack.

According to court records, Nathan Dorrough and Janet Bell were both convicted of felony assault for their attack of Bailey.

Reflecting on the event, Bailey advises anybody who is experiencing homelessness to always find a safe place to sleep to avoid being assaulted.

In the latter years of his homelessness, Bailey said he found a haven sleeping on the stoop of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, where he also sought the counsel of clergy.

Bailey said he will never forget the day during the winter of 2012, when he was walking across the parking lot at Community Services Consortium, and Cox opened her window and yelled down to him that she had found him an apartment he could move into at the start of the year.

"I always kept the faith," Bailey said. "I knew that someday, somehow, some way, things were going to turn around for me. They finally did."

A friend had introduced Bailey to the social service provider that was able to get him into permanent supportive housing.

Street Roots asked Community Services Consortium's housing services manager, Dina Eldridge, how someone could spend so many years outside in such a small community – where several people we interviewed knew Bailey – when resources were available.

"If someone is unaware of how public services work, like HUD programs, Section 8, etc., they will not know where to access those services," Eldridge said in an email. "Lincoln County does not have any homeless outreach workers who can direct folks like Richard in the right direction."

Eldridge also said Bailey's disability was not the only reason he was homeless.

"He was homeless for 11 years because he could not afford rent on his own and didn't know where else to turn," she said. "That is reality in places where housing



Amanda Cherryholmes, standing, chats with her mother Sharon Padilla at the front desk of the Lincoln City Warming Shelter.

choices are limited and unaffordable to those of modest means."

Seeds of hope

If Bailey had children, he would have been able to get on the waitlist for Newport's Samaritan House – or another program available to families 25 miles north at Family Promise of Lincoln City. But for single adults and unaccompanied youths, there are no overnight shelters available in Lincoln County – unless a warming shelter has temporarily opened because of extreme temperatures.

People from all walks of life are having difficulty finding housing in Lincoln County – and in many other areas along the coast. Increases in tourism and vacation rentals, along with a demographic that's aging in place and an expensive rental market that's out of reach to many locals, have all exacerbated what has always been a tight market. Those who have a criminal record, low or fixed income, eviction history or bad credit have been completely pushed out of the market.

There are also few options for parents who are unable to pass a drug and alcohol test.

"What we really lack here are programs and resources that are designed to engage with people at the very bottom of the spectrum," said Lola Jones, Samaritan House's executive director. "People that are sitting in front of you, half-drunk – that's a place where a lot of people are starting, and we are asking them to get three or four steps ahead of where they are without a ton of support."

While a year-round overnight shelter is still out of reach for those "at the very bottom," two grassroots drop-in centers for homeless folks have sprung up in the past year and are building momentum toward opening such facilities in both of Lincoln County's more populous coastal towns.

In the meantime, visitors to these resource centers can access showers, food, laundry, clothing and other forms of assistance during the day.

In Newport, Traci Flowers opened Grace Wins Haven in January with the goal of rehabbing the former Patrol Services building and turning it into a year-round overnight homeless shelter. Building code violations and her health have hampered progress, but while Flowers addresses building code issues, the location is serving as a drop-in center.

On June 4, Flowers made a plea, published in News Lincoln County, for people to volunteer at Grace Wins Haven while she undergoes treatment at the hospital.

"Even if you can only be there for an hour and it's just to sit and have a cup of coffee with someone or let them talk, it makes a big difference in the way people feel and the success of the center," she wrote.

In Lincoln City, 28-year-old Amanda Cherryholmes single-handedly transformed the city's warming shelter, which was run out of a church on cold nights, into its own independent facility that offers daytime resources as well.

Cherryholmes said when she began operating the warming shelter two years ago, she realized many people experiencing homelessness were not getting their basic needs met in the community. "We ended up running into issues where people needed answers. Simple stuff, like they needed to shower," she said.

She secured a \$45,000 grant from the city and leased a building from the mayor that serves as the resource center and on cold nights, the warming shelter. She's thrilled that as of this summer, Lincoln City will now have daytime services for people experiencing homelessness year-round.

Cherryholmes and her mother, Sharon Padilla, are the backbone of the Lincoln City Warming Shelter, and they do it on a primarily volunteer basis. When Street Roots visited, Padilla was manning the front desk as a steady stream of people stopped by for everything from clothing and coffee to help with obtaining their birth certificate or government I.D. card.

To support herself, Cherryholmes works as a caregiver in the mornings before

About this series

This article is part of Street Roots' Housing Rural Oregon series. Read previous articles from the series at news.streetroots.org.

opening the center at 10 a.m. and then again in the evening after it closes at 4 p.m.

What Cherryholmes lacks in experience, she makes up for with ingenuity. When she realized kids who rely on free lunch at school might go hungry during the summer, she brokered a deal with the local transit authority to allow low-income parents to take their kids to meal sites on the bus for free when school is out.

The coast is experiencing its own opioid epidemic, but those in the region seeking detox services have only local emergency rooms at area hospitals as an option. In response, Cherryholmes also hopes a manufactured building that's been donated to her center can be converted into detox facility, shelter and daycare once she finds a lot to put it on and secures funding.

"There is a large number of families who are not getting help because the parents aren't clean," said Cherryholmes. "Most substances you can't just quit cold turkey, you need the medical detox. What are you supposed to do if you're a single parent? What happens to your kids? People get stuck in vicious cycle. They need help, know they need help, but there isn't an organization that will babysit your kids while you're in detox. I've never heard of a detox center before that provides childcare. Why would you do one and not the other? If we're not helping the parents, all we're doing is passing it on to the next generation."

There are no syringe exchange programs in Lincoln County, which is also one of only three Oregon counties where Hepatitis C occurs at a rate of more than 200 per 100,000 residents, according to Oregon Health Authority's 2017 data. (The other two counties are Lake and Jefferson.)

About 60 percent of the 300 people who dropped into Cherryholmes' day center between November and April were travelers, she said. This population increases during the summer, when just like other Oregonians, those without homes flock to the coast.

She said about 25 percent of her clients are temporarily or newly homeless because of situational circumstances, such as a no-cause eviction or job loss. She said the other 75 percent are dealing with substance abuse, mental health issues or both.

"There are people who are lost, and they know they are," said Cherryholmes. "A lot of addicts know they need help, but don't know where to go because they know they won't pee clean."

But it's not just people who use drugs. People like Bailey and families on waiting lists will continue to camp in tents, squat in condemned buildings and find other ways to survive outdoors in Lincoln County until a year-round shelter opens its doors and ultimately, more units of affordable housing are built.

emily@streetroots.org
@greenwrites

