

# BUSINESS Guide



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BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Brienna Fultz has been struggling with homelessness for about three years and in previous years relied on staying with friends or sleeping in her car to avoid the cold. This is her first winter in a tent.

## Surviving Together

### CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Brienna Fultz, a Portland woman who has been struggling with homelessness for about three years, told the Portland Observer that this is the first winter spent in a tent. In previous years she stayed in her car or with a friend.

"With as many homeless as there are, it's really hard to find places where we can actually stay," Fultz said.

Last February, there was an estimated 4,000 homeless people in Multnomah County, a 10 percent increase from two years ago. The camp I spoke to represents just a small portion of the over 1,600 homeless people who went without shelter at the time of the count. Nearly 30 percent of them were women.

"It's hard during the winter, you know, to keep moving and trying to figure out 'okay, where are we going to go?'" Fultz said.

"It's been cold... everything about it is hard," said another woman, who is called Bug.

As the camp mom, Lex said

she has broken up fights, provided spare dry clothes for older or sick members of the group, cooks camp meals when there's enough food to go around, and provides emotional support.

"Most of us are out here because our families have abandoned us and we don't have family [...] we're more of a community than most families because we look out for each other. We may not like each other, but we love each other," she said.

Alta Willman, 54, is thankful for Lex and the other camp members who took notice when she had an infection on her neck that was left untreated for days. Her companions urged her to go to the hospital.

"Had these ladies not cared and loved about me as a human being, 'cause I had gotten bit in the neck by a spider (choking up) had they not pushed me to go, I wouldn't be here. The doctor said if I would've waited another four to six hours, I'd be dead," Willman said.

As the women look after each other, it's a vivid contrast "to the

many more people that are looking down on us," Lex said. "We have people drive by everyday honking at us, throwing shit at us, calling us garbage. And heaven forbid one of their family members ever becomes homeless."

"You know, we all have feelings," Lex added. "We don't need people to feel sorry for us. We don't need people to pity us. If they want to help, we need water, garbage [removal], bathrooms. The rest of it we pretty much take care of on our own."

As frigid temperatures hit the Portland area in recent weeks, with ice and snow being the latest ordeal to overcome during the long Christmas holiday weekend, shelters were opening in response.

Responding to the city's homeless emergency, officials continue to step up to reach people in risk. Anyone who is suffering from conditions such as hypothermia or inhaling carbon monoxide from burning fuels is urged to call 211 to get emergency transportation to a warming center or shelter. Those who are interested in donating or volunteering can go also call 211 or visit 211info.org for information or make donations.

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