

Homelessness

*How a Small Town
Made a Big Difference*



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Acknowledgements

I want to thank all of the people in Silverton who gave generously of their time to let me interview them, especially those who have or are experiencing homelessness.

I have decided to offer this book free of charge to anyone who wants to read it in an electronic format. You may distribute it to anyone you wish. If, after reading the book, you would like to make a contribution, please pick out one of the groups in the book or a group in your hometown.

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Homelessness – How a Small Town Can Make a Big Difference

Preface

I was born in Bismarck, North Dakota in 1950. The winters were brutal. We didn't know about wind chill back then; we just read the thermometer outside my parents' bedroom. In the winter it often read 30 degrees below zero. During my childhood in Bismarck, I never heard of a homeless individual. Obviously, there was no way anyone could camp out under a bridge and survive the winter nights. Today, a former nursing home has been transformed into the Ruth Meier Hospitality House and welcomes anyone who needs shelter.

My father had a working-class job as a radio/TV technician. My mother was a stay-at-home mom with three kids, but she had inherited some funds when an uncle died. They purchased a lot and built the basement of what was to be a two-story home. We lived in the basement until they could save enough to build the rest of the house. This house was located on a block that doesn't resemble many neighborhoods today. The block consisted of single-family homes, but also contained small apartment buildings where there were six to eight apartments. (The apartment houses were great at Halloween because you could stay warm for Trick or Treat knocks on eight doors!) Many of my friends at school lived in apartments and there was never, to the best of my knowledge, any talk about why they didn't live in a house like we did.

Once the war was over, housing was needed for the returning veterans. Several blocks of single-family homes were somewhat hastily constructed. Then in the 1960s, apartment complexes arose with over 50 apartments in them. The rest of the city development followed patterns in other cities and housing became more segregated by income. As Bismarck was mostly white, there was no visible segregation by race.

After graduate school in Wisconsin, I escaped the cold Midwest and came to Oregon. Like most people, I lived paycheck to paycheck. But I had family who would have supported me and helped me out if I needed it. I did have one experience where a boss wanted to suspend me for a month, and I said that I would have to quit so that I could access my retirement account to pay my mortgage. Fortunately, she changed her mind and agreed to just put a letter in my file. Needless to say, it was time to move on. But that was a rather mild experience compared to what most people deal with at least once in their lives.

I certainly was aware of homelessness in Portland. It was often in the news and there were well-known shelters in the central core area. In the 1990's a group of us made tacos to take down to serve at one of them about once a month. We called ourselves Team Taco. I remember how grateful and thankful everyone was who came through the line. Once that stopped, my encounters with homelessness were few and far between.

When my husband and I moved to Silverton in 2016, I would have been quite surprised if you had told me there were homeless individuals and especially homeless families here. They were

never very visible and there were no shelters. When I became involved in the warming shelter effort in 2017, I became aware of the number of homeless Silvertonians, a figure much larger than I would have expected. But what amazed me the most was all of the activities that citizens in the town were engaged in to help individuals down on their luck. I decided I had to write about it. If we could do it, so could others.

Think of this book as a manual. Pick something that you find interesting and take it on as a project in your town. I assure you that you will learn things you never knew and will appreciate the difference that you can make in the lives of others.

Introduction

At 2:00 AM in the morning the baby started a wail that only increased in volume. The mother picked her up and held her tightly to her chest trying to stop her cries. With a worried look on her face, she looked around and listened. Why was she concerned? Babies cry all the time. But not all of them are sleeping with their parents in a tent in the corner of a large room located on the second floor of Oak Street Church, which housed the Silverton Warming Shelter. There were about 20 people asleep on their cots and she knew that if the baby kept crying, someone would get angry and yell out. They might be forced to leave. She, her husband, and their four children now spent every night there. They had previously had a business and their last client refused to pay a fairly large sum of money that was owed to them. They ended up being evicted from their apartment and no one would rent to them even after the husband had secured another job. It appears that having an eviction on your record is worse than having a criminal conviction.

It's 2020 in one of the richest countries in the world and a family with four children and a dog are living in their car and spending their nights at a warming shelter. Is this the best we can do? How did we get here? Have there always been homeless people? Have we always ignored them? Was there always a lack of affordable housing? Were homeless people always seen as freeloaders unwilling to work? What are the facts?

This book attempts to provide answers to some of those questions in regard to one small town in Oregon – Silverton. With a population of around 10,000, Silverton is nestled between the rugged Cascade mountains to the east and the lush Willamette Valley to the west. It is about a 20-minute drive from the state's capital, Salem, and about an hour to the state's largest city, Portland. We begin with a short history of homelessness as it has occurred over the decades in Silverton. But that history is not the main thrust of this book. Rather, it is about some remarkable people in Silverton who have contributed hundreds of hours to make a difference for people who end up homeless or in dire straits. They start a warming shelter. They provide food. They help students with lunches and activities when their parents can't. They teach parenting classes. They help people secure employment. They help people get any federal assistance that is available. This book is a model for other communities who don't want to wait for the federal government or the state government or even the county government to 'solve' the problem of homelessness. This book is for people who want to take charge and make a difference in their communities – people who think the homeless, or those who might end up homeless without this assistance, have just as much a right to be in their town as they do.

Were there always homeless people in Silverton?

The word homeless was unlikely to have entered the lexicon in Oregon until well into the development of the area. Many of the white settlers had just crossed the continent on the Oregon Trail and were used to living with only a covered wagon as their residence. Robert Horace Down, in his *History of Silverton Country* written in 1926, explained that this was timber country and a one room log cabin could be easily built with second growth Douglas fir which grew “straight and smooth without limbs.”¹

Daniel Waldo settled in what is now known as The Waldo Hills between Silverton and Sublimity. In an interview in 1878 he reflected on his first years in Silverton Country, “Oregon was just like all other new countries. For a long time, we had to pack our own blankets and no place to sleep. There was only a little town at Oregon City. I always kept people without charging them a cent. I accommodated quite a number of people in my house out here on the road. We had not very many beds; they would sleep on the floor anyhow.”²

Many of the later settlers were of Scandinavian descent – either Swedish or Norwegian – and had cultural ties that lent themselves to helping each other out. Individuals without any family could pitch a tent or create a small lean-to without any housing regulations or zoning laws to prevent them.

In the first part of the 20th century, people who had homes often rented one or more rooms to single people. Women teachers were often the renters or the local timber worker. They were usually inexpensive. There is some reference to lodging houses in the historical literature where several rooms might be for rent in one building. There were not yet apartment buildings where the entire edifice consisted of single apartments.

It is likely that the first serious case of homeless in Silverton came about during the Great Depression. Still a vibrant part of his community, Jack Hande, who was born in Woodburn in 1931, moved with his family to Silverton when he was just six months old. In terms of people in need when he was growing up in the 30’s and early 40’s, he remarked, “As long as I can remember, people came to our door asking for food or work. We didn’t look upon them as bums. 25% of the workforce was unemployed. They were good people with bad luck who just were traveling through the area. One man, who had come all the way from Australia, Claude Spiney, managed to get a job fixing up someone’s yard. They recommended him and it snowballed. He became fully employed and some people with money helped him get a home and he lived in that little house on Fiske Street for a long time.” Hande remembers the federally funded Works Progress Administration crews working in Silverton. They hand dug ditches in the roads to install pipes and repair the surface.

¹ Robert Horace Down, *A History of Silverton Country* (Portland, OR: Berncliff Press, 1926), 163.

² *Ibid*, 12.

Hande edited and published the four volume *Silverton Stories from the 1920s, 30s, and 40s* that contain recollections of many Silverton residents. It is interesting that even when the times were hard, these writers had fond memories of growing up in Silverton. Much like elsewhere, the children spent a great deal of time outdoors swimming and catching fish in the creeks, playing games with friends, and walking to school. Sporadically mixed in with these stories are a few references to where they lived. When it was a single person, they often mention boarding in someone's house. Leonard Strobel recounts the following, "From 1942 I boarded with Thad and Lovena (Lovey) Blust on Madison Street. Max Blust was employed at McCord field; therefore, they had an empty bed! At \$25 a month including meals and laundry, I jumped on the offer."³ When families, usually the mother and children, picked strawberries for farmers in the summer, they sometimes were able to live in cabins provided on the farm.⁴ The supply of rental housing was never abundant during the first half of the 20th century. During the 30s, there was little if any migrant labor coming from the South, so the school year was made to accommodate the strawberry picking in the spring and the hops picking in the fall.⁵

Hande tells the story of Clark Gable who stayed in Silverton in his twenties. He had a job and a room in the Cottage Hotel on Main Street. This was the type of room where you shared a bathroom down the hall. Someone helped him get into drama school and the rest is history. During the war, Hande remembers a family that lived in a vacant commercial building on North Water Street. They would have been called gypsies at the time. They were nice people according to Hande and they had a couple of boys. No one gave them any trouble or tried to kick them out. Hande was a schoolteacher from 1956 to 1978. He remembers all kinds of kids and their families. Some kids were hard pressed, but they were all in some kind of a home. He doesn't have any memory of them being mistreated because of their situation.

During the Depression, men would ride the rails hoping to gain employment in the towns around the route. James Wright, telling the story about his parents who were berry farmers, made a clear distinction between bums and hobos. "Mom and dad used to go to where they knew they got off the train to pick up berry pickers. They had about 3 or 4 cabins to house them, and they were sure grateful. Since this was during the Great Depression time most, if not all of them, weren't bums, but hobos - willing and looking for work. When it really got hot my folks would sometimes take them to Silver Falls Park for a treat --- they sure liked that."⁶ Note that there was still a stigma to the word bums.

Cheryl Arbuckle, one of the writers in Hande's book, commented that "jobs for any age were so few and far between. Our little town of 2,500 was struggling to keep families fed. And households intact."⁷ "Jobs were scarce with at least 50% unemployment. I was lucky to have a job. Most people were on government relief. My beginning pay was 25 cents per hour," explained Norman Kolln another contributor.⁸ Virginia McKim, writing in *Growing up in*

³ Jack Hande, editor, *Silverton Stories from the 1920s, 30's, and 40's*, Vol. I, 54.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jack Hande, editor, Ibid, Vol. IV, 36.

⁶ Jack Hande, editor, Ibid, Vol. III,118.

⁷ Jack Hande, editor, Ibid, Vol. II, 5.

⁸ Ibid, Vol. II, 17.

Silverton, stated, “I didn’t understand then about the Depression and my dad looking for a job for over a year before coming back to Silverton to grow his own food.”⁹

The programs many rely on today to help pay for accommodations such as Social Security, disability, unemployment insurance, and Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), didn’t go into effect until 1935.¹⁰ In 1937, the government took the lead on public subsidized housing, but at the outset, that did not occur in small towns such as Silverton. While job programs such as those created by the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps helped employ people, usually men, they didn’t go into operation until 1939.¹¹ However, once the Second World War started, jobs became more plentiful and many an able-bodied man in Silverton was able to obtain employment in Portland or Vancouver, Washington in one of the three Kaiser shipyards. Begun in 1937, Kaiser’s ships outperformed other ship builders. While it is hard to fathom, Liberty ships “were typically assembled in a little over two weeks, and one in less than five days.”¹²

There have been a number of recessions since the Great Depression caused by the impact of the Korean War, monetary policy, oil embargos, wage-price controls, and even fear about whether the dot.com business could survive the Y2K scare.¹³ Each of these impacted housing, employment, and subsequently homelessness. As stated in the following interviews, Silverton has always had some homeless people, but it was not until the impacts to the economy in 2007-2009, that it became more pronounced. Called the Great Recession, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has labeled it the worst recession since the Great Depression.¹⁴ The Gross Domestic Product, a key indicator of the state of the economy, was down 8.4% in the fourth quarter of 2008 and didn’t rise to a positive until the third quarter of 2009.¹⁵ One of the areas of the economy that was hardest hit was the housing market. Rising home prices, loose lending practices, and the sub-prime mortgage market have been cited as the key causes.¹⁶ This recession resulted in the loss of jobs, homes, and savings, all of which can be precursors to homelessness and in any event spiral down to those who are very low-income fairly quickly. Homelessness became more visible and even small towns like Silverton started to be aware of a problem that heretofore had only applied to larger cities. I interviewed three individuals who have lived and been active in local issues for the last few decades to get their views on this increase in homelessness.

Jim Squires is a businessman who has been very active in the local government and other concerns in Silverton. He has always been aware of homelessness in the community. “You don’t have to hold a sign on the corner to indicate that you are homeless. Sometimes these people look

⁹ Virginia McKim, *Growing up in Silverton* (Los Altos, CA: Ozma Press, 2009), 21.

¹⁰ Sasha Abramsky, *The American Way of Poverty: How the Other Half Still Lives* (New York: Nation Books, 2014), 72.

¹¹ Jack Hande, *Silverton Stories from the 1920s, 30’s, and 40’s*, Vol. I, 66.

¹² Arthur Herman, *Freedom’s Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2012), 176-91.

¹³ <https://www.thebalance.com/the-history-of-recessions-in-the-united-states-3306011>

¹⁴ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/labor-productivity-growth-since-the-great-recession.htm>

¹⁵ <https://www.thebalance.com/the-history-of-recessions-in-the-united-states-3306011>

¹⁶ <https://www.investopedia.com/investing/great-recessions-impact-housing-market/>

just a little rougher than normal and have a large bag full of some of their belongings. I've seen people take items out of the garbage and end up selling them on the curb to make money." In his time in Silverton, he doesn't ever recall the discussion of homelessness coming up with the City Council or frankly in the local newspapers, at least until recently. In the past, according to Squires, people thought they were just passing through if they didn't know them. And perhaps they were. But Squires knew they were there, sometimes seeing people camp out by the bridge next to the local bowling alley. In the 80s and 90s, it became more obvious with some people sleeping in front of the stores in town. But they were usually gone by the morning.

Squires tries to do his bit by helping out where needed – buying a slice of pizza for someone or giving someone a coupon to take to the local McDonald's so they can have a meal. Sarah White, one of the founders of Sheltering Silverton, reached out to Jim about the needs of a man who was a Marine Corps veteran. Jim stepped up to the plate and offered to take him in. After spending three or four months lodging at Squires' house, the man was able to find his own place. Squires himself was in the Marine Corps and has a deep concern for veterans, especially those in need.

Stu Rasmussen served on the City Council of Silverton from 1984 to 1996 and again from 2004 to 2008. He served two terms as Mayor in the 1990s and three terms from 2008 to 2014. He describes himself as a fiscal conservative and a social liberal. He operates the Palace Theater, once owned by his father, and also owns a television production studio in Mt. Angel and manufactures the KissMeter, a coin-operated relationship analyzer.

Rasmussen describes two men who were the most well-known homeless people in Silverton until a few years ago. He describes them as polar opposites. Johnnie was in a wheelchair but was often loud and obnoxious. "He would often get in your face when he was panhandling or making demands inside of stores," Rasmussen explained. Everyone knew who he was. While he had family in town, he ended up living on the streets. Next to Silver Creek on Main Street, one could often find him or his belongings. Sarah White helped Johnnie find permanent housing once, but he was later kicked out because of his drinking. He came back to Silverton and Sarah once again found him a place to live after a stay in the local hospital.

The other man was named Mike. He was the face of homelessness in Silverton for 20 years. He was smart, according to Rasmussen, and knew which shelters to go to. "He was harmless, benign, and intelligent. His family offered to help out, but he just preferred to sleep outdoors," explained Rasmussen. He passed away recently of renal failure.

Most of what people hear about homelessness comes from news reports about the big cities. But small towns have their own unique issues. "We are on Silverton Standard Time," quips Rasmussen, "40 miles and 40 years from Portland (the largest city in Oregon)." Rasmussen adds that "you can't be anonymously homeless in Silverton. There aren't any 'others,' they are all us." With the Great Recession of the late 2000s and 2010s, things changed. The big cities ran out of resources and some people started to drift into Silverton from Salem or Portland. "These people stood out in Silverton because they were newcomers," explained Rasmussen. And because Silverton is still a town of only 10,000 people, none of the resources that larger cities had secured were available – no overnight shelter, no social services, and no available affordable housing. "One only needs to look at the discussion of placing four pods to house women on the

grounds of St. Edward's Episcopal Church in 2018 to see the difference in attitude of Silvertonians toward the homeless," Rasmussen added.

Chief of Police Jeff Fossholm has been in service to the city for the last 32 years. He quips that he has hired staff who have lived fewer years than his tenure with the city. Fossholm expresses what most people in Silverton think – it is a great community. He and his officers know most of the people who are homeless in the city. They are not usually very visible and camp out in the park or by the bridge. "What you don't often see, however," Fossholm adds, "is the people who are couchsurfing, spending nights with different friends or family."

The Silverton Police Department does what it can to help people out. When someone was exhibiting signs of mental illness and didn't have any place to go, the police used to be able to take them to the Oregon State Hospital in Salem. The officer would ring the bell and then participate with the staff person in an interview. The staff person often agreed with the officer's assessment and the person was admitted. As the facility became overcrowded and fewer people were admitted, this became a more difficult route. Fossholm commented that 25 years ago there was a facility in Salem where officers could take someone who was a danger to himself and others from alcoholic abuse rather than place the person in jail. There is still a place for addiction help called Bridgeway, but a person has to enter voluntarily. Fossholm cites his view of the three top reasons for homelessness: 1) lack of better facilities and programs for those with mental illness, 2) lack of programs for those with substance abuse, and 3) the strict housing and zoning rules that make it difficult for many to find affordable housing.

He adds that the police do their best to help people out. "Homelessness isn't a crime," he says. "It could be any of us. We don't roust people out of a camp unless there is an overaccumulation of trash or if there is potential for a fire." Most of their interaction with the homeless is through complaints from the public. Fossholm is very supportive of the work that Sheltering Silverton is doing. It's an opportunity to work with them when the police get a call about someone. "At least now there is somewhere we can refer them to," he adds. Fossholm is referring to the organization that started with a short-term warming shelter in 2015 and which is the subject of the next chapter.

Sheltering Silverton

Four women came together in 2015 in order to help the people in Silverton who were experiencing homelessness and were particularly vulnerable given the prediction of freezing temperatures in the next few weeks. Each of them brought their own experiences to bear as they explored what they could do to help the homeless who were increasing in number.

Sarah White had a less than ideal childhood herself. Her father was an alcoholic and also used hard drugs. He would disappear for days at a time. Her parents moved around a lot in Southern California when she was young. There was also a lot of violence in her home. When she was seven years old, her mother left her father and took a job as a waitress. As a result, Sarah identified with poverty growing up. When she married her husband Dmitry, he was soon stationed in Germany. In Germany, Sarah became a Family Readiness Group leader in the Army. This group helped to support families who were deployed. She mostly worked with women. After his discharge, they moved to Silverton in 2012. In Silverton, Sarah took a position as case manager for SACA, Silverton Area Community Aid¹⁷ in 2015. SACA serves as a food bank and also provides emergency aid for rent, transportation, and utility payments for those in need. She loved the job. But she soon became frustrated with the lack of services available locally, especially for women who were fleeing domestic violence, families with children, and seniors. She had majored in Family and Human Services in college and she knew that more could be done. One of her chief concerns was a man in a wheelchair who was homeless. Really? She couldn't believe that social services were so lacking in her community that they couldn't even take care of him. He was one of the first people helped by Sheltering Silverton.

Jennifer Ohren was a friend of Sarah's who also had worked at SACA. Jennifer was born in Silverton and struggled as a young adult with alcohol and drugs. In the early 2000s, now in Salem, she ended up losing the house she was in and began living in a car. She had been living with the grandmother of a friend of hers and the family members kicked them out. Jennifer always had a job. She often worked at a local coffee shop across from the courthouse in Salem. She got off drugs and has been clean for eight years. She worked at Outside IN, an organization in Portland that has a health clinic and young adult programs that "strive to meet people where they are and provide safe, affirming spaces for our community to receive judgment-free care and support."¹⁸ In addition to this position, she was on call at St. Joseph's Shelter associated with the Benedictine Abbey in Mt. Angel, just north of Silverton. From both of these experiences, Jennifer explains that she pretty much has seen everything, from drug abuse, to homelessness, to victims of domestic violence, etc. She also has managed a food pantry run by the Benedictine Mission called Helping Hands, a migrant men's shelter, and an apartment complex for farm workers. Today, she is employed by Northwest Human Services in Salem and serves as the Congregational Secretary at Trinity Lutheran Church in Mt. Angel.

¹⁷ See chapter on SACA.

¹⁸ <https://outsidein.org/>

Jennifer commented on the severe problem the government created when they decided to close down most of the mental health hospitals. In Oregon, the Fairview Training Center is a case in point. It was a state-run facility for people with developmental disabilities in Salem. It was established in 1907 as the State Institution for the Feeble-Minded and closed in 2000.¹⁹ In 1923, the Oregon State Legislature established a eugenics program that led to the sterilization of many of the residents. The Oregon State Hospital, first known as the Oregon State Insane Asylum, was the location for the movie, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.²⁰ As can be gleaned from the movie, it had its share of bad practices as well, including lobotomies. However, when Fairview closed in 2000 and changes were made to the Oregon State Hospital, many people were left out on the streets with no viable place to go to. Jennifer commented that while there were certainly concerns about simply locking people up in an institution, there was nothing to take the place of these institutions when they closed down. Dealing with mental health issues is not an easy task and most people are not equipped to do so. Many people with mental health issues end up self-medicating by using street drugs. As a former addict, she is very grateful for the opportunity to help others out.

Esther Nelson grew up in nearby Marquam and received a college degree in Psychology from Marylhurst University in Portland, Oregon. She worked for the Sexual Assault Resource Center in Portland after graduation and created their anti-trafficking unit. After ten years, she decided to take some time off and moved back to Silverton. In 2014, there were two domestic homicides in the city and a third incident, an aggravated assault. She and two other members of the community decided to hold an open forum to talk about the issue of domestic violence. Over 100 people attended, which is a large gathering for a city the size of Silverton. They established a Safety Council including representatives from SACA, the police department, and the local school district. They met multiple times. She offered to connect people to the resources that she knew were available, but outside Silverton. In 2016, she met with those starting Sheltering Silverton because domestic violence often results in homelessness. The women decided to focus Sheltering Silverton on housing and Esther ended up creating Safety Compass, a non-profit corporation. She also volunteered overnights at the Warming Shelter established in 2016. She now focuses exclusively on Safety Compass which has grown to seven staff people and works with child welfare agencies, police, hospital emergency room staff and juvenile intake to provide resources to deal with the issues of domestic violence and sex trafficking in Marion and three of the surrounding counties.

In late 2015, several days of especially cold and snowy weather was forecast for most of the Northwest, including the Silverton area. Snow and sub-freezing weather are relatively rare in this small town located in the transition area between the Cascade Mountains and the Willamette Valley. When snow and bitter cold does come, few seem adequately prepared for it, especially those living outside or in their cars. Jennifer, Sarah, Esther, and a fourth woman who preferred

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairview_Training_Center

²⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Flew_Over_the_Cuckoo%27s_Nest_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Flew_Over_the_Cuckoo%27s_Nest_(film))

to remain unnamed, knew many of the people in the community who were living without appropriate shelter. They all felt that that no one should have to endure such brutal conditions outdoors. Now, they feared that among the Silverton area residents who were experiencing homelessness, the most vulnerable and fragile individuals literally might not survive the fast approaching and unforgiving weather. Their goal was to create a place of safety and respite - an emergency warming shelter. The four of them sat down on a Sunday afternoon and devised a plan.

On a Monday in December, Sarah approached the City Emergency Manager to put out feelers. She asked if they could use the Community Center, a former armory where several offices that provided services to people were housed. The manager said no.

She then approached Oak Street Church. Oak Street Church had started hosting a Monday night meal in 2009 for seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and the poor. The pastor, Breck Wilson, had previously stated to his congregation that “If a pastor is not hospitable, he shouldn’t be one.” She approached him cautiously. “Do you think you might be able to host a warming shelter for a week?” He shrugged his shoulders and with no hesitation said, “Sure, that works. I just need to check with my board.” His board approved the proposition and in two days they had a sign-up sheet, volunteers came forward, cots were donated, and a set of policies developed. Immanuel Lutheran joined Oak Street Church in providing the overnight service, coupled with a meal starting in the winter of 2015-16. Pastor Leah Stolte-Doerfler commented on Immanuel’s participation. “In Silverton, it’s always about collaboration, not just one person or one group. When something needs to be done, it’s the town that steps in. That’s just how Silverton is.”

When Sarah White and other volunteers opened the first Warming Shelter in 2015, they needed to reach out to the homeless in Silverton. They couldn’t have found a better person to work with than Ramon Fernandez Meza. Ramon has deep empathy for homeless men, especially homeless dads, because he was one. “It can happen to anybody,” Ramon said. “It’s like a game of chess – one wrong decision and you can lose everything.” Ramon had purchased a dump truck to collect scrap metal. But he soon found out he couldn’t pay for both the truck and his apartment. He’d just become a father. He got evicted and had to sell the truck back to the former owner for less than he had paid for it.

He now runs two businesses – a limousine service as well as a property maintenance company focused on larger projects, also known as hardscapes. He tries to help out whenever he can, assisting seniors at the Silverton Senior Center or working with people who are out on the streets. “I don’t support just handing out money,” he explained, “but wouldn’t it be great if we could create something for them to sell – like bottled water?” He is enthusiastic about creating something for homeless people to do that would net them some money and would help them avoid the harassment they garner on the street.

Ramon worked with Sarah that first winter the Warming Shelter was set up to identify the locations where homeless people had set up camp in Silverton. Going out to them enabled more of them to learn about the Warming Shelter, thus avoiding a night out in temperatures that were below 32 degrees. “How can 10,000 citizens in Silverton not take care of the 100 homeless we have?” he asks. As he knows, many of them have strong ties to Silverton and want to stay here. That first night, Johnny, the man in the wheelchair, was their first guest. All in all, there were

about 35 people sheltered that winter. Sarah, Jennifer, and the fourth woman covered all of the shifts for the Warming Shelter so that someone was there every night to supervise and help out.

During the next winter, 2016-17, like the first one, the churches were open only when the temperature dipped to 32 degrees or below. Being an amazing collaborator and believing that operating a warming shelter, addressing homelessness, and advocating for services and low-income housing needed to be a collaborative community response, Sarah decided to create an advisory board. Brent Jacobsen had met Sarah when she worked at SACA and responded yes when she asked him to be a member of the advisory board.

Brent is a native Silvertonian who loves his hometown, wants it to be its best, and who has a broad work history in helping people. "Many of the people I've worked with haven't always been as well equipped to deal with the challenges of life." His career included work with juvenile court-administered private school helping young people make life, education, and career decisions; providing job skills training; parole and corrections reform in adult corrections; career counseling. He also served as the Director of Advising and Counseling at Chemeketa Community College in Salem and a college in Colorado as well as time as a businessperson. He has a PhD in Vocational Education, a Master's Degree in Education, and a Bachelor's Degree in a double major of Sociology and of Community Services and Public Affairs. Brent commented, "I strongly believe that every person deserves safe, stable housing. Through community collaboration, we can solve homelessness, at least here in Silverton. I want Silverton, my hometown, to be welcoming to and supportive of all of our residents."

The Advisory Board soon recognized that to continue, seek funding, and create a more formal organization, they needed to become a non-profit organization. That early Advisory Board helped shape some of the ideas for the new organization. For example, there should be a new, small, nimble Board of Directors informed by a larger Advisory Board. At Brent's suggestion, it became an Advisory Collaborative instead of board to reflect, in Brent's words "what we conceived as our necessary operating model." Sarah and Brent agreed to take the lead in getting it all started. Even though the Advisory Board no longer met, they were kept in the loop until the first Board of Directors was created. All of the Advisory Board members were invited to become members of the new Advisory Collaborative, and some accepted. The initial or founding Board members for the soon-to-be-formed corporation included Pastor Leah Stolte-Doerfler, Immanuel Lutheran Church, and Michele Stone Finicle, teacher and community activist. Over the next several weeks, Judy Goetz and Andrew Sprauer were added. The interim Board elected Brent as Chair/President; Pastor Leah as Vice-Chair/Vice-President; Michele as Secretary; Judy as Treasurer; Andrew as Legal Advisor; and Sarah as Direct Services and Operations Advisor.

Then in the winter of 2017-18, Oak Street Church agreed to host people every night from Thanksgiving through February. Those who sought shelter could store their sleeping bags and other belongings in the church's attic. The Warming Shelter opened at 9:00 PM and everyone had to leave by 7:00 AM. Operating a warming shelter every night was definitely the first of its kind in Silverton and continues today. Sheltering Silverton served 67 individuals in 2016-17 and 83 individuals in 2017-18.

Silverton Sheltering Services, Inc. was incorporated as an Oregon nonprofit in April 2018 (doing business as Sheltering Silverton). The new Board quickly applied for and received a grant from

the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency that allowed them to keep the Warming Shelter open every night for almost three months in the winter of 2018-19. It wasn't until the fall of 2019 that Sheltering Silverton received its 501c (3) status that allowed it to accept donations that are tax-deductible. Brent was the first chair of the non-profit and will likely end his three-year tenure with Sheltering Silverton in 2020.

The new organization opened a daytime Resource Center located next to SACA in a building that was once an armory for the Oregon National Guard and now operates as the Silverton Community Center by the City of Silverton. Silverton's mayor during the formation of the Warming Shelter and then Sheltering Silverton, Kyle Palmer, is a leader in efforts to serve the neediest in our community, coordinate efforts, and to foster understanding among people in the community. The city charges Sheltering Silverton \$1 in annual rent and city staff are extremely helpful and supportive of the organization's work. All of the Resource Center staff are volunteers, including Sarah White, who still advocates and provides case management services for clients and is the organization's Program Director, a position that supervises the operations of both the Resource Center and the Warming Shelter. Other staff include a Resource Center Coordinator and eight to ten volunteer and continuously trained 'advocates' who help staff the Resource Center year-round, Monday through Friday, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM and 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM if the weather is particularly brutal. Individuals who are seeking assistance are able to have a free lunch, relax on the comfortable couch, speak to an advocate or Sarah, visit with friends, and obtain goods that may make them a bit safer or more comfortable as they work to address the issues and barriers that led to becoming unhoused. Specialists from other agencies also are available at certain times to provide services in Silverton rather than require someone to travel to Salem where most of their offices are.

Sarah describes her approach to helping people get back on their feet. "I act as if the person is my sister. I want to take care of their physical needs such as food or coffee and then give them a hug. I often start out asking them to tell me their story and I listen carefully." Sarah provides empathetic feedback during this time by acknowledging the burden that many have been carrying. She calls her approach "strength-based and trauma-informed." She honors their resilience and endurance. "I want to focus on their assets," she explains, "whether this is their courage to hang in there or perhaps their loyalty to family members." She maintains that if you minimize what people are going through and can't empathize with them, they are likely to remain overwhelmed and stuck right where they are.

The help provided by the advocates covers many areas. The first step is often as basic as getting an identification card by requesting a copy of their birth certificate and then lining them up with the correct agency. Obtaining health care is a crucial need and most of the clients are eligible for the Oregon Health Care Plan which is a free plan for individuals who qualify based on income and certain residency requirements. With some of the clients, dealing with the criminal justice system is an important aspect of their needs. This help could involve getting someone to court, helping them deal with probation, providing opportunities for community service, or from the victim side, obtaining a restraining order or filing a police report. Housing is a key issue. Recent research has shown that having a safe place to live is first and foremost in order to handle all of

the other issues that have arisen while they have been homeless.²¹ Advocates work with clients to obtain federal Section 8 housing assistance, access local farm worker housing, provide rent assistance, and secure donated RVs. Unfortunately, the two senior housing facilities in Silverton both have an almost two year wait as do apartments that qualify for Section 8 voucher use. Other services provided are working with the businesses in town for possible job interviews, helping people to write a resume, analyzing their skills, getting them the appropriate clothes for an interview, and driving people to an interview. Drug addiction is another barrier to clients. Although options are limited, Sheltering Silverton does try to get people into rehabilitation centers. When you consider that this is all done by volunteers, it is very impressive that they have helped 104 people move into permanent housing in their short existence.

Sarah describes their work with seniors with disabilities. “First we get them admitted to the hospital and connect them to the social worker on staff. After they are discharged, we work hard to get them in a skilled nursing home, assisted living arrangement, or an adult foster home.” Sheltering Silverton has already assisted three such people in finding permanent housing.

Peggy Andrews, an original Warming Shelter volunteer and Advisory Collaborative member is one of the volunteer advocates at the Sheltering Silverton Resource Center and covers at least one day’s shift a week from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. She was a paramedic for 35 years in Alaska and Oregon. She then taught in the Emergency Medical Technician and Paramedic programs at Chemeketa Community College in Salem. She retired in 2015. She started helping out the homeless by volunteering to work at the Monday night dinners offered at her church – Oak Street Church – in 2008. In 2016, she happened to be at the church when Sarah was there and Pastor Breck Wilson introduced them. She asked if she could be involved with Sheltering Silverton and of course Sarah immediately replied yes. After observing a shift, she got started. At this time, the activity consisted of only the Warming Shelter. The Resource Center had not yet opened.

Peggy said that it was hard for the homeless to be kicked out of the Warming Shelter in the early morning. Homeless individuals already feel undervalued and when you only have a place to sleep and must get up early and take all of your belongings, there really is nowhere to relax. One of the homeless, an elderly gentleman, who was later housed, said that he woke up early that first morning in his apartment. He then realized that he didn’t have to get up and leave and went back to sleep! He spent practically the whole day in bed – what a feeling!

Peggy strongly supports the fact that Sheltering Silverton doesn’t just provide handouts. She helps clients learn to take charge of their lives. SS has an intake process and form and always includes asking clients what their goals are and what needs to be done to achieve them. “You can’t convey to them that you are there to take care of them,” Peggy explained. “It’s a joint effort to get them back on their feet.” She mentioned a frequent visitor to the Warming Shelter who was always busy talking about all the jobs she had had in the past. Peggy and another woman engaged her in conversation about what she was doing to be employed now. The woman responded, “I’m done working.” Given that she was not of retirement age and was homeless, that

²¹ Deborah Padgett, M.P.H, Benjamin Henwood, Ph.D., and Sam Tsemberis, Ph.D. *Housing First Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

didn't sound like a very good response. Today the woman is employed, thanks to the interventions and support of Peggy and others.

Peggy responded to an urgent need when a homeless man fell off a ledge in Portland. He rolled off the rocks and hurt his foot. It was infected and he had to have two of his toes amputated. She stepped forward to house the individual in her home for two weeks until he was able to get into an assisted living home. He couldn't have survived on the street.

The PIT Count

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development mandates a PIT – Point in Time – count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals on a single night in January. For Silverton, the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency is in charge. Silverton participated in this count in January of 2019. Sheltering Silverton held an all-day open house at Oak Street Church with services such as pedicures, vouchers for haircuts, massages, sewing assistance, three meals throughout the day, information, camping gear, and movies provided for people who were willing to come in and fill-out the questionnaire.

The information was turned into the ARCHES Project in Salem which is the agency that deals with homeless individuals in Marion and Polk Counties. Obviously not all individuals came to the church and filled out questionnaires. At the time of the PIT count, there were over 40 students who were not in permanent dwellings. Only three individuals on this survey reported having children.

The questionnaire could be considered fairly invasive as it asks many personal questions. The fact that people were willing to share this information, even with only their initials recorded, is quite remarkable.

Not surprisingly because of the composition of Silverton overall, only six individuals reported a race other than White. Those were five Hispanic/Latinos and one Native American. Six of the individuals were veterans. Age-wise, 31 of the individuals were born before 1981 with 19 born before 1971. The gender was fairly evenly split with 20 males and 15 females reporting their gender.

What is most interesting about the survey is the issues that individuals reported on. The most commonly reported conditions indicated by individuals were a chronic health condition (14) and a physical disability (12). Drug use was reported by 11. There were 14 who said they had been subject to domestic violence including 11 women and 3 men. Four reported they had been released from jail or prison in the last 90 days. Unfortunately, 18 of the survey respondents checked more than two conditions.

When asked where they stayed the previous night, 22 indicated on the street, three with friends, five doubled up with others, and three were in other situations. When asked when they became homeless most recently, 27 indicated in the last four years. One said since 2000.

In terms of why they had become homeless, the most common answers were that they couldn't afford rent (18), were unemployed (18), domestic violence (14), kicked out by family/friends (11), and evicted (9). Twenty-four respondents checked more than one of the reasons listed.

In a book reliant on well-documented research entitled *Housing First* by Deborah Padgett, the current case model, usually called the continuum of care is shown to be ineffective. As seen above, some of the barriers including physical and mental disabilities usually require long term solutions. Without housing, individuals become easily discouraged and drop out. Instead, Padgett

offers the proposal to house individuals first and then to deal with the other conditions that are present that contributed to their homelessness.

In Silverton, both of the subsidized rental senior living complexes have two year waiting lists. In terms of other affordable housing, there is very little available. Currently, a minimum wage job pays \$11.25 for workers in Silverton. That amounts to \$1,950 per month. The standard guideline is that you should not pay more than 30% of your net income on rent or other housing arrangements. Current vacancies for apartments in Silverton hover around \$1,000 for the least expensive.

*Edward*²²

It was a rainy Christmas Eve, typical for Oregon. Edward and his girlfriend were at his apartment and they had started drinking. They had only gone out twice before, but he was interested in furthering the relationship. When she told him, in no uncertain terms, that she did not want to continue to date him and walked out the door, he kept refilling his glass until he was in a drunken stupor. But that wasn't the worst of it. After pressing the call button 50 times on his phone to her number (needless to say she never answered), he blacked out. The next morning when he finally woke up, he was pissed at himself for having called her 50 times. He said to himself, "I do not give a fuck." But then he suddenly lost his vision. He could not see anything. But he could hear his mother's voice and an incident from his childhood came back to him in vivid detail, a memory that had never come to him before.

He was about 11 years old and had just come home from school. He was walking up the stairs to his bedroom on the second floor. His mother saw him and started screaming at him, "What do you have in your hands? What are you bringing upstairs?" His hands were empty, but that did not seem to matter at all to his mother. She started screaming her lungs out saying, "All men are disgusting." In a few short moments, she had reached her son. Grabbing him by his collar, she ripped off all of his clothes and began to toss him around in the hall. Suddenly, she ordered him to stand. As he was just reaching puberty, an erection present before the encounter was still visible. She had seen it of course and reached for a bamboo back scratcher nearby. She proceeded to thrash his penis with the newly weaponized scratcher. You do not have to be a male to understand how much this hurt. He finally got away from her and ran to his bedroom and hid under the bed. But there was no escaping this woman. She knelt down to grab him, pulled him out, and continued to hit him until he was unconscious. He woke up bloodied, sore, and angry.

When Edward recovered his vision and the memory of the traumatic incident was over for the time being, a voice inside his head told him, "Be detached. Do not have an emotional response to anything in this world. Do not become attached."

PTSD is defined as "a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event."²³ Most people think of our recent soldiers coming back from conflicts in the Middle East or Afghanistan as the most likely people to experience PTSD. More troops died from suicide than from combat in Afghanistan in 2012.²⁴

²² This is the first of a series of personal stories of people who have experienced homelessness in Silverton. Some of the names have been changed for those who wish to remain anonymous. These stories will be interspersed throughout the book.

²³ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355967>

²⁴ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/more-u-s-troops-died-by-suicide-than-in-combat-in-2012>

But military wars are not the only cause of PTSD. The scene described above is a perfect example of trauma that could easily produce PTSD symptoms. Unfortunately for Edward, the attacks on his penis were not the only trauma he was subjected to as a child.

The grey blue split-level house in a middle-class neighborhood where Edward grew up could easily hide the terror that occurred inside. On any day children played happily outside and in the woods nearby with their parents, not fretting that it was unsafe. There were rarely any incidents that called police into the neighborhood such as robberies, domestic violence, or other criminal activity. But inside Edward's house, life was anything but normal.

Edward's mother had been married prior to Edward's birth and she already had three children – two boys and a girl – when she met Edward's father. Edward was the sole child of the second marriage. His father started out with an irrigation/landscaping business and then transitioned into owning a heating and air conditioner installation company.

If asked to remember anything as a small child, Edward can only remember sitting in his crib hearing his parents yelling at each other – all the time. They rarely hit each other but throwing objects at one another was a common occurrence. On vacation in Hawaii he remembers having seaweed wrap around his ankle. Having just seen a scary movie about a snake, he was terrified, but no harm came to him. Upon their return from this vacation, more and more issues arose between his parents. When she found out that her husband had been molesting her daughter who was a mere 6 ½ years old, she kicked him out of the house. She had routinely told him that he was “worth more to them dead than alive.” When the police charged him with assault, he perhaps remembered that phrase. He jumped off a bridge in 1982 when Edward was only six.

Unfortunately, his mother became even more psychotic after his father's suicide. Any protection that he had received from his father, little though it was, evaporated. The oldest of his mother's children from her earlier marriage had taken the brunt of his mother's wrath especially when he reached puberty. He was locked in the basement and tied to the bed by himself. His arm had once been broken by his stepdad for peeing in his bed when he was around ten years old.

Edward never knew when his mother was in a good mood or bad adding to the anxiety of living in this household. His mother beat him on an almost daily basis. While he tried to read body language (was this an okay day to say hi?), it was not a very effective strategy. His mother did not feed him, his sister did. He learned to pick the lock on the basement to access food. As his mother expected the apocalypse to arrive at any time, she had stored a fair amount of food locked in the basement. He also became adept at stealing food from stores.

Edward confided to his teachers about his mother's behavior, especially after his father died. For a while, Child Protective Services was involved. Unfortunately, no change was made because of their inquiry. Her friends, especially those from the church she attended regularly, stood up for her thinking that perhaps she manipulated people from time to time, but that was the extent of it.

It all came to a head when Edward broke into a classmate's house and stole a gun. The classmate had been boasting about the guns his father owned. Edward brought the gun home and hid it in the backyard. That same day, his sister and her friend decided to take his dad's truck for a spin. His sister, who was driving, stomped on the brake and ended up knocking out cables in half the neighborhood.

On Friday the 13th, the police arrived at their house looking for the stolen gun. Edward took the officer to the back of the house and showed him where the gun was. A couple of weeks later, police officers came to his school and pulled him out of class. They told him that he had to leave the house. They had contacted an uncle that agreed to let him move in with him. Edward feels today that they did this for his own good. They realized what was really happening in his house and that Edward needed to leave.

Living with his uncle's family, who were highly religious, was not much better than his former living situation. He recalls today that they were very restrictive in whom he could be friends with (no one outside their religious circle) and that he never learned any social skills as a result. He finally moved to Silverton, Oregon to live with his grandparents.

As an adult, he was often homeless or couchsurfing with friends. He had difficulty holding down jobs. He became involved with Sheltering Silverton and was provided an RV to live in near the city just to the north. He is now starting his own landscaping business knowing that he still has many issues to work through.

Food Resources

This chapter portrays the efforts of three churches to provide free meals to Silvertonians. In addition, the role of the Silverton Area Community Aid is explored.

Wednesday Night Dinner – First Christian Church

In 2006 across the United States, home prices started to fall. By 2008 a full-blown recession had spread itself across the country and reached the City of Silverton. People lost their houses, their apartments, and their jobs. Homelessness increased. People were going hungry.

In light of these difficulties, two of the members of the First Christian Church in Silverton - Karen Brock and Cherry Hoffman - approached Julie Bersin, who was an elder in the church, and asked “What can we do?” They came up with the idea of providing food. They thought they could offer a meal, once a week, to those in need. Julie came up with the idea of offering spaghetti. “I thought it would be easy to add to it if we had more than 10 people,” she said. They approached Steve Knox, the pastor, and asked whether it would be okay to launch their idea. He responded that it was fine with him, but they would need an okay by the church board. He voiced a concern that, like many great ideas parishioners had come up with in the past, this one might fizzle out rather quickly. Time proved that he was quite mistaken. Soon after their conversation with the pastor, the board met and gave a green light to the women’s project. The board did note that there was nothing in the budget to provide funding for the meals, however.

Undaunted, Karen and Cherry went shopping at the local grocery store. They threw spaghetti boxes into their cart along with shrimp appetizers and salad fixings. Julie started out as the only cook. She started at 3:30 PM for the 5:00 PM meal. Today, many volunteers arrive at 8:00 AM to get all the meals and side dishes ready. None of the three women had thought about dessert for that first meal. Today there are three long tables that hold a variety of desserts - some made by volunteers and brought each Wednesday to the church - probably the most popular part of the meal!

The first night, November 11, 2008, they served 37 meals. The second week, they served 50. The numbers started to creep up. When they reached 75, Pastor Knox started to panic. “I felt like a deer in the headlights,” he recounted. “I wasn’t sure that we could handle the increase in numbers we were seeing. But as has occurred at so many other times in this endeavor, God things happened.” Because at just about the time that Pastor Knox was being blinded by the headlights, St. Paul’s Catholic Church approached First Christian and asked if they could help. Sue Johnson from St. Paul’s had heard about the dinners that were being provided and wanted to be part of the team. Carol Anderson from St. Paul’s later joined the group. Catholic Carol, as she was referred to, became a constant volunteer until she moved out of Silverton in 2019. Sherry Palmer, yet another volunteer from St. Paul’s, is still active today and contributed to this history of the Wednesday Night Community Dinner as the meals came to be known.

Cherry Hoffman is a commissioned minister. She is not known as a great cook. Early on the other volunteers kicked her out of the kitchen saying that she should be conversing with the people, that’s what she did best. It was explained at the outset that evangelizing wasn’t their

goal. There would be no sermons, no arm twisting, and no pamphlets handed out at each table. “We wanted to show our love through example,” Cherry added. In 2019, when someone raised this issue at a coalition meeting of groups working on the homelessness issue, Judy Duncan, one of the stalwarts of the effort, reiterated their position. The man, who thought they should have a Bible study for the homeless along with services that were provided, realized that the group, including the church representatives, would not support him.

Six months into the program, a crisis occurred. The Marion County Health Department (Silverton is located in Marion County) called the church stating that they had heard that the church was hosting a dinner on Wednesday nights. The Health Department staff person calling said that he had seen the sign put out in front of the church to announce the free dinner. The next thing out of his mouth was that what the church was doing was a violation of the county’s health codes. Pastor Knox began to feel again like that deer. He tried to explain that they were not a restaurant and that the meals were free. The staff person explained that whether they charged for the meals or not, they were still in violation of the codes. The most devastating information he provided was about the initial licensing fee required to be paid after a rigorous inspection was conducted. It averaged between \$1,200 and \$2,000. For First Christian, that amount would have brought a swift end to their endeavor. However, the staff person was sympathetic and said that he would talk to his supervisor. When he called back later, he told Pastor Knox that in the fine print of the regulations, there was a waiver of the fee for benevolent causes. Pastor Knox breathed a sigh of relief. There was still an inspection ahead for their facility, but fortunately they had just redone their kitchen. All they had to add was piping hot water into a hand washing sink. Lynn Koenig, one of the volunteer cooks who met the Environmental Health Specialist that day at the church, was curious about why it had taken the county six months to find out about the meals they were offering. The specialist provided a quick answer, “I don’t work on Wednesdays.” Someone else had finally told him about the sign.

Several issues came up early whose solutions are still in evidence today. First, the team decided that they didn’t want to serve the meals on paper plates. They wanted to use regular dishes and real silverware, not plastic spoons and forks. Fortunately, the church had installed an industrial dishwasher that processed each load in under three minutes. Todd Ferrell came in 2010 and took on the task of getting everything ready for the dishwasher which Brad Brenden has been running for years – clearly the ‘hottest’ volunteer job. People with carts move among the tables and take dishes and silverware when the diners are done with their meals. As these carts make their way back to the kitchen area, Todd scrapes the food off every plate and another volunteer rinses all the silverware and places glasses and glass coffee cups in the plastic trays that are used with the dishwasher. Originally, you might not think that this was a big deal. And it wasn’t at the starting numbers in 2008. In 2019, however, over 300 meals, sometimes as high as 500, are served each Wednesday night. On February 20, 2019, the church announced it had served its 200,000th meal!

So how did the church finance this effort? In multiple ways. Pastor Knox explained that every time they were in need of money, a donation came in. The Elks, the Kiwanis, the Rotary, and other organizations, and other churches donated funds once they saw what was happening at the church on Wednesday nights. Marion-Polk Food Share also regularly donates food for the events. Every so often, someone, usually totally unexpected, sends in a large check. Once a bank in nearby Salem (the state’s capital), sent a check for \$500. Their employees had told them about

the Wednesday Night Community Dinner. The City of Silverton does not enforce its parking meters (yes, still just filled with coins) during the Christmas holidays. However, people are encouraged to still plug the meters. The City Council then decides on a charity to donate the money to. First Christian's Community Dinner received a \$2,000 check one year. Very little of the funding of the dinners comes from grants. Bruce Pac, a Silverton food processing plant, offers meat to the church at a reasonable price. Each meal has a meat component in order to provide a balanced meal. Oktoberfest, a traditional set of festivities held in nearby Mt. Angel, has also contributed funding in the past. And there are moving stories to many of these donations. Judy was volunteering at one of the dinners and a woman brought in a \$500 check stating that she supported their efforts. The woman's mother had recently passed away and the woman thought her mother would have approved of the donation. Her mother had played the piano for years during the community dinners until she had to be placed in a nursing home. She had been in her 90's when she graced the diners with her music.

On another occasion, Cherry's brother, Angel, came to dinner. He is a professional clown. He regaled the diners, especially the small children. "The looks on the kids' faces were priceless as the balloon animals and hats magically appeared," noted Cherry. Sometimes a play area or craft table was set up just for the children so the adults could converse with their friends after finishing their meal.

Julie told about one night when they had eight pans of enchiladas (today that would be 22). "We were down to just one pan in the oven," Julie commented. "I told the servers to cut the portions in half because there was still a line of hungry people that went to the door. We were just finishing serving and I opened the oven door again. There was another tray of food." Julie insists it wasn't there before when she looked. "God does see to it that we never run out of food," Julie said.

Books sales were also instigated to raise funds. The indefatigable organizer, Cherry, had the first one at her house. Once a pallet of books arrived from the Marion-Polk County Food Share. They never knew just what they were going to receive from them. And sometimes it obviously wasn't even edible!

Linda McCallister is the woman who organizes the volunteers who are going to serve the meal when they arrive around 4:00 PM. These are the slicers, choppers, pourers, mixers and servers. At 4:45 PM she assigns everyone to a place behind the long table where large serving dishes or often warming pots are placed. She also lets everyone know that they have to wash their hands for at least twelve seconds and put on the plastic gloves that are provided. Woe to the person who forgets! She also has people assigned to relieve each server so they can also partake of a meal. This is in addition to those assigned to the kitchen who have usually been there all day and the dishwashers and cart helpers who usually arrive around 5:00 PM. By 7:00 PM, everything is being dismantled and put away for the next week. Leftovers are often taken to the Union Gospel Mission in Salem.

Ed Jenkins is one of those servers who has been there from almost the beginning. He pours chocolate milk, regular milk, water, and an iced tea every week into glasses – at least 400 of them! One night, shortly after they started, they were concerned they were running out of those

glasses to serve drinks in. When Cherry and Karen were counting the donations one night, they found a \$100 check specifically for glasses. As Cherry would often say, “Miracles happen daily.”

Today, the dinner accomplishes a great deal. It is a place where seniors can go to eat meals they don't have to prepare and have a chance to talk to their friends. Homeless people can have a nutritious meal complete with dessert and know that they are welcome. Sometimes, volunteers come from the Emergency Medical Services training program at nearby Chemeketa Community College. The court also imposes community service on youth for transgressions that they have committed. Community Dinner is a place they can serve their 'time.' The dinners start at 5:00 PM and at 6:00 PM, anyone can line-up for cardboard containers to take a meal home. Conversation is usually lively, and some people are reluctant to leave at 7:00 PM.

And sometimes – a life is saved. Jim Squires, a long-time Silverton resident, often attends the dinners. One evening, he started a conversation with a man who appeared a bit down on his luck. The gentleman appeared reluctant to engage in dialogue, but eventually Jim won him over. After a bit of conversation, the gentleman said this was his last meal and that he intended to go home and kill himself that evening. Jim took a deep breath and continued to talk to the man. After a while, Jim said, “Hey, why don't you meet me for coffee tomorrow morning?” The gentleman agreed. While Jim wasn't sure he would show up, he did. And Jim met with him for coffee every morning for three months. With Jim's help, he was able to pull himself out of his suicidal thoughts and now has a research position at a leading university in the Midwest. A chance encounter. A safe place. A caring man. A life saved.

Up to 20 meals are delivered each Wednesday evening to people who cannot leave their homes – mostly seniors. One evening, the group made its last stop at an elderly woman's house. Their rule is that they can knock on the door and if no one answers, they can open the door and shout the name of the individual and walk in. This night, that is exactly what they did. When no one answered once they were inside, they decided to look throughout the house. They found the woman on the floor and immediately called an ambulance. Later it was discovered that she had been on that floor in the same position for three full days. After the woman was stabilized and brought home, she wrote a note to the church informing them that the doctor had told her that she likely would have been dead in an hour had the group not arrived when it did. Another life saved.

The volunteers come from all walks of life. The average age is, well, shall we say over 40... or maybe even 50! But they are not all parishioners of First Christian or St. Paul's Catholic Church or even any church at all. However, they all have one thing in common. They want to help others who are less fortunate than they are. Judy states that she is an organizer. When they needed to have people prepare desserts and bring them to the meal, she started a list in a small notebook. Slowly, she began entering names and phone numbers of people who had offered to help. The cookies always showed up on time. After the meals are served, some volunteers stay to vacuum the carpets and to be sure all the tables are clean. And not a single volunteer has to go home and say, “What could I have done to help others today?” Because they have already done it.

Oak Street Church

Breck Wilson started his pastoral career in a religious commune in California. He was part of a group referred to as World Outreach that welcomed people, especially young people, who wanted to worship Jesus. In the 1970's, the group came to Oregon and settled in Silverton. They started a gleaning operation where people are allowed to pick up the last of the produce after the official harvest has ended. It was their goal to process the food to supply other communes, but that didn't work out. In 1973, while he was helping on a farm in Alaska, he met his wife Cathy.

They started renting the church that is now known as the Oak Street Church. The building was built in 1908 and served the Woodmen of the World and the American Legion in the past. Woodmen of the World was a fraternal organization founded in 1890.²⁵ "We needed to become more a part of the community and be centered in it, rather than on the outskirts," Breck explained. "After each service on Sunday, we offered a meal to anyone who wanted to come," added Breck. "This was the start of offering meals that eventually moved to Monday nights in 2009." Breck often stated, "If you are not hospitable, you shouldn't be a pastor." They eventually bought the property from the American Legion. "We were truly a commune," explained Breck. "All the money went into one purse." At times, they had their own businesses where they would train new members.

Cathy shared that the Monday night meals "really helped people make connections." She added, "God is in all of us and comes in all sorts of packages." Monday night meals was one of those packages although they were careful not to promote their religion and didn't even say a prayer before the meals. People who were new to the community could come and meet people. Some ended up regular volunteers at the meals. Bill Schiedler, a fifth-generation farmer in the area, brings food in for the meals as does the Community Supported Agriculture program. Cathy added that they even ran some cooking classes "so people could learn to eat healthy foods that were obtained locally."

Breck Wilson was the pastor when he asked one of his parishioners, John Friedrich, if he was interested in becoming the pastor at the church when he retired in 2014. At the time, they also needed some extra help. They had more and more kids coming to the church and didn't have a formal Sunday School for children. Breck asked John to help out in these duties and also to preach once a month. He was named the Associate Pastor and was later ordained as Pastor in 2018.

John was brought up in a fairly conservative religious family. He had the opportunity to be an intern at Canyonview Camp, a religious camp, which is based just outside of Silverton. John added that in addition to taking some classes on religion that he "scrubbed a lot of toilets and washed a lot of dishes" during his three years at the camp. He also worked six months at Youth with a Mission in the mountains of Northern Idaho. But the most interesting work he did was perhaps in North Central India where he was linked to a number of small house churches. He loved his time there and was able to wander the streets freely. He notes that there was a lot of poverty. He was cautioned by his sponsors to avoid giving money to kids who were begging on the streets. They informed him that they were not trying to secure money just for themselves but were usually working for someone who took most of what they were able to garner. But John

²⁵ <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ar/county/greene/historywood.htm>

was reminded of one of the sayings of Jesus that you should give to anyone who asks, so he found it hard not to. He invariably ended up giving the kids some coins.

When John first came to Silverton, he doesn't recall seeing many homeless people. He did notice homeless camps under the freeway overpasses a little north of Silverton on the interstate highway. He often heard people asking, "Why don't they just get a job?" John resisted this attitude and believed it was important to be more compassionate, like Jesus.

John estimates that at least 30% of the attendees at the Monday meal today are either unhoused or housed but poor. All of the meals are paid for by donations. The church has a Corn Dog Booth at a couple of local festivals in Silverton and the surrounding area. Oak Street has affectionately adopted the slogan Corndogs for Peace, because nearly all the money raised at these festivals by selling corndogs is used to support local and international missions that work to promote peace. John invites people to the meal but does not at the same time invite them to the church. "Instead of pressuring people to come to church, it's better to share a meal with no pressure," John explains. They now average about 120 people on Monday nights.

Sarah White came to Pastor Breck one Monday night in the winter of 2016-17 and talked about the freezing temperatures which were coming soon to the city. Pastor Breck said they would help out without consulting anyone on the spot. That first year, they shared the Warming Shelter with other churches. Later, when Oak Street Church became the sole location for the Warming Shelter sponsored by Sheltering Silverton, Pastor John consulted his board. "All of this work is within the mission of Oak Street Church, so it was never controversial to welcome the shelter," John explains. "As time went on, we just made it more official and organized." Sheltering Silverton did reimburse them for the utilities that normally would have been much lower had the Warming Shelter not operated all night.

Emily Neves, the current administrative assistant and a volunteer with Sheltering Silverton, explained her views on why service to the community is so important.

It's only natural that we host the Warming Shelter and a weekly meal, because service to the community and justice for the marginalized members of our community are foundational to Oak Street. When John says, "it was never controversial to welcome the shelter," he couldn't be more accurate. Our congregation, of course, always has more room to grow, more ways to serve, more opportunities for hospitality, but as a member and a leader at Oak Street Church, I am not only okay with hosting the Warming Shelter, I am honored to. Just as I am honored to work in the resource center alongside the unhoused and underserved members of our community, who are a beautiful, unique, challenging, and wonderful gift to our community.

John states that the unhoused are not very different from the rest of us. "It wouldn't take much for any of us to be in such extreme circumstances. In other places in the world, everyone knows each other because they are always outside. We tend to stay inside our houses and don't reach out as much to our neighbors."

John is concerned about the rising prices of housing in Silverton. It has become a bedroom community for Salem and Portland, and he wonders whether he will be able to afford to live here when he starts a family.

Trinity Lutheran Church

Laura Beville is the pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church. But given the small congregations of some of the churches today, she also serves as pastor at the United Methodist Church. She has served as a pastor for nineteen years in various locations in Oregon and Idaho, several in rural areas. She is a graduate of Boston University.

When queried about the homeless, she said, “Many people who live in small rural communities want to stay there. Economic challenges that arise leave some homeless.” The luncheon Trinity provides to the community started about four years ago. “Several people who form the core of our congregation wanted to extend the family environment at Trinity to the community,” Laura explained. “The Kaser and Ohren families were active from the beginning.” The Trinity luncheon, which serves 80-100 each Saturday, attracts a broad variety of people. “Initially, the luncheon attracted seniors who wanted to socialize,” said Laura. “Having Meals on Wheels delivered can be a very lonely experience.”

The church partners with community supported agriculture. A local farm delivers vegetables to the church. All the meals are cooked from scratch. The United Methodist Church grew a large garden in the back of their building in order to provide food for others. “Food insecurity,” Laura explained, “was one of the focuses of both the garden and starting the luncheon. Charlie Flannagan was the lead person who initially wanted to teach people to garden, but he ended up doing it mostly by himself and ended up helping to sustain both the Trinity luncheon and the Oak Street Church’s Monday night meals.”

The church has other ideas about how to serve their community. “We have the land and the facilities to do more,” Laura said. “We are exploring using our land to provide more affordable housing for people in Silverton.” The church is in the process of working with other organizations, such as Sheltering Silverton, United Way, SACA, and Habitat for Humanity, as well as the City of Silverton to determine what might be done with their one and one-half acres.

Silverton Area Community Aid

SACA’s website reveals the long history of assistance provided by the citizens of Silverton to those in need. “Through the 1950’s, compassionate people in the Silverton area actively volunteered for the organization then-named Silverton Emergency Aid, which provided food and other services for people in need. In June of 1984, the program was incorporated as Silverton Area Community Aid, Inc., and a governing Board of Directors representing churches, civic organizations, and citizens was established.”²⁶

²⁶ <https://silvertonareacommunityaid.org/about/>

Today, there is a full-time Executive Director, Sarah DeSantis, as well as five part-time staff who are assisted by many volunteers. DeSantis first served as a volunteer with SACA when the director position opened. “I thought it would be a great way to serve the people of Silverton. I was born here and feel connected to the town,” DeSantis explained. With a degree in French and International Relations, she has worked in an incredibly wide variety of fields: advocate for domestic violence survivors, child protective services case manager, and business and policy analyst to name a few. She also has lived in France and Taiwan.

SACA is located in the former Armory building just down the street from City Hall and shares the building with other support organizations including Sheltering Silverton and Silverton Together. Its mission: “Improving lives by providing food, services and access to community resources.” SACA’s food pantry offers fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, meat, bread and a variety of non-perishable foods. People can shop once a week for their household.

“We would like to do more,” explained DeSantis, “but we need a larger space. We would like to offer more classes, have private spaces to speak to clients, and perhaps offer free clothing.” Currently, the City of Silverton doesn’t charge rent for the Armory location. “We will probably need to work with our donors to finance a move,” DeSantis said. She added that it would be ideal to have other groups such as Sheltering Silverton and Silverton Together in the same location. “It would be much easier for our clients to access services,” DeSantis added.

The statistics for 2018 are quite amazing given the small size of Silverton (about 10,000 citizens). 337,500 pounds of food have been donated to the food pantry it runs, with 2,986 visits. \$70,100 in financial assistance was provided as well. SACA received grants in the amount of about \$14,000. One-third of their food donations come from Marion Polk Food Share (MPFS) which provides oversight from a rules and regulations perspective. In turn, MPFS is overseen by the Oregon Food Bank Network which is part of Feeding® America. Most of the operation, however, is run through donations (food and dollars) of individuals, businesses, and farmers. In addition, both of the local grocery stores give food. “In most cases, the best by dates on products are not expiration dates and, as such, still have a shelf life beyond those dates. While stores are not always able to sell food past the best by date, we can distribute it per Feeding® America regulations,” DeSantis explained.

In 2019, the SACA Gala netted over \$100,000. The auction idea was created in 2009 by three couples: Ron and Jane Jones, Ken and Darby Hector, and Jim and Linda Webb. It was originally a private event held at the Jones’ home. It has grown substantially since then and is now a public event coordinated by volunteers. In 2019, Sherry Hoefel was the co-chair of the Gala committee. “It takes a whole year to get everything into place,” explains Hoefel, “so we have already begun preparing for our 2020 event.” In 2020, the event was to move from the Gordon House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright where it was held the previous two years to the Vanderbeck Valley Farms which has more space, a beautiful lawn, and a covered building set among trees and a creek. The 2020 Gala was canceled due to the COVID pandemic but planned for 2021 at Vanderbeck Valley Farms. “We have several sponsors whose donations help pay for the location rent, the food, and the other event expenses. Then remaining proceeds are used for SACA operating expenses. The SACA Gala is a volunteer-run event,” Sherry added. Hundreds of businesses and individuals donate items for silent auction baskets such as Oregon State Beaver or

Oregon Ducks tickets and paraphernalia. Larger value items are vied for in a live auction with a professional auctioneer. SACA Gala procurement volunteers spend countless hours communicating with potential donors and package providers for these items. In 2019, these included six nights in a penthouse in Porto Cupecoy on St. Maarten along with an airline certificate, a Holland America Cruise for two people for twelve nights, and 20 hours of landscaping. Needless to say, multiple bidders helped maximize the profits. The Porto Cupecoy trip went for \$7,400 and the cruise for \$4,100 and DeSantis Landscapes for \$2,100. Sherry has lived in the Silverton area since seventh grade and has volunteered in some fashion in Silverton since high school. “Even when we didn’t have much,” Sherry commented, “we knew there were always others worse off.” She obviously imbued this attitude in her children because her daughter, Sarah DeSantis, is the current executive director of SACA.

Dr. Mike Grady is the current president of the Board of Directors at SACA. He has been on the board for nine years. As a member of the Northwest Medical Teams, he provided medical care during the famine in Ethiopia in the mid-1980’s working to address the medical problems of people in feeding camps. He also volunteered previously with the Woodburn food bank. “SACA is much larger and the community of Silverton has been generous in its support,” Mike commented.

While housing is a primary goal to get individuals and families back on track, they would not last very long without food. Three meals are provided throughout the week in Silverton (see First Christian Church, Oak Street Church, and Trinity Lutheran Church above). However, even with the takeout meals, these services would not sustain even a small family. Thus, SACA is crucial to keeping people alive who have been thrust into poverty and perhaps even homelessness. For many families, if there is a single wage earner and he/she loses a job, this is all it takes to then lose a house or an apartment and end up homeless. A study conducted in 2019 by the organization Prosperity Now found that 40 percent of the families in the United States were only one paycheck away from poverty.²⁷ In other words, they have no savings to tide them over until they either get some unemployment compensation or find a new job. They also found that the percentage is much higher, over 60%, for Black and Latino families.

In addition to providing food, SACA also helps out with paying rent, mortgage payments, utility bills, etc. But that is not the end of their assistance. They help people with vouchers for local transportation options such as the Cherriots bus that goes to nearby Salem, vouchers for gas or propane, classes in cooking nutritious meals and gardening, help with looking for a job, and access to a dental care van. These are all needed services to help get individuals back on track to finding a job, a housing situation, and eventually out of poverty.

Karyssa Dow, who was named volunteer of the month for September 2019, heard about SACA from a neighbor. She started volunteering. After a couple of months, she decided to offer free haircuts. “Having a good haircut not only makes you feel good,” she commented, “but it’s very important to look good for a job interview.” On Wednesday when SACA is closed for food pick-up, she has 30-minute slots that people can sign up for or just drop in. “Some of the people come every month and feel quite comfortable at SACA,” Dow added. She also described one gentleman whose hair she cut and styled who had scars on his head. He told her that he had been

²⁷ <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-alarming-percentage-of-americans-one-paycheck-away-poverty/>

shot in another state and had ongoing issues because of the damage to his head. “He is a very nice man who also gives back to his community by going with a woman who has multiple sclerosis on walks with her six little dogs. She had a habit of falling and he noticed it and now goes with her all the time.” Dow added that many of the volunteers at SACA had used its services themselves in the past. “Everyone who comes to SACA is really appreciative of the help,” she said. “One gentleman who was living on social security got a job and now donates to SACA.”

In order to qualify for these services, individuals must meet the USDA guidelines and live in the Silver Falls School District which encompasses Silverton and the surrounding area. Those guidelines require an income less than \$23,107 for a single individual and, as an example of a family, \$47, 638 for a family of four. There are some other exceptions to these guidelines that allow individuals or families with slightly higher incomes to also qualify for assistance from SACA.²⁸ However, SACA does not require proof of income and only asks people to state if they fall within the income guidelines.

DeSantis shared a couple of stories of clients and why they came to the pantry. “We helped a woman whose son was diagnosed with a severe illness. She had to travel to Portland where he was hospitalized and couldn’t keep up with her job,” DeSantis explained. “We helped with gas, and housing assistance.” Another case involved an older man who again had to go to Portland for medical services. “We came up with some creative solutions for transport, but it was a heartbreaking story,” DeSantis added. She explained that there are a lot of people fleeing domestic violence and elderly persons who are living on a fixed income that use the services SACA provides.

SACA conducted a survey of its clients with mixed results. “They were willing to admit to themselves that they needed help,” DeSantis said. “But when asked about other services, most did not look beyond the basic needs.” DeSantis assumed they were reluctant to ask for additional services not knowing what they really needed.

Molly Ainsley tells the story of how SACA saved her from being homeless.

In 2018 I came very close to being homeless. I was living in subsidized housing and got caught up in a dispute with my landlord that subsequently was resolved in my favor after months of negotiation. I was successful in staying in my home because of the support of an attorney, some loyal friends, and Silverton Area Community Aid (SACA).

The background of my story is that I have been a professional all my life working as a social worker with an MSW from the University of Washington. After a career in social work, I owned a bakery and then a company that produced vegan patties. More a dreamer than a pragmatist, I saw myself as the Every Ready Bunny that would never run out of power. When I turned 65 and I went on Social Security, my income dropped significantly, and I had no savings. I luckily found

²⁸ <https://silvertonareacommunityaid.org/get-food/>

excellent subsidized housing in my town. Four years later, when I was offered a part-time, temporary job with St. Joseph's Shelter in Mt. Angel, the problems began.

I reported my increased income and was told by the manager that because my job was temporary, I didn't have to do anything more than report my newly increased income. My rent would remain the same. Unfortunately, that was not accurate. Fast forward a few months and a new, inexperienced manager accused me of withholding income information from my landlord and the management company raised my rent to the maximum payment even though I was unemployed at that time. As this dispute ran its course for nine months, I literally ran out of money since my rent was 75% of my income. Only with the help of my friends, an attorney, and SACA was I able to avoid losing my subsidy and my apartment. I feel very fortunate that I had this safety net.

However, during those nine months of dispute, I was paying the maximum amount of rent and literally ran out of money. Pleading with the landlord was useless and, ultimately, I went to SACA for help. After hearing my dilemma, they granted me support and paid my rent for two months. I was lucky. This was a life saver. The people at SACA were like avenging angels with funds.

Many people lose their homes due to disputes with landlords. And in the final analysis, it does not matter if the tenant is correct, because landlords have virtually nothing to lose by forcing tenants out since there are 50 people in the wings waiting for housing.

There is nothing so critical for wellbeing as having a safe place to call home, and nothing so fragile or tenuous as housing. It can be lost, and people can become homeless over a simple misunderstanding, leading to a dispute and then to eviction. Agencies like SACA are amazing, but they too have limited funds. But their generosity and trust in me kept me in my home.

Gloria

When Gloria was born on December 18, 1971, she came home from the hospital on Christmas Eve. Her mother told her later that she came home in a Christmas stocking. Her grandmother was important in her life because when she was eight, her family's house burned down and the family split up to live with different members of her extended family including her grandmother. The family, five individuals, reunited one and one-half years later in a two-bedroom apartment. For five people, that was fairly crowded. Gloria was one of three girls and she became known as "the boy her parents never had." She enjoyed being a tomboy, growing up in the suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri.

For the most part, she described her life as typical middle class. Her father worked for the post office and her mother was a licensed practical nurse. She liked school but had to work hard for her grades. Her sister seemed to get good grades without ever trying and missed being valedictorian by .2 of a grade point.

In the spring of 1993, Gloria ventured out alone on one of the wagon trains that sought to imitate the many people that road and walked the Oregon Trail in the mid-1800's. It was her first time away from home on her own. She met Leroy Green on the trail. He was from Nebraska and was in charge of driving support vehicles. After all, these were not 1800s pioneers, they needed some extra help! When they reached Pocatello, Idaho, she went home because she had promised to help drive the support vehicles back. She became pregnant with her first child, a girl, and decided in 1999 to move to Salem, Oregon.

She came to Oregon as the result of a friendship she had made online playing bingo with a woman. The woman taught her how to build web pages and when they met in person, they became close friends. The woman would be her support person in Oregon. Leroy was no longer in the picture.

While she was living with this woman, she met the woman's son and began a relationship with him. Their first child, a son, was born six weeks premature weighing only three pounds and fifteen ounces. The house was getting a little crowded - John's mother, his brother, Gloria, and her two children - a two-bedroom house with six people. Gloria worked at the Dollar Tree store. John was on SSDI (Social Security Disability Income) because he had bi-polar issues. When he started helping Gloria with her work, she was helping with a Girl Scout Troup, the government dropped him from SSDI. Thus, they ended up with only one income and had to use a Section 8 voucher for help with housing. They decided to move to Turner, Oregon and were able to get housing using their Section 8 voucher there.

Later, they moved to Salem and were able to get a three-bedroom apartment with another Section 8 voucher. John was Mr. Mom. He cooked and took care of the kids while Gloria worked a series of minimum wage jobs. Gloria had obtained an associate degree in Accounting in 1996 but didn't have much of a chance to use it as John's mother had a stroke in 1997 and Gloria became her caregiver.

When John, Gloria, and the kids were at an energy assistance office one day, their son Wesley was having a fit. Someone at the office called the child abuse hotline. This one call started a downward spiral for the couple and their children. When the Child Protective Services staff person came to visit them at their apartment, they were in the process of moving and had no electricity. Wesley had wet the bed during the night and the house smelled of urine. The police came to the house and took away the kids. Even though they had suffered no physical abuse (the police found no marks on them), they took the kids away because the house was dirty and there was no electricity. From May to October of 2005, they were able to have supervised visits with their children. During this time, her eldest daughter's foster mother found what she thought was blood on her clothes. It later turned out to be feces. The die, however, was cast. The foster mother called a friend of hers who was a case worker for Child Protective Services. The daughter was put into therapy. After two months, she agreed with the case worker that John has abused her. The judge threw out the evidence because it was not blood. In spite of this, John was convicted on the daughter's word alone. John received a sentence of 30 years and five years of probation. He began his prison sentence on August 3, 2006 and his first possible release will be October 22, 2035.

Although Gloria was assigned a lawyer, she lost custody of her children including a third child, a son, that was born in May. The baby was taken into protective custody directly from the hospital after his birth. Gloria was not allowed to keep him. Fortunately, her sister, who lived in North Dakota, obtained custody of the children. Gloria has tried to maintain contact with her sons, and they call both her and her sister mom. She has not maintained a relationship with her daughter whom she does not believe was molested by John. Her daughter continues to insist she was, thus making reconciliation difficult.

In 2006, when John began his prison sentence, Gloria said she "wanted to walk off into the ocean." She just felt that her life was over. She called the Crisis Hotline and was taken to Simonka House for women in Keizer (a town just north of Salem). The next day she walked back to Salem. She moved in with her mother-in-law. She served as her caregiver receiving payment through the Northwest Seniors and Disability Program of slightly under \$15 per hour. When her van was towed, Gloria had a choice – keep the apartment or keep her van. She kept the van and they stayed in motels until the money ran out. One day, she was sure her mother-in-law had experienced another stroke. The hospital she had taken her to said no and Gloria then went to a crisis center. She finally got her mother-in-law into a nursing home. They took all of her social security income for her care. At that point in time, Gloria became homeless.

In January of 2019, her van broke down and her service dog got hit by a car. Gloria has sleep apnea and the dog had been trained to wake her up if she stopped breathing. As a homeless person, she often doesn't have any electricity to use a C-PAP, a device to deal with sleep apnea. She did find her dog, but the police made everyone move from under the Marion Street Bridge in Salem where she was living. Gloria is also taking medication for a diagnosis of bi-polar disorder. She has tried to apply for Social Security Disability Insurance, but without a lawyer, she never gets very far.

She proceeded to get a grocery cart and put her tent and all her belongings in it. She slept in front of stores and offices in downtown Salem – just Gloria and Cuddles, her dog. The police

confronted her almost daily and told her that the store owners did not want anyone sleeping in front of their stores. Some of the other homeless people had told her that some of the store owners didn't care, just so they were gone by the morning. But it's pretty hard to get a good night's sleep worrying if the police are going to wake you up and arrest you.

She had a friend whose boyfriend had been arrested. They owned a 12-passenger van. The woman was afraid to drive so Gloria took over. A different friend had a voucher to live in Silverton, but there was a year's wait. They decided to stay in the Warming Shelter. Gloria met T. J. in Salem, and they have been dating ever since. They came to Silverton because of her friend. Gloria spoke at the dedication of four pods for women that are being built on the property of St. Edward's Episcopal Church. The words below are from her remarks.

The hygiene issues become barriers to getting and obtaining a job. Employers tend to turn away from hiring homeless. The work force is tough on women without adding more barriers. Mental health is a huge issue. I and many women take on the weight of the world. I call it the 'Atlas Effect.' Women are 'fixers,' but if your head is not in the game, you can't fix anything. I have anxiety to the point I get uneasy just hearing people drive, walk, bike near the church property, because in the back of my mind, it's either someone out to hurt me or make me move somewhere else. These cottages to me mean a place to feel like a home. When overwhelmed, a place to shut out the chaos, and regroup. It means safety.

The cottages, less than 200 square feet, are scheduled to be completed in the Spring of 2020. Gloria had been slated for one of them. The church has prepared a small kitchen, bathroom, and shower inside the church for their use. There will be plumbing in the cottages. Gloria helps out almost daily at Sheltering Silverton and helps cook the Saturday lunch meal at Trinity Lutheran Church. Gloria's dog Cuddles is getting to be about as famous in Silverton as Bobby, the dog that returned to Silverton after being lost at least 2200 miles away in Indiana in the early 1900's. Gloria says that crocheting helps calm her and she always has her yarn with her.

On October 1, 2019, Gloria obtained a full-time job with Retail Merchandising Systems, Inc. where she restocks store shelves on a night shift. On November 1, she and her boyfriend moved into an apartment. She loves her job and her new home.

Students

While a person can perhaps visualize themselves as homeless adults, it is difficult to imagine what it is like for a student to be homeless having to attend school each day with the vast majority of students who have homes to return to in the evening. This chapter outlines the situation at the Silver Falls School District as well as two programs, ARK and ASAP, that have been created to help these students.

Silver Falls School District

Jessie²⁹ was 16. He was sitting in one of his classes in high school, slightly bored, and reflected on his situation. His mother and father hadn't gotten along for quite a while. His dad had moved out, but sometimes he would show up. With just his mom, things would be okay, but not when his dad was there. So, he decided to move out. He was too young to apply for emancipation from his parents, but he could not have afforded to do that in any case. Most of the time he just couchsurfed with friends. He wondered about the other kids in his class. What was it like to have a home where two parents loved you, where they were civil and kind to each, and where you felt safe? Sigh. That was not to be his lot in life. At least for now. His eyes slowly began to close. He was up again late last night and just couldn't stay awake. He had had to sleep in his car. School started at 7:55 AM.

Helen Thomas, recently retired from the Silver Falls School District, was assigned to work with students like Jessie who needed extra attention – especially those who were homeless. She and the school's counselors knew the students who were homeless, at least most of them, but they would not divulge this information to the classroom teachers. They did not want to add to the stigma these children faced from wearing the same outfit several days in a row or who needed a haircut. Thomas shared this poem.

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do. Rob Siltanen

Thomas explained that homelessness can consist of many different types of lodging or the complete lack thereof. "Sometimes children and their families are doubled-up with relatives. Or they live in substandard housing where there is no electricity or water. Like in the case of Jessie, some end up couchsurfing at different friends' homes on a rotating basis. Kids who are living on their own are called unaccompanied youth. There are also students who live in the family car

²⁹ Not his real name.

with one or both of their parents and siblings. Some may live in a motel for short periods of time.”

Mark Hannan is the Special Services Administration for Migrant, English Language Learner, and Homeless Students Program in the Silver Falls School District. He estimates that the school district, which enrolled 3977 students in 2018-19, had 69 homeless students. “It is a challenge to try to identify all of the students whose families are homeless. Some families try very hard to hide that fact. They are embarrassed or fear that someone might use it as an excuse to separate them from their children,” explained Hannan. Privacy issues may also prevent a school district from verifying whether a student is indeed homeless.

The McKinney Act was passed by Congress and signed into law on July 22, 1987 by Ronald Reagan in order to address the increasing crisis of homelessness for individuals and families in the country. Federal money was provided for homeless shelter programs. The act has been reauthorized several times over the years.³⁰ The original act did not address the needs of homeless children in school districts in great detail. When Illinois passed the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act in 1994 that dealt more directly with students, the McKinney Act was amended to include many of these provisions and was thereafter known as the McKinney-Vento Act.³¹ Homeless students are defined as children who lack “a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”³² Each local education district must assign a liaison who coordinates with other entities and agencies to help meet their needs and to assure that the children were able to attend school. Helen Thomas served as that liaison and Mark Hannan served as the administrator.

Carole³³ was a young high school student. Her family had few resources and lived in Silverton thus making Carole eligible to attend Silver Falls School District even when she decided to move in with her boyfriend who lived about 20 minutes away in Salem. Carole had left home due to family issues, couchsurfing, and then moved in with her boyfriend.

One Saturday, Thomas’ phone rang. When she answered, it was Carole asking Thomas to pick her up in Salem. Thomas, to be on the safe side, called her administrator to get an okay to do so. Her administrator said okay but urged her to take someone else with her and to make sure this person had a phone to be able to call 911 if needed. She asked a neighbor to come with her.

When Carole opened the door for Helen, she was dressed in pale pink baby doll pajamas and fuzzy slippers. Carole offered to go collect her things and Thomas added in a fairly authoritarian tone, “Get dressed.” Carole was earning some money at a local restaurant as a waitress. Thomas told her to be careful and suggested that she not let her boyfriend have control over her money. Thomas didn’t even know if Carole was a documented US citizen, which if she were not, would only complicate the situation and make getting help that much more difficult. Thomas encouraged her to call her if she needed help and she also gave her the number of another counselor at the school district.

³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McKinney%E2%80%93Vento_Homeless_Assistance_Act

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McKinney%E2%80%93Vento_Homeless_Assistance_Act

³² 42 U.S.C. §11434A(2)(A)

³³ Not her real name.

“Now what do I do?” Thomas asked herself. The administrator she called had said she could not take Carole home with her and all the motels and bed and breakfasts in Silverton were full. Carole asked Thomas to take her to an ATM because she owed her boyfriend some money. While reluctant, she complied with both she and her friend keeping an eye on Carole from the car. The boyfriend approached her and counted out the money she gave him. Fortunately, Carole came back safely to the car.

Thomas ended up contacting Carole’s aunt in a nearby town and took her there for the night. But when Thomas called the aunt the next day, Carole had left. After Thomas involved the police, Carole was found and returned to her family. At least this story has a happy ending. On Mother’s Day that year, Carole brought Thomas a Mother’s Day card and a balloon. Even with the struggles of working part-time and dealing with transportation issues from Salem, Carole was able to graduate.

The Silver Falls School District currently provides free breakfast and lunch to the students it has identified as homeless. It also provides transportation where there is a need beyond the regular school bus system. Students have a right to attend their school of origin, defined as the one they began in even if their family circumstances have changed. Hannan describes a special program that they have called the Harmony Account at the local high school to assist students in financial need. He has created a similar account at his school and calls it Students in Need. Random donations either in debt-forgiveness or donations of clothing and other items are provided to homeless students. With a concern for privacy, staff allows homeless children to access what they need from donated supplies.

Hannan also keeps supplies stored at his school. Some families feel comfortable giving him a list of their needs whether it is for toiletries, hygiene products, etc. He works to find a way to help them out. Silverton Area Community Aid (SACA) has, among other services, a food pantry. Some families, according to Hannan, just don’t want to be seen there. Sometimes, he is able to find a personal shopper that can go to SACA in their stead to avoid this embarrassment. The school district is also somewhat limited in reaching out to other agencies in the community unless the family is supportive.

Thomas was also able to provide resources for homeless kids. She treated all the students the same. “If you need it and we have it, it’s yours” was her mantra. No income test was given, and no form was needed to be filled out. Just asking for something was painful enough for these kids. No one needed to document their pain. Other teachers who might have been aware of the issues of these students also provided needed supplies.

When asked what his impression of the homelessness issue was when he was growing up, Hannan stated that he didn’t know a single student who was homeless. Hannan is in his fifties. Many of the problems in the last few decades with homelessness have been brought on not only by less affordable housing, but also by the loss of the extended family. Many of these families, Hannan explains, do have ties to Silverton, however, and want to remain in the community. There are just very few affordable places to live. A single income family can lose their apartment or house in a heartbeat if the sole wage earner loses a job. While everyone should have a safety

net, most people are living paycheck to paycheck. Think back to your 30s or 40s. Did you have a big savings account?

Hannan states that the NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) concept has played itself out in most cities, including Silverton. People have a negative attitude toward the homeless and don't want anything to be built at a reasonable cost if it is near their homes. They often feel that the price of their homes will go down or that affordable housing will just attract more homeless people to the city. "I am an educator, and homelessness is not the fault of the children. The children are the victims. That's all of our responsibility," Hannan says with passion.

The Zenith Ladies, a local group in Silverton, sponsors a Tree of Giving at Christmas just for the Silverton High School. They ask families what they need and then seek donations and contributions to provide these gifts to the family.

ARK

Briana Hupp is a fourth generation Silvertonian whose father runs a local real estate business and writes frequently for the local newspaper. She is a pediatric nurse. When Briana Hupp was in high school, she volunteered at SACA. Another volunteer, Sue Rivers, noticed that there were a lot of young mothers who were homeless. She told Briana that they needed someone younger like her to talk to these young parents. Sue started a group for teen moms and dads. They helped them navigate life and warned them about issues such as sex-trafficking. They focused on how to be sure their children were not at risk. Briana suggested that Sue talk to Helen Thomas who dealt with at-risk kids at the high school. Helen had been buying Cup O'Noodles soup and feeding up to 60 kids a day. They paired up and approached Immanuel Lutheran Church which now manages the program. When Helen Thomas retired, Sue handed off the program to Briana.

"We now call the program ARK which stands for at-risk kids. We try to focus more on nutrient dense food rather than junk food in the snacks we provide. No candy bars are allowed!" Briana explained. "Sometimes it takes a while to get kids interested in nutritious food if they have been used to eating junk food." Briana goes once a week to Costco to purchase food such as jerky protein bars, granola, and some comfort food like the cup of noodles and then leaves it at the schools. Currently, she delivers to four of the schools of the Silver Falls School District but would like to be able to deliver to all thirteen of them. The kids can eat the food there or take it home. They spend about \$300 a week. At one of the elementary schools, two kids were having blowouts on Monday. The school learned that they had not been eating anything during the weekends where they lived. Briana's group added that school to their list.

Briana Hupp and the Immanuel Lutheran Church also work to provide three special free meals a year for students – Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, and Memorial Day. The schools identify the students in need, about 100 in 2018-19. Many of the students don't celebrate holidays with their families. "We don't talk about religion, that's not what this is about," Briana stated. "It's about helping kids be part of a traditional celebration."

At one of these meals, Karen Hatteberg was working in the kitchen. Jessie, the boy featured at the beginning of this chapter, was eating his meal and checking out the kitchen. He told

Hatteberg, “we need to adopt the women in the kitchen as our grandmothers.” Hatteberg told him that she could indeed be his grandmother. He quickly responded, “Grandma, you’ve missed 16 birthdays!”

ASAP

What did you do when you were in middle school when school let out? When I grew up in the 50’s, virtually everyone went directly home. The mothers were always there, while the fathers were at work. Maybe I caught a program on TV or more likely was directed to do my homework. Today, times have changed. It is difficult financially to raise a family when only one parent works. In 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that where a married couple had children, 63 percent had both parents employed.³⁴ These days, there is always the chance that unsupervised teens might get into trouble during the hours after school and before their parents arrive home.

In 2012, four pastors got together to try to provide meaningful after school activities: Father William Hammelman at St. Paul’s Catholic Church, Linda Quanstrom at United Methodist, Steve Knox at First Christian Church, and Pastor Leah at Immanuel Lutheran. The goal is expressed clearly on their website – “A place they can be safe, allowed to grow, socialize and have fun.”³⁵ ASAP was born!

The program focuses on middle school students who are bussed to Immanuel Lutheran Church for the program which runs three afternoons a week from the end of the school day until 6:00 PM. The first hour is the power hour where staff and volunteers, many former teachers, help students with their homework. They have a computer lab so no one can say they don’t know what their homework consists of. The answer is a click away. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, there is a meal at 4:30 PM prepared by volunteers at the church. On Wednesdays, they often do field trips, so a sack lunch is provided. At 5:00 PM, it is time to burn off some of that youthful energy with physical activities. There is a gym with exercise equipment and some STEM projects. OK, your task is to build a cage for an egg and drop it from the top of the gym. You win if it doesn’t break. I haven’t a clue how I would address that task, but some students managed to build a cage where the egg landed intact. James Baker, the current program director commented, “We want to keep them engaged so they don’t even know they are actually learning!” Sometimes, members of the community offer classes like Zumba or a veterinarian comes in to explain how to take care of pets. “This is a way we can incorporate the community back into itself,” Baker adds. The area around Silverton also provides multiple opportunities for field trips – the well-known Oregon Gardens with its lights display during the Christmas season, Silver Falls State Park, a swimming pool, and a bowling alley. Yes, people still bowl in Silverton!

The community plays another big role in this program by offering donations. “We decided at the outset that we didn’t want to charge the students for this program,” explained Grace Allen, a former teacher who is currently chair of the board at Immanuel Lutheran. A walk down Main Street shows many business windows with a poster showing their support for ASAP. They also

³⁴ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.asapsilvertonor.org/>

receive grants from local groups such as Judy's Party, the City of Silverton, the MAPS Credit Union, and the Oregon Community Foundation. Their annual budget is about \$70,000. Baker is the full-time director and there are two part-time coordinators.

Allen expands on the need for services at this age. "It's a critical time for kids, but not just for those who have a financial need for support. Every child is in the bubble and can start to make their own choices. They have a little more freedom and we can help them make the right choices." Baker added, "They want to be part of the flock, but also to be their own individual self." Allen concluded, "Having caring adults other than their parents whom they are more likely to listen to is critical. Because we are a small town, people know about us."

Wayne

In his book, *Breakfast at Sally's*, Richard LeMieux shares some of the startling statistics about the incidence of homelessness among veterans. Wayne is one of them.

*According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, veterans make up twenty-three percent of America's homeless population. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans conservatively estimates that one out of every three homeless men is a veteran. Nearly fifty percent of these men served in the Vietnam War.*³⁶

But we are getting ahead of our story. As Wayne explains he was “conceived, born, and raised” in Silverton. Even though he has spent years now and then in other places, he considers Silverton his home. His father was a logger, which was a common occupation until the timber ran out. Unfortunately, a piece of bark on a maple tree (a widow maker) ended up falling and going through his left lung, almost piercing his heart. After 25 years, his career in logging was over, but fortunately, it didn't make a widow out of his wife. A friend of his talked him into going into real estate. Wayne had never seen his dad study. He had only completed the eighth grade, but he dove into the real estate books like they were candy and ended up with a real estate, and then broker, license. His mother was a cook for the local school district and picked broccoli and cauliflower for farmers in the summertime. He learned to cook from his mom and still loves to cook to this day.

Wayne excelled at woodworking when he was at the local high school taking four years of courses. He still has his tools today and does it as a hobby. But during his last year in high school, the administration said he was short about one-half a credit and he got angry and quit. Since he had always been grandpa's boy, he went to him, borrowed \$300, bought a motorcycle, and took off. After a ride to Portland with a friend, he was just entering Mt. Angel (a bit north of Silverton) on his return to Silverton when a long-haired hippie in a small car made a U-turn right in front of him. Flying off his bike, he ended up 50 feet away. Landing on his hands, he rolled on the gravel and then fell on his head. He came to in the middle of the night four days later, feeling pain everywhere including on his skin that had been shaved off by the gravel on the road. Suffering a concussion as well, he spent eight days in the hospital. After he got home, he and his dad had a heart to heart talk and his dad broke down in tears, not a common event. Wayne decided to go back to high school, and he did end up receiving his diploma.

When he finished high school, it was 1968. He decided to enter the armed services. After his military training, he became part of the 9th Marine Regiment. He was subsequently sent to Vietnam. While he was trained as an infantry rifleman, phenomenally, he never had to fire his rifle at someone in Vietnam. He spent time in Okinawa as well and at the end of his service spent some fun time in Taiwan with some of his fellow soldiers. We won't go into the details of that

³⁶ Richard LeMieux, *Breakfast at Sally's: One Homeless Man's Inspirational Journey* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2008), 234.

here.

After his service, he returned to Silverton. He worked for various companies such as Stiff Furniture and Blazer Industries. He got married to a woman with two kids and they subsequently had two additional children. They went to Reno when he was offered a job at twice the pay he was receiving in Silverton. His jobs offered wages they were able to live on, but only basic health insurance, and no pension. Jobs with no pensions are becoming more and more common. Unless you work for the public sector (local, state or federal) or are part of a union, you are not likely to be part of a pension plan that you can count on when you retire. And with four kids and a wife, Wayne didn't have any spare change to put away in savings. Should he have? Yes, but Wayne was just getting by and it wasn't a priority at the time.

Fast forward through a divorce and a second marriage, child support, and a second family and you can see where this is going. That marriage ended as well even though he and his wife never formally divorced.

After his kids were grown and gone, he ended up moving in with his mother in a manufactured home in Silverton and taking care of her. When he told her he was starting to look for a house for himself, she pleaded with him to stay with her. And it's a good thing he did because she had balance problems and was developing memory problems as well. Finally, he and his sisters found her a place in a nursing home. They needed to sell the double-wide because the costs for caring for his mother had doubled.

Wayne had previously filed for Social Security and encountered some medical problems that prevented him from working. Once the house sold, he was 69 with not enough income (about \$900 in Social Security) to afford housing, so he put all of his belongings in storage and lived in his truck. In the winter of 2018-19, he stayed at the first every night Warming Shelter created by Sheltering Silverton.

Wayne has his issues. He loves his alcohol, got in trouble by not paying some child support and federal taxes in the past, but he's one of our senior citizens who defended us and served his country. How can we not help him spend the last years of his life in a warm and safe place he can call home?

At the end of February when the winter shelter closed, he was once again homeless and living in his truck. Sheltering Silverton arranged for him to stay in a room at a man's house who didn't even charge him rent. He stayed there about six months. After a short stint in a veterans' home in Salem that he didn't like, Sheltering Silverton eventually got him a subsidized apartment in Sublimity, about 20 minutes away. Now he is spending his time trying to go through all of his (and his mother's) belongings and fitting what he can into a small one-bedroom apartment. But sleeping in his own bedroom at night is a blessing.

Housing

This chapter is made of five elements. The first describes a family that has taken in homeless individuals and families over the preceding decades. The second describes the creation of four small cottages or pods for women at the St. Edward's Episcopal Church. The third describes the current efforts - and failures – to build more affordable housing in Silverton. The last two are possibilities that are under formation at the time of this writing – building Conestoga huts and Joy Farm.

Taking in Strangers

The book *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives*³⁷ lays out a new way of prioritizing services to homeless individuals. In the past, most efforts were aimed at helping people first with problems such as drug addiction, mental health issues, etc. before attempting to find housing. The paradigm shift expressed in this work states that until someone is housed, they are less likely to be able to confront and deal with the other problems they are experiencing. Housing in this context is an independent housing unit, not a temporary overnight warming shelter.

A person recently commented, “Gees, we only have 100 people who are homeless. We have 10,000 people in our town. Couldn't we just find 100 people to take one of them in?” While this might seem like an easy solution, of course it isn't. Most people would balk at taking in a stranger to live in their house or apartment. Some would not even be willing to do it for a friend and some not even for a family member. However, there are others who bend over backwards to help those who are less unfortunate. The Seebers are people like this. What follows is the experience of this family over four decades in taking in strangers to help them out when they became homeless.

Ted and Sheila Seeber met in college. They were both people of faith – he a Catholic and she a Methodist. Their son Bill, from whom I obtained this information, was born in 1973. In 1974 the family bought a farm in the Silverton area. They leased out the tillable land and mostly used the rest as a hobby farm until 2008 when they started producing organic blueberries.

Bill Seeber commented on one of the key issues regarding homelessness today. “Families are breaking up, perhaps more today than yesterday, but family members still need to help. Within our families we have a responsibility to care for each other. Within our community, God calls us to care for each other.” The Seebers substituted for those family members who could not or would not help.

³⁷Deborah Padgett, Benjamin Henwood, and Sam Tsembris, *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems, and Changing Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916).

Their first request to house someone came from a Catholic priest. A couple needed temporary housing because they were exiting adult foster care for disabled adults. They were in their twenties and both had mental health issues. The Seebers responded immediately and took them both in. They tried to find them permanent housing, but unfortunately, the gentleman wasn't staying on his medication, so the couple had to return to adult foster care.

In 1976, the Seebers took in three of Bill's cousins as foster children for about a year and a half. The father of the children meanwhile obtained custody, got remarried, and raised the children himself after that. Imagine if these children had been split up with strangers. How would that have affected their upbringing and childhood? This year and a half of help allowed them to be together with extended family and eventually reunited with their father for the rest of their childhood. Clearly a happy ending.

Shortly after this, Sheila Seeber started teaching third grade at a Catholic school and heard more and more about the needs of the community. They were not done. They now had a four-bedroom house with a daylight basement with two bedrooms. Perfect!

In 1987, they took in a young female cousin of Bill's who was in the 7th grade and needed to start over in a new and healthier environment. She had been drinking and going out with boys. Her parents were having problems with her and she had reported her parents for abuse in retaliation. She got help from the Seebers and today she is a grandmother!

In the next ten years, they took in four families. One was periodically in and out and the others were only there once. At this time, Bill got married and moved to the farm, buying 31 acres from his parents. For a time, he and his wife Alison lived in an RV while building a second home on the farm.

Bernadette Meli, the director of SACA at the time, contacted Bill about a couple who needed a place to stay while they were waiting for permanent housing. They were camping out at Silver Falls State Park. The woman had just been released from the hospital due to an operation regarding an ectopic pregnancy. "We took them in for two weeks and had the opportunity to learn about the importance of background checks," Bill explained. Bill had left to see his brother for a week and came back to find \$1,000 worth of their tools missing. The couple had been living in Bill's RV and it was covered with tobacco tar inside. He had also let them borrow his car. He found it impounded at Mt. Angel, a nearby town, and had to pay \$150 to get it out of hock. The man had a suspended driver's license. Bill scoured all the pawn shops and ended up finding only about a quarter of his tools. The man was arrested for an outstanding warrant and ended up back in prison. To avoid anything like this happening in the future, Bill got the Silverton Area Community Aid organization (SACA) to agree to do a background check before they would take anyone else in. In addition, any interested party would have to sign a letter agreeing to the terms that Bill worked out with SACA such as no drugs and Bill's right to inspect the property at any time. They also decided to only take people who had their own RV.

Their next tenant was someone they knew, a former neighbor. He only stayed two or three months, but he was always willing to help out where needed. SACA also referred to them a

woman who was living in her van, but she did not end up staying very long. In the next few years, SACA also referred five or six people who stayed off and on at the farm.

One referral from SACA didn't turn out very well. It started out looking like a couple – a man and a woman. The woman then locked herself in Bill's trailer. It turned out the man was using her as a sex slave by taking her to carnivals where there were people willing to pay to have sex with her. Bill's family escorted her back to Salem where they bought her a bus ticket back to Texas where she had family. She had originally run away from home at 15 years old.

In the early 2000's, they helped a family who had their own motor home. It was a couple with two kids. "It started out okay," explained Bill. "However, hindsight is always 2020." It turned out the man was a 'maintenance drinker,' meaning he stayed intoxicated throughout the day. "My dad," adds Bill, "came from a family where alcohol was a problem. At least he thought they were keeping the kids off the street." When one of the kids, a boy, turned 18, he went to North Dakota to be with his biological sister. The other child, a girl, was in second grade and the same age as Bill's and Alison's son. The next summer, Bill's dad, Ted, told them it was time to go. He had had enough. Since the guy had helped rebuild a truck for Ted and was helping out on the farm, they let him go to the other side of the farm. Within two weeks, the guy was in a drunken rage and blamed everything on his wife. He held a butcher knife to her throat and Ted ended up saving her life. She left for North Dakota with her daughter and told her husband that she never wanted to see him again unless he was sober. Ted went to the motorhome, removed all the alcohol and drove the man to Alcoholics Anonymous twice a week. After almost a year, the man said that it was the longest time he had been sober in his life. He said that his mother had put alcohol in his bottle when he was an infant because she was an alcoholic and didn't want her baby to die from detoxification. The man decided to go live near his wife and children in North Dakota. He bought enough gas to get there and put it in his RV. He didn't want to stop at all because he didn't have a driver's license. However, he did get pulled over in Montana. He told the cop immediately "I am going to be honest. I have a suspended license and the RV is not registered in my name and I have no insurance. I am driving to North Dakota to meet with my family to start over." The cop asked if there was anyone who could vouch for his story and the man told him to call Ted. After talking with Ted, he called ahead to clear his passage to North Dakota and told the man, "DO NOT DETOUR!" He made it. It's been seven years and he is still sober. He was able to stay employed until he was 65.

The Seebers took a break and, instead of housing the homeless, helped out the First Christian Church which had started providing meals for free in 2008. After a while, Cherry Hoffman (see chapter on the Streetwalker) approached Bill. She had a family, a dad with two daughters and a son, who were living in a tent trailer on a vacant lot in Monitor, a nearby town. Because of the rains, there were four inches of mud where they were camping. There was no electricity, but the school bought gas for a generator. Bill went to visit and then started to line them up to move to the farm. Then the kids got kicked out of school for being infected with lice. It was Thanksgiving week. Monday, they picked up the family, brought them to the barn to shampoo their hair to get rid of lice. Then they each took a shower, one at a time. He then sent them to the basement of his parents' house and did 48 loads of laundry – four days – for both houses to be sure the lice were gone. The father found someone to take the tent trailer and they bought a 25-foot travel trailer for \$150. He started to fix up the RV and wanted to get a spot at an RV park. He was not an

alcoholic, but employment was difficult due to untreated diabetes. He had no wife and his three kids went to one of the rural schools in the Silver Falls School District called Victor Point. The following April, the RV was ready to live in. They moved it to Bill's end of the farm and started living in it. The oldest daughter wanted out. She had accused her father of verbal abuse. All three children were moved to foster care. Fortunately, one of the oldest daughter's best friend's parents took her in, leaving the younger two children to live with strangers. In four months, the younger kids were able to come home. They still struggled to try to find housing. While they had a Section 8 voucher for a federally subsidized apartment, there were none available and the voucher ran out. Bill told them they had to be off the farm. The father took the kids to live in his car. He was finally able to work with the Department of Human Services and Bill agreed to be a safety service provider. Eventually, they found a place to stay in Keizer, a nearby town, and have been there ever since.

In the summer of 2019, the Seebers told SACA that they needed a break. They then heard from the family they had helped in 2002. The daughter informed the Seebers that her mother had passed away and her dad had retired. Her brother had gone to Los Angeles and they never heard from him. She had just gotten married and wanted to show the farm to her husband so she asked Bill if they could visit. She told her husband that the one and a half years she spent on the farm was the time where she "grew up." Before the Seebers, she said it was "a nightmare of survival." After the Seebers, she ended up parenting her own parents and found family stability. Those years on the farm, she said, "showed me what a family could be."

Sheltering Silverton has found some families and individuals who have taken in the homeless like the Seebers. In a small town, there is a greater sense of community that probably makes people a little more comfortable in doing so. But even here this willingness to take in people is not going to solve the whole problem. The next chapter explores the efforts to create four pods next to a church for homeless women.

The Pods

In 2017, the Silverton City Council established the *Homeless Housing Task Force* to develop solutions for the 35 to 40 individuals they estimated were living outside. It held its first meeting on August 23, 2017. Mayor Kyle Palmer explained that the HHTF was created to determine what resources were available in the community to deal with the issue of homelessness, but not for the city itself to take on a specific project. He suggested a non-profit might take over the coordination of these resources. In its first several meetings, the HHTF heard from housing authorities in Marion County, explored existing regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units (already allowed by code), and other regulations such as those for RVs that might need to be changed to accommodate more affordable housing.

On December 4, 2017, Chris Mayou sent an invitation to the listserv of a group called the Silverton Progressives. This group, composed of about 150 residents of Silverton, had been meeting about progressive politics since 2015. Her email stated the following:

*If you believe that tiny homes could be part of 'housing first' for our homeless neighbors, please join a small group of us to discuss **specific strategies** to make this a reality in*

Silverton. Other nearby cities have successful models. A likely approach is to learn from them and our own homeless population, then reach out to other organizations and people in Silverton with a vision that we hope they will support and help bring to fruition. This is a meeting for 'true-believers'! We know there are challenges, but we want to move forward.

Chris Mayou explained her interest in homelessness. "I only learned about the problem of homelessness in Silverton the first year (2016-17) that a warming shelter was opened, and I wanted to be part of doing something more permanent."

On December 7, a meeting of 13 people, who had responded to the invitation from Chris Mayou, was held. Part of that meeting consisted of a discussion about what tiny homes or pods were. Several individuals were familiar with the concept as used in the construction of Kenton Village for women in Portland.³⁸ Toward the end of this meeting, Vicar Shana McCauley offered to house the pods at St. Edward's Episcopal Church located at 211 W Center St. in Silverton. The effort then became known as the pod or cottage proposal. These pods would be very basic with restrooms and kitchen facilities to be accessed within the church building. Because of a lack of facilities for single women, the decision was soon made to house four women in them. On January 17, 2018, a second cottage proposal meeting was held where a representative from Square One, a not-for-profit organization building tiny homes in Eugene, made a presentation of the issues involved in creating housing for the homeless at St. Edward's Episcopal Church. It was open to the public and flyers were distributed throughout the town.

At the March 1, 2018 meeting of the HHTF, the first opposition to the proposal arose. Kimberlee McDermott expressed her concern that building tiny homes would attract people from other areas in the county stating "if you build it, they will come." Leigh Harrod, who became a key opponent to the cottages being built, stated she felt the meetings discussing the cottages had been "held in secret." She further stated that she didn't want to see crime in the community increase. At the end of the meeting, the HHTF passed a motion to ask the City of Silverton to examine codes and zoning in order to allow for the cottages to be built. On March 5, the City Council directed staff to draft code language relating to transitional shelter communities in reaction to this proposed project.

On April 15, 2018, paper flyers were distributed to houses near St. Edward's announcing an Open Forum on April 19 at St. Edward's and stating that anyone could attend.

The flyer included the following statements among others:

The envisioned project will consist of four small sleeping cottages that will be housed at St. Edward's Episcopal Church with access to existing bathrooms and food prepare areas within the church. These cottages will provide the shelter and service model of care for up to four women at a time with a goal to transition the women into healthy, stable lifestyles with more permanent housing.

³⁸ <https://www.catholiccharitiesoregon.org/services/housing-services/kenton-womens-village/>

We believe in the strength of community and the values of diversity and would like to hear your ideas, suggestions, and concerns about St. Edward's Cottages. We are hosting a community meeting to share more detailed information about this proposed project and gather community insight to see how we can move forward together.

Over 100 people attended the meeting. There was a lot of opposition to the proposal. Some people felt the process had gone on too long without public notice. Others stated that it should not happen at this church because there was a school near the location. Some neighbors and others expressed support for the proposal.

An informal group developed in opposition to the plan. They passed out flyers demanding a vote of the citizens regarding the cottages. They encouraged people to contact members of the City Council which were listed on the flyer which said in part:

This is something our small town does not need! Drugs, alcohol, violence, crime follow the homeless! Our community will not benefit from this, house values will go down and crime will go up!

On May 5, 2018, the Planning Commission for the City took up the charge given it by the Homeless Housing Task Force to develop code that would allow the cottages to be built at St. Edward's, as well as possibly future cottages in other locations. In one of the first comments, Leigh Harrod objected to Chris Mayou, who served on the Commission, from participating in the discussion because of a perceived conflict of interest. The Commission, in consultation with the city's attorney, did not remove her from the discussion.

Community Development Director Jason Gottgetreu presented "draft standards for a conditional use process for review and renewal with emphasis on requiring the applicant to have a process to address complaints; inform tenants of existing rules and expectations; and a means to require removal of the use if it proves to be problematic."³⁹ His report concluded that the draft Conditional Use Code was in the public interest and consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Several people testified in support of the proposal including Sarah DeSantis (SACA) and Sarah White (Sheltering Silverton). Leigh Harrod testified that she did "an online poll in Next Door to see if people felt Silverton should change the development code to allow these outside shelters." She said 60% of the people who voted said no, do not modify the development code. She feels that homeless people are dangerous and that the voters should decide on the change.⁴⁰

Discussions continued in small group meetings and on social media for the next several months. Residents opposed to the proposal voiced concerns about offensive behavior, Silverton's mental health infrastructure, safety of the neighborhood, background checks of residents, questioning limitation to women, etc.⁴¹

³⁹ May 1, 2018 Planning Commission Minutes

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ These concerns have been taken from conversations with opponents of the project including a letter written and circulated by Tom Courson as well as comments on Nextdoor.

Some of the original group meeting held at Chris Mayou's home decided to tour similar homes for women in Portland called Kenton Village. They found out that their cottages are not heated, but they do have a community room that is heated. The crime rate in the neighborhood went down after the tiny homes were built. Because the women are not renters, if they do not follow the rules of the program, they can be removed. For example, having a boyfriend stay overnight could get someone evicted from the village. The group met later and decided that the four women who would occupy the pods in Silverton would be referred by local homeless service providers including Sheltering Silverton and SACA. Chris Mayou stated that they decided the following: Single women over 18 would be referred to the church to apply and be vetted. The church would do extensive background checks to rule out violent or dangerous offenders. Applicants would have to agree to a code of conduct which will be robust and designed to preserve the cleanliness and order of the whole property, protect the safety of all participants, congregants, and neighbors.

On June 12, 2018 Jason Gottgetreu presented his recommendation for code changes which would allow the four cottages to be built at St. Edward's to the city's Planning Commission. The criteria involved a limitation of one per 10,000 square feet of open surface (not including the building) or ten whichever is less, limitation of two sites in the city, occupation limited to 18 months, and a written Code of Conduct.⁴²

Ginia Woodward, a resident of the neighborhood testified against the proposal. She indicated that she had once been homeless, but it was by choice. She indicated she had been molested by migrant workers in the area and that the women would not be safe. She said she was going to list her house for sale.⁴³ Others who testified felt there should be more surveillance, drug testing, and that temporary housing often became permanent.

Those in favor included a local restaurant owner, Anna Kuzmin, who herself had been homeless. She felt the proposal "provides hope and sense of dignity to homeless community members."⁴⁴ She offered to provide training in her restaurant for the occupants and others. Elijah Rakha-Shekotoff, a high school student, testifying on behalf of himself and several others, said that "it sickens me that this has become a conflict and that people would put property values, or whether or not this is an ideal situation, over the needs and wants of those suffering in our community...we need to start somewhere, every delay is another night without shelter."⁴⁵

Alice Griffin testified that she and three of the others whose property abuts St. Edward's were in favor of the proposal.⁴⁶ Peggy Andrews, who volunteered with the Warming Shelter, testified that it is just not young people who are homeless. She indicated there was a 73-year old woman who came to the Warming Shelter every night last winter.⁴⁷

⁴² July 12, 2018 Planning Commission Minutes

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Tom Courson submitted written testimony to the Planning Commission and the City Council as well as posting his remarks online. Courson and his wife live across the street from the church. His concerns included the background checks would only include “violent and sexual offenders” not “those convicted of other crimes such as property crimes, drug offenses or disorderly type crimes.” He stated that if a woman fails a drug test, she might have to be formally evicted which would cost time and money. He asked if the women would have to have ties to the community. He suggested alternatives including putting the pods in the Silverton Police Department parking lot or in the Community Center lot.⁴⁸

The Commission made some modifications to the proposed language, and the motion allowing the code changes necessary for the cottages to be built passed five to one.

On July 2, 2018 the City Council took up the discussion of the code changes for the first time. The proposed code language would limit the number of sites with this type of transitional housing to two in the city. The maximum number of units per parcel would be limited to one for every 10,000 square feet of the area of the proposed site. First, a Conditional Use application would be required with the Planning Commission to hold a review after the first six months and then annually thereafter.⁴⁹ Most of the people who testified in support of the project had testified at previous Planning Commission or HHTF meetings. Tiffaney Wren spoke in opposition to the proposal and said that she had collected signatures of 230 people who wanted to have a more open discussion. She herself preferred a city-wide vote. Mayor Palmer indicated the number of meetings that had been publicly announced that had discussed this issue previously. The City Council voted to defer a vote until its August meeting.

On August 6, 2018 the full City Council again took public testimony on the code changes for transitional dwellings. A number of people testified both for and against the proposal citing issues already discussed above. The City Council voted to extend public comment until its September 10 meeting, but that public testimony at that meeting would be limited to those who had not testified previously on the issue. Only two new people testified and they both favored the code change. Prior to considering the code change, the council voted to require a review of the code 18 months after the first housing unit is occupied. The City Council passed the final code changes including that the housing must be built on property owned by a religious institution, maximum space for each unit at 200 square feet, stick-built (meaning not a yurt or tent or RV) limited to four units per site, a local contact person who can be called during business hours, and establishing priority of residency to those living in Silverton during the past year.

October 1, 2018 the City Council held the first reading of the code changes it recommended at its August 6 meeting. At that meeting, the Council held a first and second reading of the code and passed it.

As this summary shows, creating four small cottages next to a church was not an easy task. There was strong opposition to this effort, but the proposal did finally pass. The church solicited donations for the effort and also received some free labor. The ground-breaking ceremony was held on June 9, 2019 and construction began shortly thereafter.

⁴⁸ From written remarks.

⁴⁹ July 2, 2018 City Council Minutes.

The next step in the process was to consider creating more affordable housing in Silverton.

Westfield Site

When the City Council of Silverton agreed to a zoning change in 2018 to allow four housing pods to be built on the property of St. Edward's Episcopal Church, housing first, the new paradigm for helping the homeless, was the primary rationale used. The idea was to get four women off the streets into temporary housing so that other issues could be dealt with. Unfortunately, no other organization has yet come forward to replicate this type of housing in Silverton. Many more are needed. In addition, the pods were seen as a temporary housing situation with the women eventually moving out to more permanent housing. The latter would need to be available and affordable.

The problem is that there is little such housing in Silverton. In February of 2020, according to rent.com, the average rent in Silverton was approximately \$1,000 for a one bedroom, slightly over 800 square foot, apartment.⁵⁰ An income of approximately \$36,000 would be needed to qualify for a rental of \$1,000 per month which translates to over \$17 per hour in wages. At this same time, only one such apartment was available according to Apartment.com. Availability of apartments where Section 8 vouchers can be used is virtually non-existent with Silvertowne Apartments, which does accept Section 8 vouchers, stating that in early 2020 they were dealing with applications from 2017.

One of the problems with creating more affordable housing in Silverton is a reluctance among many of the residents of Silverton to support more apartment buildings. Years ago, the City rezoned a plot of land with the highest density zoning, R-10, which would have allowed for 10-20 units per acre. The plan was to create more affordable housing with apartment units. Marion County ended up buying the property from the City in order to do this, but later sold it to a private developer who built market-rate apartments. Three stories were allowed under the zoning ordinance. Even though the apartments are modern and come with amenities such as a pool, many see the buildings as an eyesore and a blight to the city. In the City of Silverton's Comprehensive Plan, it is noted that over 70% of the City's residents live in single-family homes, either owned or rented.⁵¹

The City Council did not give up, however. In February of 2018, the City Council discussed and then in April formally adopted the following into its long-range goals for 2018-19. "Assist the Urban Renewal Agency in developing the scope of the redevelopment of the Westfield property, including possible use as affordable and/or assisted living." This property of approximately eight acres is located to the West of the Silverton Senior Center and a skate park and dog park. At times in the past, members of the City Council had envisioned a new police station located in this area. Later, the City purchased a former school site, Eugene Field, and are now planning to build both a new police station and city hall in the next ten years at this site. Because public discussion

⁵⁰ <https://www.rentcafe.com/average-rent-market-trends/us/or/silverton/>

⁵¹ <https://www.silverton.or.us/DocumentCenter/View/807/Silverton-Comprehensive-Plan-Part-2?bidid=>

of the latter took much of their time, the goal for Westfield was bumped ahead to goals for 2019-20.

On February 25, 2019, the City Council had a lengthier discussion regarding the Westfield site. The idea at the time was to put out a request for proposals to developers to see what kind of ideas and configuration of the property might be possible. Much of the discussion at that meeting was about density. At the time, the site was designated as Residential 1 (single family housing). Councilor Laurie Carter expressed her concern. “We need to see a senior retirement community perhaps with a community center. Our population is aging, and many cannot afford to stay in houses.” Councilor Jason Freilinger ran a combination game and electronics store and made the acquaintance of many young people. “These young people simply cannot find affordable housing in Silverton. My daughter is in her twenties and employed full-time and has just moved back home because she couldn’t find anything either.” Mayor Kyle Palmer expressed his desire to also accommodate the 18-30 age group which is finding it difficult to afford housing in Silverton. The decision was made to consider up to R-10 zoning for the Westfield site which would allow a minimum of ten and up to a maximum of 20 dwelling units per acre.

At about the same time, Harry Douglas entered the picture. The Douglas’ have a history of helping those who are less fortunate. Harry and his wife Karrie cooked the first meal that was offered at Oak Street Church many years ago. In 2014, Karrie came up with the idea to offer a free Christmas dinner for those in the community who didn’t have family or friends with which to spend the holiday. “I was amazed at the turnout,” said Harry. “I had no idea how many people would come.” Over the ensuing years, 45 to 125 people showed up for the holiday meal. It was first offered at Oak Street Church. Later, Rick Lewis, who is a current State Representative from Silverton, gave encouragement to the Douglas’ by securing the Senior Center as a location for the meal. In order to fund the event, the Douglas’ obtained donations by attending many of the other community events in Silverton and asking for support. The meal had been offered for four years when Harry’s health started a slow decline and his doctor recommended that he disengage somewhat from his activities.

But Harry wasn’t done. In the summer of 2018, he started what came to be called the Affordable Housing Chat Group. The goal of this group was to address the problems seniors, low-income Silvertonians, and recently graduated high school students were having with securing housing. The Douglas’ live at Twilight Courts which now receives support from the Section 8 housing program. It is a senior/disabled community with 550 square foot one-bedroom apartments. Harry tells the story of a nun who was excluded from her convent community. She moved into Twilight Courts and was unable to afford heat her first winter until Section 8 funding took over. Unsurprisingly, there is a waiting list to secure an apartment at Twilight Courts as well as at other senior housing developments in Silverton. While Harry is planning on staying at Twilight Courts, some recent rent increases have caused others to try to find something less expensive. Some of these people joined Harry is pursuing more affordable housing.

Harry was impressed that many city officials attended one or more of the early meetings – Mayor Kyle Palmer, Councilor Dana Smith, Community Development Director Jason Gottgetreu, City Manager Christy Wurster, as well as Rep. Rick Lewis and candidate Barry Shapiro. Another early participant was Sarah White who had helped start the Warming Shelter in Silverton in

2016. As with most discussions, this group started out with a broad focus – helping high school students who had recently graduated, low income families, seniors, and others. Deciding fairly early on that this focus was too expansive, it narrowed its discussions to creating a village for senior citizens.

Within some months of ongoing discussions, the group decided to pursue a village of small homes (300-700 square feet) to be located on the vacant land behind the Silverton Senior Center (the Westfield Site described above). “This location is ideal,” cited Harry. “It is obviously within walking distance of the Senior Center, but also a large grocery store, four churches, and the Oregon Gardens. What better location for a senior housing project?”

“But we needed the City of Silverton to get involved to broaden the focus and involve the City’s decision makers,” explained Harry. “So, I talked to Kyle Palmer and he worked with the City Council to establish the Affordable Housing Task Force (AHTF).” The first meeting of this task force was January 29, 2019. Those appointed to the task force included Harry Douglas as well as other members of his chat group – David Goldblatt, Bonnie Logan, and Molly Ainsley, as well as City Council members Jason Freilinger and Dana Smith, Mayor Kyle Palmer, city staff, developers, and other citizens. The first meeting touched on key issues affecting housing such as prohibitive rents, inability of workers to live in the city at the wages they are making, high costs of accommodation for RVs, lack of incentives to build low-income housing, lot size restrictions, etc.

The task force continued to meet monthly discussing zoning issues, the concept of Accessory Dwelling Units (built on a lot with a home and rented to someone not related to the homeowner), mixing housing types in a neighborhood, the concept of tiny homes, and the high cost of system development charges among other related issues. On June 18, 2019, the Affordable Housing Chat Group first presented its concept for the land behind the Senior Center to the AHTF. Arlea Gibson, a member of the group, made a slide presentation containing the key elements of their plan – small homes 300-700 square feet containing at least one bedroom, living room, bathroom, and kitchen. She also spoke about a possible community center that could be included that would allow residents to entertain groups. The proposal asked the City of Silverton to donate one acre of the property for 12 small homes and to waive the City’s System Development Charges. (The City currently waives SDC’s for homes built by Habitat for Humanity.) She further explained that the group would like these to be rental properties because the people they were targeting could not afford to purchase a home.

The Affordable Housing Task Force continued to discuss options such as more density in residential zones such as duplexes. They also discussed apartments or cottage homes that were smaller than current regulations and built around a common courtyard. At their October meeting, they expressed support for a policy that would “provide opportunities for development of housing affordable to all income levels.”⁵²

Then somewhat suddenly, the City issued a Site Solicitation Proposal for the Westfield Site on October 11, 2019. The proposal delineated four key requirements.⁵³

⁵² Affordable Housing Task Force Minutes 10/15/19.

⁵³ SFP for Westfield Site Acquisition

1. Serve as a catalyst and model of innovative development that acts as a gateway to Silverton;
2. Serve as a model of affordable housing within the City of Silverton;
3. Be bicycle and pedestrian friendly; and/or
4. Provide desirable goods and services to area residents, visitors and employees.

While the proposal did not stipulate a specific number of affordable units, it indicated that the more affordable units that were proposed, the better the chance of being selected would be. The SFP defined affordable as units that would be available to people earning 50% or 60% less than the Area Median Income and indicated the specific rental limits in its document. The City of Silverton also stated a desire for a mix of units and stated that “retail, office, or industrial uses to benefit non-area residents or for profit businesses are discouraged.”⁵⁴ Other issues such as minimum (10 dwelling units per acres) and maximum (20) were listed as well as maximum building height (three stories), lot coverage, and other requirements. The deadline for receipt of proposals was December 5, 2019 with the selection of proposals by January 24, 2020 - a fairly fast timeline for receipt and decision-making.

In the meantime, the Affordable Housing Task Force had hired the consulting firm, Eco Northwest, to go through with them all the city regulations, zoning ordinances, building restrictions, and various fees that might hamper building affordable housing. Their draft report published on November 27, 2019 outlined specific changes that would help make housing more affordable in each of the categories listed above. As examples, they suggested reducing the minimum lot size in the Single-Family Residential (R-1) zone from 7,000 to 5,000 square feet; evaluating the setback requirements to see if they could be modified to reduce costs; allowing single-room occupation in R-5, RM-10 and RM-20 zones; allowing cottages in clusters as well as tiny homes; as well as many other ideas.

If you are carefully following the timeline of these events, you will note that the City Council issued its Site Solicitation Proposal for the Westfield Site before the Affordable Housing Task Force had even received a final report from the consultant, Eco Northwest. In addition, the solicitation for proposals was not shared nor discussed with the Affordable Housing Task Force. This is a prelude to what happened in the next two months.

In fairness to the City Council, they felt that they had discussed using the Westfield Site for affordable housing at least two years ago when it was put in its long-range plans. There may also have been another reason to seek the proposals at the same time they were going to move forward to re-zone the property. In 2016, the City Council had approved an ordinance to annex slightly less than 10 acres located on North James Street to the City with the zoning of R-1 – Single Family Residential. When a developer purchased the property and submitted a proposal to the Planning Commission to put 33 single family homes and seven duplexes on the site in May 2018, they were denied. The Planning Commission stated that this subdivision proposal would hinder the performance of the nearby intersections in regard to traffic. The City Council concurred, and the developer appealed the City’s denial to the Land Use Board of Appeals which

⁵⁴ Ibid.

presides over all land use decisions in Oregon. LUBA generally reverses decisions that have been appealed in less than 5% of the cases.⁵⁵ However, in this case LUBA agreed with the developer to allow it. In regard to the Westfield Site, the City perhaps thought that if the zoning decision were coupled with a specific proposal, they wouldn't end up getting their decisions reversed by LUBA.

The best laid plans... However, when the Planning Commission heard the proposal to zone the Westfield Site as R-10, it balked. It felt that it had not been involved in this major city project. It voted not to approve the zoning. When the Planning Commission's no vote was taken to the City Council, the Council voted to uphold the no vote of the Commission. The development of the Westfield Site is not dead, but the City Council now will have to go back and consult other groups, examine the proposals it did receive, and build support for the project. Given the lack of affordable housing in Silverton, it cannot be put on hold.

There is an interesting attitude in this small-town regarding density. As I stated earlier in the preface, when I grew up in the 1950s in Bismarck, North Dakota, I lived in a block with single family homes as well as small apartment buildings. Yet this type of mixed housing is rare today in new housing developments. Suburbs became the popular standard for new housing developments. However, as Colin Steif points out in his article "The History and Evolution of Suburbs," they are not a new phenomenon. He quotes from a Babylonian clay tablet from 539 BCE: "Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to Babylon that we enjoy all the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home, we stay away from all the noise and dust."⁵⁶ This same attitude can be found today in suburbs throughout the United States. While Silverton doesn't have suburbs per se, most of the city's dwellings consist of single-family homes with newer developments such as the 150 lot Abiqua Heights forming a homeowner association with many restrictions on development and the requirement to pay annual dues for the upkeep of its Commons, a park-like space.

It is possible in the future that concepts that integrate different types of dwelling units will become more popular. But the City of Silverton will clearly face opposition to building another large apartment complex. And it is almost impossible to provide lower cost rentals without the scale of apartment buildings. The City Council has its work cut out for them.

Conestoga Huts

As stated earlier, as of April 2020, no other church has yet stepped up to the plate to replicate the cottages or pods that have been built at St. Edward's Episcopal Church. Earlier in the year, the Fire Marshall of Silverton conducted an inspection of the Warming Shelter on the second floor of Oak Street Church which operated from the end of November 2019 through March 18, 2020. He determined that substantial remodeling would have to be done including adding fire sprinklers if the site was to be used during the following winter. Thus, an alternative to the

⁵⁵ <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/local/silverton/2019/06/12/land-use-board-of-appeals-decision-benefits-silverton-property-developer/1359671001/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.thoughtco.com/overview-of-suburbs-1435799>

Warming Shelter, as well as a place to lodge people when the Warming Shelter closed, was the next big project on Sheltering Silverton's plate.

With the thinking that you do not need to reinvent the wheel, Sarah White and several Sheltering Silverton volunteers, in February 2020, toured three sites in Eugene, Oregon that have been developed to temporarily house people who were homeless. Eugene is a much larger city than Silverton, over 150,000, and has been dealing with homelessness for a lot longer than Silverton.

Community Supported Shelters (CSS), a non-profit corporation funded largely by community donations, as well as grants and fundraising activities, has created three villages which it describes as Safe Spot Communities. These villages are described as "legal, designated places for people who are without a conventional form of housing."⁵⁷ The villages are located in different areas of Eugene – two are located on city property along the train tracks on major roads near industrial areas and the third is on the Mission property, also close to the tracks and not far from the others. On these properties, CSS has constructed a basic type of housing called the Conestoga Hut designed by Erik DeBuhr, their executive director. Up to 15 of these huts constitute a village. The huts are so named because they resemble the Conestoga wagons which were used for transport in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Eastern United States and Canada. The design has now reached the Pacific Northwest. The huts are constructed on a wooden platform with both the front and the back constructed of wood including a lockable door. The back has a window set toward the top of the structure. The sides and the top are built from a wire frame that is covered with a durable membrane that seals the hut. There is a small porch area where a lockable container for additional belongings can be placed. While only about 60 square feet, they provide a private secure space for one or two residents. A construction manual and templates for building the hut are available for a fee on the CSS website.⁵⁸

The entire village has a secure fence with both a vehicle gate and a pedestrian gate. There is a common space that has wood-fired heat for cooking and warmth as well as a solar charging station for small appliances such as phones. There is a common kitchen with a propane cookstove, running water, counter space, and food storage. Because there is no electricity or plumbing within the huts, porta-potties as well as garbage receptacles are also provided within the fenced area. The participants also have an area designated for gardens should they desire to use it.

The visitors reported on their site visit to the Sheltering Silverton Advisory Collaborative on March 5, 2020. Sarah White felt that a village of this type would be preferable to creating a camp site with just tents. "This village appeared much more dignified than a camp site and it was very clean," she explained. Each village has up to five camp volunteer staff that take care of communications with the office, transportation using the organization's truck, keeping up the common kitchen and grounds maintenance. They do not have the same time limit as the other campers. "One woman leader had been there for five years and absolutely loved her job," added Rob Ambrose who also did the tour. Trish Ambrose, another tour participant, explained that each group had set up a different set of policies that governed the village. "If someone violates the

⁵⁷ <https://communitysupportedshelters.org/about-sccs>

⁵⁸ <https://communitysupportedshelters.org/hut-construction-manual>

policy,” Trish explained, “they can be reported and may eventually be terminated from the program.” This self-governance seemed to be working. The goal is for most participants to move on to more permanent housing. All campers are expected to do gate duty shifts each week. They have to be out of the camp for four hours during the day. They also have a two and one-half hour work party every month for community bonding.

Given the low cost of construction, \$2,000 or less depending on whether volunteer labor is used, this type of village is much more doable than some of the other villages that have been created. As an example, SquareOne Villages, also based in Eugene, is a non-profit corporation that creates self-managed villages for people who are at risk of becoming homeless. Since their founding in 2012, they have built three tiny-home villages and have presented workshops in other communities that have since replicated their efforts. Emerald Village is a site with 22 tiny homes of about 250 square feet with small garden spaces and patios. I have personally talked to several of the residents who plan to spend the rest of their life there. They pay \$300 per month and self-manage their community with assistance from SquareOne. Emerald Village units have a bathroom, bedroom, living room, and a kitchen with a refrigerator and space for a microwave. A large kitchen with a stove and laundry facilities is located in a community center on the property. Because these tiny homes are connected to water, plumbing, and electricity, they are not inexpensive to build. SquareOne Villages was able to raise the funds for them from its much larger donor base. This type of affordable tiny-home village might be developed in the future in Silverton, but the Conestoga Huts would be a better first step.

Obviously, there are more issues than just raising funds to build these huts. Given the opposition expressed during the zone changes for the pods, it will be necessary to garner community support for wherever they are located. It might also require City Council action to allow such residential units to be built.

What is interesting is how much we spend on homelessness because we do not take care of it early by building small units like the Conestoga huts. Dr. Mike Grady, the past president of Silverton Area Community Aid, recently visited three of his patients in nursing homes. “Two had been evicted from apartments,” Grady explained. “The evictions led to their getting ill and hospitalized and then admitted to the nursing home. The third was a woman with severe emphysema dependent on oxygen who lived in a space without running water or electricity. She was dependent on oxygen canisters. When she ran out, she deteriorated quickly leading to near death and a lengthy hospitalization, before coming to the nursing home.” Grady calculated that the homelessness of these three individuals probably ran close to \$250,000 in hospital costs as well as continued expenses in the nursing home which were probably about \$7,000 per month for each patient. Imagine if you had \$250,000 to build tiny homes or buy oxygen canisters for people in need. The huts would be such a better long-term solution than a nursing home with its very high costs. “Housing first is not only the right way to go,” commented Grady, “but a far cheaper way to deal with the problem.”

Joy Farm

Sheltering Silverton has the opportunity to lease a 2.3 acre farm on the outskirts of Silverton. This farm includes a four-bedroom home and a small garden shed. The land is home to several mature fruit trees and an acre of south facing, gently sloped pasture ideal for a food garden. The vision is to provide transitional housing for up to six women. It is perceived that by living and working together to run the farm, residents will develop interpersonal relationship skills, life skills related to daily life, and job experience in running an agriculture-based local business.

The home has five transitional beds and one emergency bed in the house plus two well-appointed RVs for families. This home would provide up to one year of transitional living and service support. The women living here would have the opportunity to build strong and lasting personal relationships and develop work experience through handcrafting and gardening, business management, and community relations. While staying at the farm, guests would receive community care, social service support, and respite.

Sarah White, Program Director of Sheltering Silverton and head of this project, explained why women versus men were chosen. “Women and families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population,” she said, “with 34% of the total homeless population composed of families.” For a number of reasons, Sarah added, women consistently avoid shelters. Because 20-50% of all homeless women and children become homeless as a direct result of fleeing domestic violence is likely one of the primary reasons for this avoidance.

There will be a set of rules or policies for the women including maintaining a clean and sober lifestyle, participating in self-governance, contributing to the working of the house and farm and keeping personal possessions to a minimum.

Similar to the idea for the Conestoga Huts, residences like the idea for Joy Farm have come from successful models including Catholic Worker Homes, Oxford Houses, and Hood House. Sheltering Silverton plans to partner with local agencies such as Safety Compass, Legacy Health, Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, and United Way to provide case management support.

The Cusanos

A subcontractor refused to pay for 70 hours of work worth about \$2,800, a landlord evicted them with one month's rent not paid, and a social service agency made them jump through hoops instead of helping them with permanent housing. Eleven months later, James and Mary Cusano, their 13-year-old son Avery, five-year-old daughter Miakoda, and their two-year-old twins Goddrik and Dominique came to Silverton. "We have had more help from Sheltering Silverton than we did from the agencies in McMinnville and Salem that have lots of full-time staff and millions of dollars in their budget," explains Mary. They are now in North Carolina.

But we are getting ahead of their story. Let's go back two years. The Cusano family had a painting business that was doing quite well. James is a skilled painter that also specializes in wallpaper and faux finishing. They decided to have a third child... and ended up with twins! While four children are a lot to handle, they were doing great. The twins were thriving, and the two older children were in school. Mary handled the office and bookkeeping end of the business and was able to continue to do that after the twins were born.

Then a subcontractor they were working with decided not to pay them. If it had been a small job, it might not have mattered, but it wasn't. He owed them \$2,800. They were expecting this payment in order to pay their rent and other bills. When it didn't come, they got behind. It was winter, work was scarce. They used up their savings. When they were late once before, it appeared the landlord was eager to evict them. But they paid. Now, they got behind again, and the landlord evicted them for being one month late. Evicted a family with four children. The property owner for which they were paying \$1,695 plus utilities for a house in a small town in Oregon was out of Las Vegas. "They couldn't wait to evict us," James said. They proposed a payment plan to catch up with the rent with the landlord, but he rejected it. "We want you out," he said. Mary went to court for the eviction and their attorney asked the judge to recuse herself because she was a former tenant of the same company. She recused herself and a new court date was set. The Cusanos didn't get notified, so they lost. Now in North Carolina, they will have to request arbitration to get the eviction off their record.

When they were given notice of the eviction, they went to the State of Oregon's Department of Housing Services to see if they could get some help. The state told them that YCAP (Yamhill Community Action Partnership) in McMinnville where they were living was the agency to go to because they had just received \$1 million for housing assistance. According to YCAP's website, if you are homeless, "you can apply for multiple housing assistant types."⁵⁹ It further states that it can help with "rental arrears and ongoing housing assistance."⁶⁰ Sounds like just the agency the Cusanos needed, right? However, that is not what happened. YCAP denied they had received the money the state had told them about. Furthermore, they said there was no money to help them.

They stayed in a motel for three weeks with their tax refund and at her parents for another three weeks. YCAP kept saying, just call us when you are homeless. Finally, YCAP got them into a shelter in a nearby town. They had one room in a house. "It reminded me of a fraternity house,"

⁵⁹ <http://yamhillcap.org/>

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

said James, “there were so many unrelated people there.” The room had black mold. Avery was the first to get sick with projectile vomiting. When they saw a pediatrician, the doctor said his illness could very well be from mold. When they wrote a letter to YCAP, the agency moved them to a shelter in another small town nearby called Newberg. This room in yet another large house was one of the warmest. With six people in one room, you can imagine that it got even warmer. There was no air conditioning. The blinds throughout the house had been crocheted together so they couldn’t open or see through the windows. Then there were the rules in the house. You couldn’t take a shower after 10:00 PM. James was still painting and sometimes he ran late. Too bad. Can’t wash up after work. “They just dehumanize you,” said Mary. They started testing them for THC, the component in marijuana, even though it is legal in the state of Oregon. She had to do a urine test (she had had one beer) and her THC count was high. They tried to get into a program where they help you pay your rent for up to three years to help you get back on your feet. But they couldn’t move in until their application was approved. Mary went to a town hall meeting in McMinnville held by County Commissioner Casey Kulla to testify about the problems they were having getting help. Three days after her appearance in front of the City Council, armed security guards arrived to kick them out of the house.

They went back to her parents. James and Mary’s mother got into an argument, so they started to camp out. “There was a very nice Hispanic family residing at the same camp,” Mary explained. “They had gathered firewood and gave some to us. The woman, Rosa, said that ‘Jesus told us to help you.’” Rosa also helped them with gas. James was still trying to work. He would go wherever in the valley he could to get painting jobs. They couldn’t get housing, however. “Having an eviction on your record is worse than a criminal conviction,” Mary said. “No one would rent to us.”

They were just getting ready to go see friends in Goldendale, Washington. They tried to get to their storage unit to drop off all their painting tools. It was their wedding anniversary and they wanted to take a week’s break. James had just gotten paid. However, it was not meant to be. A local police officer, who knew them, pulled up alongside their car. He ran its plates without any rationale for doing so. They were not speeding or committing any other infraction. But the officer knew she had no insurance. “I will have to tow you,” the officer said and then laughed at them when they were pulling their kids out of the car. A taxi took them to the Walmart parking lot. They still had their work van which hadn’t yet been towed. James and the kids hunkered down inside among the painting equipment. Mary and the dog slept outside. Not only was the wedding anniversary trip off, but because they did not have car insurance, the Department of Motor Vehicles immediately suspended Mary’s driver’s license. She will have to get a new one in North Carolina. “It’s a racket,” Mary said. “Once you are down, you just keep getting pushed down further when you try to get up.” And then there was the fee for the towed car on top of everything else.

They were finishing up their last exterior painting of the season, so Mary’s mom took the kids for the weekend. Her mother had promised Miakoda a Build-a-Bear. They offered to buy dinner for Miakoda’s birthday at Red Robin. At the dinner, Mary noticed her father kept trying to put his hand under Avery’s butt. She told Avery to scoot over next to her. Her father always carried a gun, so she was understandably a bit nervous. In a couple of days, Avery was able to admit that his grandfather had been molesting him for his whole life. Avery told the school. They used

some money from a GoFundMe account to stay in a motel for two months. When that ran out, they were told by the detective handling Avery's case that they could no longer take the kids to her parents' house. "If you do," he said. "The state will take your kids from you."

They spent some time in Salem, but the agencies there were not able to help them either. One night, when they were sleeping in their car at Minto Brown Park, a police officer checked up on them. He then left and brought back some toys for the kids. Another police officer gave them two \$50 gift certificates for Fred Meyer. It helped them forget the experience they had had with the police in McMinnville.

Mary had connected with Sarah White, who runs Sheltering Silverton, two years previously through their mutual support for Bernie Sanders for president. In November, they found out that the detective who was handling Avery's abuse case was an ex-partner of Sarah's husband Dmitry White. He encouraged them to go to Silverton. It was the right decision. "We have had more help here than we did anywhere else," Mary explained. In November of 2019, they started to stay at the Warming Shelter, but that was only open from 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM. The Warming Shelter had an area with small tents for anyone with children. They got up early and took Miakoda and Avery to school. But then the twins got sick. One day, they ended up walking to the hospital with them and then walking back in the rain to wait until the Warming Shelter opened. Needless to say, they were exhausted and at the end of their ropes.

The Cusanos had already decided to move back to North Carolina where they had relatives. Mary is from the Lumbee tribe near Pembroke, North Carolina. Her mother took her back there often when she was younger. She knew that she would get help from them. Sheltering Silverton had bought them plane tickets. But when the twins got sick, they were desperate. Would they make it the two weeks until their plane left? Hilary Dumitrescu, the executive director of Sheltering Silverton, came to the rescue. She called around town to real estate agents to find a vacant house that was for sale. Dixon Bledsoe, a long-time resident and realtor in Silverton, had a small house that was vacant that hadn't been shown very much. He called the owner who agreed to rent it to them for \$200 for two weeks. There was no furniture in the house and the furnace didn't work. But at least it was out of the windy and rainy weather.

They stayed there until their plane left. They had to sort through all of their items in storage in McMinnville and ended up donating most of everything to Sheltering Silverton and another non-profit. They could not afford to have it shipped to North Carolina. A GoFundMe campaign was set up to help them ship their one remaining car and the painting van full of what belongings they kept. The Saturday before they left, they met friends at the local bowling alley in Silverton to say goodbye.

The Advocates

The next four segments deal with individuals and their work with the homeless. Let's start with the streetwalker.

The Streetwalker

Don't confuse Cherry Hoffman with the usual definition of streetwalker. Far from it. Steve Knox, Pastor at First Christian Church in Silverton, first used the name for her for her work in identifying people in need throughout Silverton. And she does literally walk the streets, virtually every day.

Hoffman is a commissioned minister with First Christian Church. This appellation differs from an ordained minister because she did not attend a seminary. While she does give sermons in several different churches, her work as a streetwalker occupies a lot of her time. When I asked her how she identifies people who might be in need, she explained that she looks for people who make no eye contact, may be carrying a large garbage bag or a backpack, are perhaps a bit scruffy, and do not appear to be interested in what's going on around them. She introduces herself and tries to start a conversation. "You have to earn their trust," she explains. "Sometimes it can take weeks. But if I do, then I can help them." She may invite them to her house for a meal or accompany them to one of the free meals that are offered around town. "It took me four weeks to get one gentleman to feel free to talk to me," she added.

One young man with whom she became friends had been shut out by his family because he was using drugs. He would come to her house in the middle of the winter and lightly tap on her door. When she answered the door, he would ask, "Are you hungry? I could make you breakfast." She invited him into her house and the only thing she had was Tony Roma ribs. They heated them up and ate them for breakfast! One night he showed up at the First Christian Church Wednesday night dinner. He showed symptoms of the flu. Hoffman encouraged him to call his mother. When he did, his mother said she had to ask her husband, the man's stepfather. When the mother got back on the phone, she said he couldn't come home. He left the dinner in the rain and cold and walked a mile and a half to his camping spot. "It nearly broke my heart," Hoffman shared.

Decades ago, several boxcars were placed near the center of town. It's hard to believe that they comply with city code, but someone is renting them out. Hoffman knows everyone who lives in them and sometimes intervenes with the landlord. Unfortunately, there is only one trash can that is rarely picked up and thus trash accumulates in the front of the lot. She often takes the tenants places and even sits and cries with them. One of them cannot talk, perhaps because of a previous stroke. "These people have nowhere to go and living on the streets would kill them," she adds. But like anyplace else, the landlord is free to raise the rent. When one tenant's electricity was not working, Hoffman took the check for the rent. The tenant was able to say, "My minister has my rent, but you need to fix this first." That time, it worked out and the repair was made.

Not all the encounters are pleasant. "It's been a terrible education for me about what people are capable of," Hoffman explained. She encountered a young child, about six years old who had been duct taped to the toilet seat and given a loaf of bread and peanut butter. His mother had left him for the weekend. When she was working at Randall Hospital for Children in Portland as a chaplain, she encountered a child who was brought in with severe injuries. "You don't get those kinds of injuries from bumping your head on a faucet which was the explanation given to the doctor," Hoffman said. "You do ask yourself after an incident like that, how do I keep going?" she added. But she always does.

Craig Bazzi

Craig Bazzi, a volunteer advocate for Sheltering Silverton, is a retired gentleman who worked at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility as a group life coordinator for seven years. He served the rest of his career as a Probation Officer and Probation Supervisor for the Marion County Juvenile Department. After his retirement from his last position, he worked for a time for Mid-Willamette Community Action Agency at a transition housing program for men coming out of prison. Following that assignment, he managed a community-based resource center for men and women who had been incarcerated or otherwise involved with the criminal justice system. This program provided a wide range of services to facilitate clients' successful reentry into mainstream society. This included help with employment, housing, mental health, personal adjustment, and other services.

Bazzi first got involved with Sheltering Silverton at their Warming Shelter. His role at the Sheltering Silverton Resource Center is to greet folks who come in during the four hours they are open during the week and help them access resources, give them tokens for a free shower, and offer supplies.

When asked about the causes of homelessness, Bazzi replies that the most common cause is “the lack of support and connections that people have. Everyone thinks that using drugs is the biggest issue, but it’s not.” He added mental health issues and the inability to gain employment as other key factors in explaining why people are homeless. Bazzi explained that there are many stages for recovery from issues such as drug abuse. “Some people just aren’t ready to make a change. Others are struggling with working on a specific plan and getting treatment,” Bazzi added. Sheltering Silverton deals with people on every part of this wide spectrum. “Relapse is part of change,” he added. “It doesn’t mean it’s over, it’s part of the normal process.” Bazzi did add that serving only one day a week makes it hard to establish the continuity needed for him to assist some of the individuals.

Trish and Rob Ambrose

Trish and Rob Ambrose could be the poster people for their volunteer efforts in helping those who need it. They have a regular shift at Sheltering Silverton, work at the Wednesday night dinners at the First Christian Church, and have volunteered for the food pantry called Mission of Hope just to name a few of their endeavors.

Trish and Rob met at Houghton College, a Christian liberal arts college in Houghton, New York - a town even smaller than Silverton with slightly over 1,400 people. As students, they read several social justice books such as Ron Sider’s *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Sider proposed that many Christians “blame morally reprehensible individual choices,” while many liberals “blame constrictive social and economic policy” for poverty.⁶¹ A theologian, Sider found himself agreeing with both sides, but suggested ways where everyone can make a difference.

⁶¹ https://www.amazon.com/Rich-Christians-Age-Hunger-Generosity/dp/0718037049/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=age+of+hunger&qid=1568501841&sr=8-1

Rob and Trish also became acquainted with urban ministry through David Mains' book, *Full Circle*, and the work of a church in Times Square, New York City. As a result, they became committed to helping people in need. After graduation, the Ambroses found themselves involved in Inner City Ministry in some tough neighborhoods in Chicago for over six years.

Down the road, the Ambroses were living in Pennsylvania, raising their six children, (Trish home schooled all of them!), when a double murder occurred that impacted their family very personally. They decided that it was time to move. As devout Christians, they prayed for guidance. Trish had a dream one night involving a waterfall. In time, following further investigation and research, they felt led to Silverton where they joined Silver Creek Fellowship. (Silverton is near Silver Creek Falls State Park with a stunning collection of waterfalls.) This church runs a food bank called Mission of Hope, which initially started out providing meals to homeless individuals who were living under the Center Street Bridge in Salem. Trish and Rob helped deliver these hot meals once a month, setting up chairs and tables so that people could feel like they were being served in a restaurant. Between 60-120 individuals came together for these meals. This effort later transitioned into a mobile food pantry serving both Silverton and Southeast Salem.⁶² The Ambroses also helped with these monthly food distributions. Rob explains that at the beginning, he was quite intimidated with this work. "What should I say?" he wondered, not knowing what would be appropriate and what wouldn't. He soon found out that most people just wanted to talk and were willing to tell him how they had become homeless. "They are just people," he said. Trish added that over time, the crowd under the bridge became a pretty rough crowd. "There were not enough shelters, or for one reason or another folks couldn't stay in the ones that were available. Sadly enough, there were certain people with drug problems, and the place became pretty trashed," she added. Unfortunately, when the city of Salem shut it down, there were no alternatives available, for either food distribution or housing.

Trish and Rob became involved with what became Sheltering Silverton when the city of Silverton held hearings over the desire of St. Edward's Episcopal Church to place four housing pods for women in their parking lot (see chapter on the pods). Trish and Rob ended up attending all the zoning and City Council meetings, advocating for the project, and then became involved with Sheltering Silverton as it developed at about the same time.

As a volunteer advocate at Sheltering Silverton, Trish, experienced with research, spends a lot of time helping people navigate various agencies and programs on the computer. She and Rob connect people with these services based upon their needs. Rob frequently gives clients rides to various appointments and Trish coordinates the meals at Sheltering Silverton's drop-in center. Trish recounts the rewarding story of working once with a woman who had missing and loose teeth as a result of domestic violence. The woman was enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan but hadn't been accessing it. They helped find her a dentist in Mt. Angel who resolved her issue. Afterwards, she eagerly sought them out to share her new, perfect smile. Most of the restoration was covered by OHP, but a generous portion was donated by the dentist himself. "It really takes the efforts of the entire community to produce success stories," Trish commented.

When they moved to Silverton, Rob had wanted to do pastoral work, but it didn't work out. "I asked God, what I should do instead?" The answer he received was to help the poor. He was a bit

⁶² <https://scf.tv/mission-of-hope/>

intimidated because of their rough experience in inner-city Chicago, but he vowed to do it because he knew that's what God wanted. He credits Sarah White for making the difference with their involvement in Sheltering Silverton. With her help they are actually helping people. "In the past people would come to us with many needs and we would give them food and pray for them, but that didn't help them out of their long-term homelessness," Rob said. Sarah's experience, knowledge, and compassion changed this dynamic. "Now we always make a significant difference in the lives of the people we're helping. Housing is so important," he added. "If you are sick and outside, you can't recover. If your situation never changes, and you can't see a way for it to improve, you lose hope. We try to give people hope. Often, all they need is someone to help them a little to get them over the goal line. That's what we do."

Trish said that working with Sheltering Silverton has changed their lives. "It is an important goal just to care and love people," she said. "We care about them and we know all their names. We see them, truly see them." Rob added that we need to return to a time where we simply cared for our neighbors.

An Overnight Volunteer

At 8:00 PM, the doors to Oak Street Church are opened. Usually, there are several people waiting outside, some catching a chance to smoke one of their last cigarettes of the night. Smoking is not allowed inside the church. Entering the church, a wide staircase looms ahead. It leads to the second floor where the Warming Shelter is housed. At the entrance to the large room, there is an area separated out with cloth covered tables and a large counter where the evening meal serving dishes are placed. Just like at the Wednesday meal at First Christian Church, no paper plates or plastic spoons are used. Some individuals place their belongings in their space and return, eager to find out what food is being served. Others have already eaten elsewhere and go to their cot and crash, falling sound asleep instantly. For those, the day has been long, spent walking the streets or taking the bus to Salem for appointments such as methadone treatments, or working a long day. Having been together either at the Warming Shelter or at the Resource Center, most of these people know each other. Some get along well and others find that their personalities clash. If they don't avoid each other, they are likely to get into a loud argument and one or the other could be expelled for the night or longer.

I decided to volunteer every Wednesday night for the winter of 2019-20. I will admit that for a 69-year-old, it was hard for me to adjust to the schedule. I am a night owl. Thus, I tend to stay up and read until 1:00 or 2:00 AM. The wake-up by the paid staffer at 6:30 AM was a harsh reality that no one gets to sleep in - including me. The hours of the shelter are from 8:00 PM to 8:00 AM. During the time the Warming Shelter is open (this year from November 15 to March 18), the Sheltering Silverton Resource Center is open from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. While dinner is served, there are only snacks handed out for breakfast. At times, there is food at the Resource Center prior to the noon meal that is served, all provided by volunteers.

It doesn't take me long to meet everyone. Some are more reluctant to engage, but most of the people are very friendly and eager to meet a new friend. There is a paid staff person who must remain awake all night and this person, at least on my nights, generally stays in the large area where the cots have been placed in order to see that there are no disruptions. East Valley

Vineyard Church created dividers with poles and sheets so there exists a modicum of privacy. Each cot has a pad and a duvet with a pillow. Many people have sleeping bags or blankets that they add to the mix. Serving dinner allows me to engage with people. As I have a habit of starting conversations with strangers pretty much everywhere (especially in long lines), it's easy for me to do. Most are eager to share stories or experiences or even talk about politics or other subjects of interest. Some just want to be left alone.

The rules for the shelter are placed near every cot, the eating area, and the bathroom. The guest policies are as follows:

Speak politely.

Practice patience.

Respect the needs of others.

Clean our space and surroundings.

Help when you can.

Guests who cannot or will not follow these policies will be asked to leave.

Sheltering Silverton is a safe place for all of our neighbors.

Someone has been asked to leave several times during my stays. Usually it involves a loud argument and the staff person, if he fails to calm it down, turns it into an eviction. One night two guests got into an argument and both had to leave. Another night, someone thought his phone had been stolen and got loud and angry when people were trying to sleep. He was also asked to leave. Another episode involved a man who had once been molested in a shelter by another man and had issues about being approached by someone as a result. As the male staff person got closer, he got louder and angrier. For a short time, I stood to the side with my phone ready to call 911. However, it de-escalated, and the man was simply asked to leave. Had we known about the person's issues; we might have been able to handle it differently. With so many different staff and volunteers as well as many guests, it's almost impossible to be familiar with all of their issues - to say nothing about enough training to deal with them.

People are free to come and go until 11:00 PM when the doors are shut and the lights go off. Most exit the building simply to have another cigarette. However, some people come, have a meal, and exit for the night. One woman took all her belongings with her and intended to wash her clothes during the night. Another simply said, "I have things to do tonight." By 11:00 PM most people have taken to their spaces and are lying on their cots. One couple has decorated their space with stuffed animals and other objects, making it feel a lot more like a home than an overnight shelter. Their belongings even trip out to the aisle between the rows of cots. Others have stored all of their belongings in the plastic bin provided. One area is segregated for people with children. There are two colorful tents that are set up with an area separated by the cot dividers. Fortunately, there is a bathroom on the second floor, so no one needs to find their way out of the room and down the stairs to the first-floor bathrooms during the night.

As I lay on the couch where the volunteer person sleeps, I can't help but think about the meagerness of this arrangement. While those who come to the shelter consider it better than sleeping outside, particularly when the weather is cold, it is not very private. Snores can be heard

in various decibels throughout the night. When I finally fall asleep, I add to the cacophony. I can't help but think, is this the best we can do?

In the morning, everyone is awakened. Remember, there is little or no privacy, so most just sleep in the clothes they wore the night before. There is no shower available, so a morning face and hand wash-up in the sink in the bathroom is about all that can be done. Fortunately, the Resource Center has tokens to allow people to take showers at the local swimming pool run by the YMCA. After a cup of coffee or tea, everyone leaves the building by 8:00 AM and the staff cleans up the space as best as they can, mostly by emptying the waste cans, vacuuming the floors, and cleaning the bathroom. Sheltering Silverton recently hired two part-time staff to arrive at 8:00 AM and do a thorough cleaning.

I have the luxury of returning to my home and crashing in a king-size bed in a beautiful house in the Abiqua Heights neighborhood of Silverton. I've worked hard to achieve what I have and so has my husband, but I cannot help but think our society could do more for those in need. Do people really need to live in big houses? Do they need landscaped lawns and gardens? And then there are the extremely wealthy who have mansions, multiple homes, etc. We didn't start out this way. Hunter-gatherers shared pretty much everything they had with each other. However, the advent of agriculture created the concept (and reality) of private property ... and the rest is history.

Dale

He was known as Bongo Billy as he played the bongos in a bar in Washington State for the band Bongo Billy and the Breaktakers.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Dale was born in Bellevue, Nebraska in the early 1950s. His mother worked in a bank, the first woman to do so in Nebraska. His dad was in the military and was also a carpenter working in the construction industry. Dale characterizes his childhood as excellent. They lived on his grandparents' farm and he spent a great deal of time outside near animals. His sister was two years younger than him.

He quit high school his senior year and went into the army in 1972. He completed basic training but received a medical discharge in 1973. He came back to Nebraska and worked in construction and farming.

When he was 23, he met a young woman and moved with her and her young child to Everett, Washington. Together, they had two girls. The relationship was rough, and she left him with the girls several times. Finally, it was he who ended up raising the two girls with the help of his mother back in Nebraska. He worked on the ranch to help out. Dale kept repeating the mantra of Jesus to himself, "The first will be last and the last will be first." He says it kept him going during the hard times. He went back to Washington to try to get back together with his wife, but she was with another man. When she decided to end the marriage and get a divorce, he got custody of the two girls.

Dale was raised to not seek governmental help. He wanted to do everything on his own, especially raising his girls. But times were tough. This was the era of the Vietnam War. His dad committed suicide, adding to the trauma of his life.

He eventually got a job in Anacortes, Washington, working in refineries. He let the kids stay at their mom's for a while so he could get work and save some money. One of his daughters went to live with her mom permanently when she was twelve. But she got pregnant at fifteen. Dale treasures his beautiful grandson who is now about twenty-five years old. His other daughter stayed with him, but she too quit high school.

Fast forward to when his daughter was in her forties. He was living in his van and he had a falling out with his daughter. They were in the van and she started to assault him in the face. She got out of the van and they walked to a store across the street. Someone called the police and even though there were no witnesses to the altercation, his daughter obtained a no contact order which forbade him from being near her. When the judge held court on the no contact order, he announced that it should have been a felony. Fearing a conviction, Dale skipped out of Washington and went to California. But Dale couldn't give up on his daughter. She was living on the streets of Portland and doing drugs. He tried to help her by returning to Oregon. She was with a woman who had left her husband to be with her. Dale tried to help them out because the winters are cold in Portland and the two women were living under the bridges.

When he was with his daughter and her friend near Wilsonville (between Salem and Portland) at a rest area, they were stopped by the state patrol because the van had a broken taillight. The patrol officer walked up to the van and saw the two women inside with drug paraphernalia. Even though Dale had told them never to have drug items in the van, they had done so. The officer told them all to sit down on the curb. He ran the truck's plate. All was okay. He lectured the girls because he saw that Dale was trying to help them. He contacted the daughter's probation officer who told him to let her go. According to Dale, the ball got dropped and she never got the help she needed.

Later, they were in Polk County, next to Marion County, in the van. Dale ended up asking the park ranger to call the police. He was at the end of his ropes. His daughter and her friend were high on drugs. But he ended up getting arrested because he had a bit of a controlled substance in his pocket. He had parked his van in the parking lot of a fitness center where he was a member, but it was Sunday.

When he was released from jail, he went to the HOPE center in Salem to get his mail. The girls had taken the van to avoid it getting towed. He got them a ride and then drove his van to Silverton. The next day, the girls ended up in the parking lot near Sheltering Silverton where Dale and the van were. Sarah White ended up calling the cops because there was so much altercation going on. When Dale arrived, he got arrested because of the no contact order. The next day, the girls came and took the van. He ended up being released after serving 30 days in jail. He also ended up with a fine.

Dale is now dealing with the court system and his daughter removed all his belongings from the van – pretty much everything he owned. He reported the van stolen and it is now impounded with a fee of about \$1,200 to retrieve it. All of the tires have been slashed.

He ended up spending a month in jail on the no contact order and later entered a plea deal to serve 18 months of supervised probation, pay a fine of \$200, and serve 80 hours of community service for the arrest in Polk County.

But the story doesn't end here. Sheltering Services found a van with a sleeping bed and sink in the back and gave it to Dale. Another volunteer paid for the new tags. He now has a way to get around instead of riding a bicycle at 67 and is doing his community service. He also obtained a seasonal job at a local farm although at his age, hauling 50-pound bags around is tough. His attitude has improved, and he has not made any contact with his daughter.

Local Businesses

Silverton has a vibrant business community. There are over 200 members of the city's Chamber of Commerce. When numbered by category, restaurants, construction, health care, and retail win the top four places. Stacy Palmer, executive director of the Chamber, graciously agreed to send out a survey to her entire membership regarding homelessness. 50 owners responded. This chapter addresses the results of that survey.

Virtually one-half of those responding to the survey have run their businesses for more than ten years. Given the fact that the average life of a publicly traded company is ten years⁶³ and of a small business only about eight years, Silverton businesses would get more than a passing grade. With 26% of the owners having been born in Silverton with another 46% who have lived in Silverton for more than ten years, the endurance of their businesses is not surprising. Some of the businesses have been in operation for generations with family names that proliferate throughout the community.

When asked the question, "Are you aware there are over 100 homeless people in Silverton?" 66% of the businesses answered yes. Many who answered "no" were aware of the homeless population, but did not know the extent of the issue in terms of the number of homeless people. When asked how long they have known about the problem, most of the answers pointed to the last few years. Certainly, since the 2008 Great Recession, homelessness has increased. In the past five years, it has also been a frequent topic in the news, especially regarding West Coast cities like Los Angeles and Portland. One of the local newspapers in Silverton, *Our Town*, has run articles about the issue specifically in this area. The creation of Sheltering Silverton and the opening of an every-night (during the winter) Warming Shelter has also increased awareness and interest in the issue.

When answering questions about the reasons for the increase in homelessness in recent years, respondents' most common answer was the cost of housing in Silverton. The median home value in January 2020 in Silverton according to Zillow was \$334,357. Zillow estimates that this price increased by 2.4% over the previous year. Five years ago, it was \$225,000.⁶⁴ That is a 48.6% increase in value/cost. The rise in the minimum wage in non-urban counties in Oregon was just 24.3% during the same time period.⁶⁵ Apartment availability is very limited, especially in housing that accepts federal Section 8 vouchers. In some of the latter complexes, the waiting list is at least two years. Results on Apartments.com on February 22, 2020 showed ten facilities. Nine of these had no vacancies and the remaining one showed a one-bedroom priced at \$850 per month.⁶⁶ Business owners also mentioned the fact that livable wages were not always available in Silverton.

⁶³ <https://www.businessadministrationinformation.com/news/the-typical-lifespan-of-a-business-according-to-science>

⁶⁴ <https://www.zillow.com/silverton-or/home-values/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.oregon.gov/boli/WHD/OMW/Pages/Minimum-Wage-Rate-Summary.aspx>

⁶⁶ https://www.apartments.com/silverton-or/1-bedrooms/?bb=2n-g3n3pmQ6_ng-wjB

Business owners also frequently mentioned the lack of services for mental health as an important reason people were homeless. Oregon has the dubious distinction that one of its mental health facilities, the Oregon State Hospital, served as the setting for the 1975 film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* featuring techniques such as lobotomies that are no longer practiced. In 2008, the majority of patients at the Oregon State Hospital had been found guilty of crimes and were judged to be insane. Others were a danger to themselves or to others.⁶⁷ Sarah White, the primary counselor at Sheltering Silverton, had a client that admitted he was considering suicide, and she still couldn't find him a place in a facility that would help him.

Not surprisingly, business owners were well aware of the current drug crisis, especially with the proliferation of opioids. One couple, who stayed briefly at the Warming Shelter, had to get up at 5:00 AM to secure a ride to their daily appointment in Salem, 16 miles away, in order to obtain medication as part of their treatment for methadone addiction. They also had to take a course as part of this treatment. It is hard to imagine how one could hold down a job while undergoing this fairly rigorous daily treatment schedule. Also mentioned were medical health issues that may have resulted in a total loss of savings or even bankruptcy.

Less frequently mentioned was the loss of family support. Those who mentioned this as a reason for homelessness surmised that it was the result of either a lack of family or the abuse of help that had been previously received rendering a break with the family and an unwillingness to help further. There were also those who felt that the increase in homelessness in Silverton was due to people coming to the city from other areas. During the discussion of the creation of four cottages at St. Edward's Church, this viewpoint of "if you build it, they will come" was often heard as well. Finally, several mentioned that most people live paycheck to paycheck, thus possibly rendering one homeless if a job is lost suddenly and a new one cannot be obtained.

Most of the respondents mentioned that they have had personal encounters with the homeless, either through volunteer work, random encounters, or through their business. The most frequently mentioned encounter regarding the business was someone wanting to use the bathroom. Sleeping in a car on or near their business or camping in nearby bushes and trees were also mentioned.

Almost half of the owners indicated that they had had problems with homeless associated with their business. One issue that was mentioned more than once was finding trash on their property from someone camping overnight.

When queried about training their staff on the issue of how to deal with the homeless, 32% indicated that they had to do so with the majority stating no. One owner suggested that perhaps training could be offered by Sheltering Silverton, SACA, or one of the other groups dealing with the homeless population.

When asked about the city's role in helping the homeless, many responded that the city might have a role to play, particularly on the issue of camping around the town, but most emphasized that the help needed to be "a hand up, not a handout." There was also a caution against using

⁶⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_State_Hospital#Population

taxpayer dollars, whether from individuals or businesses. Many acknowledged the problem with a housing shortage and the cost of living in Silverton.

In a tribute to the helping nature of citizens in this small town, 80% of those responding to the survey indicated that they have helped out homeless individuals personally. The last question asked for any additional comments the respondent wanted to make. The answers ran the gamut from avoiding simply giving handouts to understanding just how complex the issue really is, not just here but everywhere around the world. One individual stated that “by having empathy, operating with facts and not opinions, and through collaboration, Silverton can eliminate homelessness. However, businesses, churches, developers and the city have to lead by example and step it up.” Another commented, “This is such a big issue. My opinion is we need to help the most vulnerable first. Children and elderly. Then continue to help the next vulnerable in line... We need to try and humanize the homeless more. Get to know them, their names. Look them in the eye and say hello. It’s not simple.” But others wanted to be sure there was some accountability. One commented “I would like to see more support for actually helping people get out of poverty, not support them to maintain it indefinitely. If they choose not to take that opportunity, then the aid stops. But that's their choice.” Another said, “There has to be some way those who want to rise out of homelessness and have the desire to work, can move ahead with some help.” Finally, someone said the following. “I believe this is epidemic and we, as a whole, need to protect our community and our children. Homelessness is not because there are not jobs, it’s not because of lack of education nor county help, food stamps, Section 8, etc. It’s so much more. We are breaking as a society. America offers so much to her people and yet we are slowly dying because of too much from freedom? Too much help? Too easy in life to do nothing? Easy access to drugs?”

Teagan

Given what most people know about homelessness, they probably wouldn't wish it on their worst enemy. But for Teagan, it became a very revelatory experience. "I don't regret becoming homeless," she explains. "In fact, I'm happy it happened to me. It got me in touch with who I want to be."

Teagan grew up in a fatherless home. She didn't know who her biological father was and didn't meet him until she was 18. Her mother, a lesbian, lived with various partners. Teagan found out later that her dad was also gay. Unfortunately, her mother developed a crippling disease and they moved from Colorado to Washington when she was in fifth grade. Her mother intended to be part of a study for RSD (reflex sympathetic dystrophy) syndrome but never opted in. Her mother couldn't work and lived with various partners after they moved to Washington.

Teagan left home after completing high school. She had no desire to go to college and worked various pizza delivery jobs. A man was usually in the picture. But Teagan was no light weight. When a boyfriend assaulted her, she informed the police and he went to jail. When she did that, his family and her friends turned against her. "He wouldn't get a job or go anywhere with me. The first time he pushed me and left bruises, I was out of there," Teagan adds. She left Camas, Washington where she was living and ended up in Salem.

Unfortunately, that also left her homeless. Because she had a dog and a cat, she could no longer use her vehicle for pizza delivery. Her manager was sympathetic and even offered to serve as a reference if she could land another job. After various car trades, she ended up with an old van where she could sleep and house her pets.

At a local Walmart, she met a man and his mother who were also homeless and living in their vehicle. "Is it safe to park here?" she asked them. Safe and legal are two different issues, however. She was regularly asked to leave and to quit loitering no matter where she parked in Salem. She did become friends with these two. "They didn't do drugs and they were very nice. We helped each other out when we could."

A pause here. Teagan is 23 and is of the generation that makes most of its connections on social media. As you have undoubtedly read, posts and comments on social media can be brutal. But the connection with this man and his mother was face-to-face. It involved empathy, no judgment, and frequent conversations. "I never had much contact with strangers," Teagan began. "I wouldn't approach someone I didn't know before I became homeless." Another friend suggested she come to Silverton. She couldn't even find a place to shower in Salem and she hadn't approached any of the organizations that help the homeless there.

This friend told her about Sheltering Silverton, and she met with Sarah White to see if she could get some help. Fortunately, the City of Silverton had just adopted a policy that once the person was approved, he or she could park overnight in one of the city's public parking lots. The person would also receive a key to the public restroom in the park which was locked during the night. She kept her new job in Salem at a local pizza place (not delivery as she still had her dog and cat) until she couldn't handle being mocked about being homeless. She quit a few weeks before I

interviewed her. Before she quit, the restaurant (said in the loosest sense) had required she purchase an NFL jersey that was quite expensive (over \$75). She couldn't afford it. She figured she was going to get fired anyway and she couldn't stand the mocking and harassment from her boss and some of her co-workers. The restaurant had a habit of denying unemployment by just keeping the person's name on the schedule whether they were signed up for any hours or not.

Two weeks after she lost her Salem job, Teagan was hired as a part-time custodian for Sheltering Silverton's Warming Shelter. She also applied for a job at Silverton's Goodwill Industries. She was offered the job, but then the supervisor told her she would need a drug test. Teagan has never done hard drugs, but does smoke marijuana, which is legal in Oregon. When asked if the test would identify marijuana, she was informed that it would, so that job didn't work out.

In the time that Teagan has been in Silverton, she has met many people who are in a similar situation to hers. "I've had more interaction with people since I've been homeless than I've ever had before. I've always been empathetic and try not to judge people based on their circumstances." Teagan shared.

Living in a van isn't easy though. It has little heat and at night the dog's water dish often freezes over. "If you are driving an old van, trailer, or RV," Teagan explained, "you are a sore thumb to the police and often get pulled over." Teagan hadn't paid her van insurance and got pulled over for a broken taillight. She ended up getting a \$265 ticket and her insurance was increased. Sarah White wrote a letter to the judge in the case asking that the fee be waived. Teagan is hoping that will make a difference. Not only doesn't she have a full-time job, but she has accumulated a fair amount of debt that she must pay off as well.

Teagan was diagnosed with depression in her teens and is taking medication after undergoing intensive therapy. Homelessness has given her a lot of time to think about her life. "I am able to think ahead now and set some goals," explained Teagan. "I don't want to get married and have children. I think it's true that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. I want to live off the grid, build a sustainable small home, and be self-reliant." Teagan shared the various YouTube videos she has watched where people built a small dwelling by hand out in the country. She knows more about tools and construction than I ever will! She is pretty good at fixing cars as well. "I saw a bumper sticker on a car a few years ago. It said, 'remember who you wanted to be.' Being homeless has brought me back to my goals," Teagan added.

While this may seem pie in the sky to some, I think Teagan will achieve her goals. She has been employed most of the time since she was a teenager. She is willing to do hard work. She is very articulate and personable. She wants "to be there for others." And she has a strength of character that I never had at that age. I'm looking forward to keeping in touch with her. I think we could both learn from each other.

Wash Day

Wearing bright orange t-shirts with Wash Day written in large letters across the middle with a drawing of an old wringer washer, Bob and Virginia Widing begin their day at the local laundromat. As individuals enter and hand them a token, they hand out a sheet of instructions.

The directions are simple: loads are limited to four and washers should be emptied by 4:00 PM and dryers by 4:30 PM. Tokens are accepted from 12:30 to 4:30 PM every other Tuesday. People are also asked to clean up the floor wherever they see dirt, water, or waste. A broom and mop are hanging by the bathroom door to assist in this effort. As the washing machines are usually all in use, people are asked to be sure to monitor when their wash is complete and to remove it as soon as possible. The instructions are signed “Love, Bob and Virginia.”

Love is the impetus for this effort. Bob and Virginia decided to help out those who wanted to avoid the stigma of being homeless and dirty. They noticed a need and responded to it. In May of 2018, they had the idea of helping the homeless and those on the lower income scales get a chance to do their laundry for free. They approached the owner of the local laundromat in Silverton. The owner wasn't hesitant but was inquisitive regarding how the process would work. Bob and Virginia tried it one week. The owner accepted the proposition and a year later, all the machines are whirling busily on these two Tuesdays a month.

The Widings rely on several area groups to provide a screening process for the individuals who come to the laundromat. Sheltering Silverton, SACA, and Cherry Hoffman give out tokens to those they know are in need. Once the token is given to the Widings, they swipe the machines, both washer and dryers, with a card that records all the charges.

Women from their church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in Silverton, make 25 individual lunches for those that come to wash and dry their clothes. Another member of their church comes in every other Tuesday and brings soap pods.

Stu Rasmussen, a former mayor of Silverton, was walking by the laundromat one day and Virginia chased after him. Once Virginia explained what they were doing, he gave a donation. Other patrons who just come in to do their laundry that day also contribute. Local businesses, SACA, and other Silverton citizens have contributed the \$800 it costs per month to pay the owner for the use of the machines.

Bob and Virginia also have another strategy to raise funds. They moved from their church in Molalla, a nearby town, to Silverton. Missing their fellow parishioners, they have dinners and invite their old friends. “We tell them we have a new Amway process to share with them,” Bob says in jest. They ask their friends to contribute \$25 when they come for dinner. This is yet another way to pay for the laundry charges.

Bob and Virginia both acknowledge that they have learned not to be judgmental about the people who come to take advantage of Wash Day. “We have learned to love these people who are down on their luck,” explains Virginia. “They often thank us prior to leaving the laundromat and many have tears in their eyes.”

Like many of the other endeavors to help the homeless in Silverton, money seems to show up when it's needed. The Widings are confident they can keep providing this service for as long as they are able.

Daniel

While we were waiting for our lunch to be served, I grabbed a few of the Trivial Pursuit cards provided at each table. I should have known I would lose when Daniel said it was the Classic Edition. To me, there was only one edition, the one I had sitting in my closet from the 70s. I got one out of five. He guessed three right. The sports and movie characters had always stumped me.

It was an interesting foray into Daniel's personality. He is smart and well-read. He's been in the Army, maintained equipment for Shell gas stations, worked in the oil fields, researched titles for real estate companies, taught special education in schools as a teacher's aide, tutored and mentored boys at a youth home, and done government reporting research at a bank. His last gig was working in the IT department of the U. S. Census Bureau in Salem. Whew! So why is Daniel homeless?

It's a story that could happen to anyone. In December of 2019, he quit his job at the Census Bureau. The work schedule kept on changing and it was driving him crazy. "My body rebelled. Lunch was at a different time every day. You could never count on knowing what your day was going to be like," Daniel explained. "I was losing sleep and I dreamt every night about helping people and I didn't do any better in the dreams than at work."

At the time, he was living with his ex-wife in Silverton. They had moved there over four years ago. It might sound odd that they were still staying together, different bedrooms of course, but it worked... until it didn't. She was furious he had quit his well-paying job and gave him 20 minutes to move out. Kind of hard to get all your stuff together in 20 minutes. Okay, he had also started drinking maybe a bit more wine and beer than he should have.

He hadn't asked for half of the property in the divorce because she had bought the two houses they lived in herself – one in Silverton and one at the beach. Looking back, he had done a ton of upkeep and home improvement work on them, so he should have asked for something. But he hadn't. So out to his truck he went. He heard about the Silverton Area Community Aid organization and ended up talking to one of their staff. He was so grateful to receive shower tokens he could use twice a week at the YMCA nearby. Cleaning yourself up in a truck is not an easy job.

When he showed up at the Warming Shelter (better sleeping on a cot than being tucked into the passenger side of your truck), others thought that the police had sent him to check up on the place. He didn't look like he fit in. He didn't have a large backpack stuffed to the gills with his belongings. In fact, he only had a few things in the plastic container provided by the Warming Shelter. He neatly placed it under his cot. He was fairly quiet and well groomed. He was never loud or boisterous. But no, the police had not hired him to spy on the others.

He's already applied for jobs in Silverton and will likely receive one in a short while. He had been homeless once before when he came home from the Army. He was only 23. He hadn't kept much in touch with his friends and when he returned to Southern California, they had all moved on. He had been married and divorced and had a young son nearby. While parking at a rest area at Surfers Point in his Firebird on Christmas Day, a homeless man tapped on his window asking

for change. He ended up going to a liquor store, buying a case of malt liquor, and camping out with the other homeless people on the river under the bridge. His first meal was hobo stew. That's a meal made out of anything that could be pilfered during the day. But he was young and soon rented a room, got a job, and re-established himself. When his first ex-wife moved to Berkeley with their son, he didn't follow. San Francisco was not on his bucket list. He moved to The Dalles, Oregon where his brother, sister, and parents lived, eventually ending up in Portland where he married his second wife and then moved eventually to Silverton.

When asked about the other homeless people who stay at the shelter, Daniel said that drug addiction or mental illness were the main causes. He cited a recent incident where a woman was wielding a knife and threatening others. "It was clear she was high on something," Daniel said. "Some of the others are just not living in reality." Daniel thought that getting one-on-one help with mental health disorders would be a needed first step for many of them. Unfortunately, this help is not readily available and, except in extreme circumstances, a person can no longer be admitted to a drug facility or mental health institution unless they are willing.

Books, Parents, and Seniors

The following three entities provide much needed help for individuals in Silverton, those who are homeless, and for those who are not.

Public Library

In the early American colonies, most libraries were associated with the Anglican churches. The first free public library anywhere in the world was founded in 1833 in Peterborough, New Hampshire.⁶⁸ It was supported by local taxes. Many of us can probably identify a public library in our home state that was funded by Dale Carnegie and the local community. After all, there were 1,689 of them!⁶⁹ Because these libraries were free and open to the local public, they became centers of learning and a place where people could find a quiet place to read and peruse the book stacks. Homeless men and women undoubtedly found the library a safe and warm place to spend time in decades past. The biggest increase in use since the Depression came with the recession in the 1980s and the shuttering of mental health institutions. However, because of the 2008 Great Recession and declining affordable living places, the use of the public library by homeless individuals has increased substantially since then.

Large cities, of course, have seen a greater problem than small towns simply because they have more people who are homeless. In one metropolitan area, St. Louis, Missouri, the New Life Evangelistic Center, which was a 300-bed night shelter for homeless individuals, was located right across the street from St. Louis' central library. The overnight occupants were kicked out at 6:00 AM and there was nowhere to take a shower, use a restroom, or spend time until nightfall when it reopened. Many of those who left the shelter in the morning ended up going daily to the library. When the city spent \$70 million on a renovation for the library and complaints about the homeless poured in, the city ended up revoking the hotel license of the shelter in 2015.⁷⁰

Christy Davis, the librarian at the public Silver Falls Library in Silverton, started her career in Klamath Falls, a city of 20,000, about twice the size of Silverton and located in Southern Oregon. She worked there from 1996 to 2017 and then secured the position in Silverton. "Because Klamath Falls was on a rail line," Davis surmised, "they had more people experiencing homelessness than a similar city located in a more isolated area." She indicated that most of the homeless who came into the library were quiet. However, there was a very small percentage of the homeless population that resulted in comments such as 'those homeless people.' Davis said the average calls to 911 were about twice a month. She would have to call 911 if someone was making loud angry outbursts to staff and to others. "There was also property damage and two attempted arsons," she added. There was one person who would frequently say, "I'm having a heart attack." They were thus obliged to call for an ambulance, even though it turned out that the person simply wanted a safe place to stay overnight.

⁶⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_libraries_in_North_America

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ <https://themillions.com/2017/10/whats-a-library-to-do-on-homelessness-and-public-spaces.html>

In Silverton, Davis found that there are a lot fewer problems. “This community has a more compassionate response to issues like homelessness,” she explained. “Klamath Falls was a very conservative community with a fairly negative response to the homeless population,” she added. Davis cites the beginnings of Sheltering Silverton and its provision of its Warming Shelter in the winters for the last three years as a step in the right direction. Davis did recall some of the angry opposition to the placing of four housing pods for women on the property of St. Edward’s Episcopal Church in 2017 in Silverton. “It was painful to listen to the opposition to such meager housing opportunities,” Davis lamented. “But there was push back to that anger and the project went forward with a lot of compassion being expressed. It was helpful that the mayor, Kyle Palmer, was always calm and would state the facts and remind people to be civil to each other,” she added. Davis believes the attempts in Silverton to deal with the homeless population address what the population needs. “The desire of this community to understand and address them in a compassionate way is a rare and beautiful thing,” Davis commented.

While there are fewer problems with homeless patrons in Silverton than in Klamath Falls, Davis says they do exist. “If the person is not clean and residues of urine and feces are left on the chairs, it does create a biohazard,” Davis stated. She had all the chairs reupholstered with a cleanable surface to help deal with the problem. She has also witnessed people, just like in Klamath Falls, who are belligerent. One person spilled his catheter bag in the bathroom, and she had to clean it up. That person, fortunately, did not return. “People have brought in pets stating they were ‘service animals’ who had fleas,” Davis explained. “People also have so many of their belongings with them that they end up taking up a large space, sometimes fall asleep, and snore, disturbing the other patrons.”

The issue of homelessness and public libraries has reached a certain milestone with a film by Emilio Estevez called *The Public* featuring Alec Baldwin, a well-known Hollywood actor. The film spans two days in Cincinnati during a very cold winter. The main character named Stuart Goodson, the head librarian, encounters homeless persons at the beginning of his day as they come to the library to escape the cold weather outside. In one scene in the movie, a person strips naked and sings in the stacks! Several scenes in the movie have patrons asking the staff where they can find something. One patron says, “I’m looking for a set of laws that will send me back to jail for a couple of months.” An older woman, clearly with some mental health issues, comes in at the opening and stays all day. One evening, when the local shelters are all full and it is below zero outside, a large group of homeless men comes into the library later in the day and vows to stay all night. They state that they are going to ‘occupy’ the library. The negotiations then occur between a library board member, the librarian, and the police. As the evening unfolds, people hear about it over the news and come and drop off items for the homeless. In the end, all the men, including the librarian, strip naked, and with their hands over their heads, are handcuffed by the police and led away.

Another milestone is a book by Ryan Dowd entitled *The Librarian’s Guide to Homelessness*. As an executive director of a homeless shelter, he also offers training for librarians and staff. The book is a large tome indicating the weight of the problem that librarians face.

Davis closed our interview with a broader explanation of why she cares about this issue. “My dad came from poverty and was one of 14 children - four of whom died before the age of two. I

learned to help others and be empathetic at an early age. Because of my extended family, I know some things about what it is like to be on the edge.”

Silverton Together

Jan Holowati’s connection to Silverton Together dates back to her days as an owner of a deli and gift shop in Silverton. She catered for the workshops they provided. Today, she is the director of a program that focuses on helping parents raise their children in the best way possible. Prior to the creation of Sheltering Silverton, Silverton Together was the resource for connecting people, especially parents, with the resources they needed. Some of these may have been homeless or on the edge of becoming so. “We helped them get the support they needed by connecting them with the programs that were available at the time such as obtaining food stamps, Section 8 housing, etc.,” Holowati explained.

Today SACA and Sheltering Silverton are where she sends people who need such help. Silverton Together now concentrates on parenting classes. There are nine different programs that they offer, all with a different focus, mostly organized by age group. There is a program for adults who become parents when they are under 21, a Boot Camp for fathers to be, and Parenting with Love and Logic designed for parents with children age four to 14 years old which consists of seven sessions for parents who want “practical techniques for less stressful, more effective parenting and more ease in family life.”

Silverton Together is located in the same Community Center that SACA and Sheltering Silverton occupy, thus it is easy for each to refer people they are working with to each other. For a small town, this is a pretty amazing array of services located at one address.

Silverton Together, early in its existence, received grants from the statewide Child and Family Services organization, but they no longer exist, and the county entity no longer has any money for grants. A statewide program, Oregon Together, also used to give out grants and Silverton Together received some of them. They give out far fewer grants today. Thus, as with many organizations featured in this book, donations are the primary resource for programming. They receive money from an annual Garden Tour in Silverton and are able to send out a mailing once a year to everyone who lives in Silverton. In addition to parenting classes, they host events and programs to prevent child abuse, underage drug use, and smoking by children. While Holowati is the only staff person and works four hours a day, Silverton Together accomplishes a lot for the community. “We are one of the few small towns who are able to offer this array of services,” she added.

Silverton Senior Center

Dodie Brockamp has been the executive director at the Silverton Senior Center for almost eight years. She has over 30 years’ experience with long term care of seniors and has lived in Silverton most of her life. With over 800 members who are 50 and older, Brockamp is familiar with seniors who may become homeless. “Often it involves displaced care givers,” Brockamp explains. “I have met several women who were living in the home of the person they cared for and after the person died or had to go into a care facility, they were homeless. A person can also

age out of caring for someone else and simply not be able to do the job anymore. It is not easy to replace a job that provided rent, food, and utilities.”

Whether it is a displaced caregiver or another homeless senior, Brockamp gives referrals to other resources that exist in the community. The Senior Center runs a Thrift Shop that garners the most revenue for the Center’s operation. They will give clothes for free to a person who is in need. Other resources in Silverton, such as the newly formed Sheltering Silverton and the longstanding food bank, SACA, are often the first referrals she makes.

Brockamp explains her philosophy, “We get so much from our community, how can we not give back to it and help those in need?” She sees the Senior Center as a hub for seniors for whatever their needs are. Sometimes it’s just community, sometimes it’s the enjoyment of field trips with transportation provided, and sometimes it’s help with homelessness.

Meals on Wheels uses the kitchen at the Senior Center and delivers 40-75 meals a day between Mt. Angel and Silverton with a focus on the elderly and disabled. They also do welfare checks on people to be sure they are okay.

Brockamp keeps up with the legislature and other governmental agencies so that she is aware of issues affecting seniors. “It helps me be a strong advocate for seniors,” she adds.

Zo

A year ago, a woman who was 76 at the time, showed up in Silverton. She had come from Boise, Idaho and said that a friend had taken her to the Oregon Coast to visit. There was no warming shelter open at the time, so she ended up sleeping outdoors next to a couple who slept in their van in a church parking lot. The Resource Center ended up providing her a night at a motel and then a ticket back to Boise. With its limited resources, the Resource Center tries to limit its help to residents of Silverton.

On a Wednesday night, a year later, I noticed her at the First Christian Church Wednesday Night Dinner. She didn't look well. She had arrived back in Silverton and had her belongings at the Warming Shelter which was open at the time. I took her with me to the Warming Shelter that night and she immediately fell asleep on her cot. In the morning, I took her to the Resource Center and someone took her to the Emergency Room at Legacy Hospital in Silverton. She had pneumonia among other maladies. The doctor treating her later said that if her admission had been delayed even by a day, she might not have made it.

Two weeks later, I picked her up from a rehabilitation center in Oregon City, about a half-hour's drive from Silverton. She had dinner with my husband and me and then I took her back to the Warming Shelter. As you can probably surmise, a wave of guilt fell over me. Here I am in this large house and I have a homeless elderly woman with me. Yet I take her back to the Warming Shelter. While I want to help, I also value my privacy as does my husband. It's a question that is often asked by those who oppose efforts to help the homeless. "Well, if you care so much, why don't YOU take someone in." But taking strangers into your space isn't always easy. The City of Silverton allows ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Units) in many residential areas, but they haven't really taken off. They are not allowed where I live.

But let's get back to Zo. Zo was born in California. When she was 19 years old, her parents moved to LaPine, Oregon. She had completed beauty school and decided to move to Seattle. Zo held several jobs while in Seattle: selling cosmetics at the Bon Marche and serving as a hostess at the Space Needle among others. She was in Seattle for 23 years.

She moved to back to Oregon in the mid 1990s when her elderly mother needed around the clock care. Her parents had moved to Salem in 1973 because of her father's ill health. He passed away in 1981. "The state came to our house one day and took my mother to a nursing home," explains Zo. "I was outraged! I got her back that afternoon but was constantly worried they would come again." A year or so later, her mother passed away. Zo stayed in the house her mother owned, but then she was beset by yet another tragedy. A fire broke out and the house was destroyed. The authorities were not able to determine the fire's cause.

She was living for a while in her mother's partially burned out home but then had to leave. She started to learn about where she could stay. She ended up staying in one shelter after another. She was so devastated by her mother's death and the fire that she couldn't work right away. She met a man named Jimmy and ended up being with him for the next 16 years. He had been homeless as well and told her what he had learned. "The first night I was homeless, it was pouring down rain. After all, it was Oregon," Zo explained. After they had been together for a

while, Jimmy took her in with him. “He took good care of me and made sure I had food,” Zo commented.

A year ago, she broke up with Jimmy. It wasn’t working out. He had taken another woman on a trip to Hawaii. She decided to travel to Baker City. She put everything that she owned into storage in Salem and set out by bus. After visiting Baker City, she met a couple that said that she just “had to go to see Boise.” Zo is a traveler. She loves exploring new places and likes being “on the road again.”

She immediately signed up for OSHER classes. OSHER is a program of Boise State University that offers courses without credit for adults over 50.⁷¹ And there are no exams or homework! Zo is now 77 and the one thing she loves to do is learn new things. She has taken classes at OSHER in oceanography, geology, and many other topics. Whether it is reading books or taking classes, this is an activity that keeps her going. While in Silverton, she spends a great deal of her time at the library.

While she was in Boise, she stayed at the shelter. Had she secured a Section 8 voucher that would have allowed her to pay only one-third of her income for an apartment, it wouldn’t have mattered. Boise’s affordable housing system is broken. They have so many people on the waiting list for Section 8 housing that they are no longer even adding anyone to the waiting list.

While living in Boise, she took several trips to California where she grew up, and to Utah. She often stayed with friends on these month-long trips. She ended up back in Silverton this fall. She wanted to consolidate her belongings that were still in storage in Salem. Because there is such a long waiting list in Silverton for subsidized housing, she will never find an apartment here. “I love Silverton and the Warming Shelter,” Zo explains. “Everyone is just so nice to me.” What will happen to her when the Warming Shelter closes on March 18? She lives on her Social Security income of about \$800 a month. “I will probably just get on a bus and travel somewhere else. I’ve heard Nevada is pretty cool,” says the almost always optimistic traveler.

⁷¹ <https://www.boisestate.edu/osher/>

Navigating the Maze

Many of the homeless have experienced entering a maze that they have very few resources to make it through and get out the other end. There are many reasons for the difficulty in navigating the maze and many reasons people are forced into it in the first place. Here is one example.

Dale⁷² raised his daughter by himself. He always felt a close bond to her. Unfortunately, she got hooked on street drugs. At one point, she got angry and filed a no contact order against him. In essence, that meant he could be arrested if he sought her out again – either by text, a phone call, or appearing in person. But what does he do when she calls him in tears? Say, “Sorry, can’t see you anymore.” Or “I’ll just have to wait until the NCO expires.” Or “Honey, I would happily go to jail to see you again and help you out.” You see the conundrum.

After the do not contact order, his daughter reaches out to him again. They ended up in a park in Polk County, next to Marion County, in the van. Dale ended up asking the park ranger to call the police. He was at the end of his ropes. His daughter and her friend were high on drugs. But he ended up getting arrested because he had a bit of a controlled substance in his pocket.

While he is in jail, someone from Hawaii writes two large checks from his bank account. When he gets out, his bank account is frozen. This is the account where his monthly Social Security check is deposited. Now he is once again homeless, without a car, and without any resources. Two months later, he is still unable to resolve the bank issue. The bank admits he couldn’t have written the checks because he was in jail at the time. Every time he sets up a new bank account, something goes wrong. He puts \$50 in his new account. The bank makes a mistake and puts it in the closed account. When he tries to use his NEW debit card from his NEW account to access the \$50, there is no money in the account.

At the same time, he is trying to switch his Social Security payment to his new account. He has no car, so he ends up biking the 13 miles to Salem from Silverton or taking the bus. Once there, unless he arrives first thing in the morning, it means a two to three hour wait. Then the bank changes his account again and he starts all over. No Social Security means no income.

In addition, someone steals his wallet. He has a California Driver’s License. Does he try to get an Oregon license or go back to California to seek a replacement? For an Oregon Driver’s license, he is going to have to show a birth certificate which he does not currently possess and likely take, at the very least, a written test. Of course, this has to occur back in Salem. It cannot be done in Silverton. Or maybe he should just ride the rails back to California?

Let’s go back to the drug charge. He is assigned a public defender. Eventually a hearing is held before the judge in a nearby county where the incident occurred. I drove him there. The court scene is set. A new judge comes in and seats himself. One district attorney presides over all the cases to be heard that afternoon. There is a window near the lawyer’s platform into the jail so

⁷² This is the same man about whom an earlier chapter was written.

that defendants that are already in jail can appear in court. There are two public defenders (no one is represented by a private attorney) who trade off depending on the case. Each case takes less than three minutes. Virtually all involve some kind of misdemeanor possession of illegal drugs, intoxication, trespass, etc. And all of them have already worked out a plea deal, hence the short time before the judge. For Dale, he ends up with 13 months supervised probation, a drug and alcohol prohibition with random drug testing, and a fine of \$200. At least he is able to switch his parole supervision to Salem in Marion County. His meeting with the probation officer is set for two weeks hence.

While this is all taking place, he is trying to find work. But how can he apply for a job when he has all of this going? He would just have to start and then ask for permission to be off work. Not a good tactic. So he tries to do odd jobs here and there. He has worked his whole life and has a good set of skills. He is able to set up some painting gigs but has to fit them in between his many trips to Salem.

One day when he is returning to the house where he is porchsurfing, a semi-truck comes so close to him on the narrow road, that he gets run off the road on his bicycle and lands in the ditch – with a very sore hand and head.

At 67, he is exhausted. Did he get himself in this position? Certainly, possessing drugs was a bad idea. But the bad checks? The theft of his driver's license? The lack of any affordable housing for a senior living on Social Security? Yes, we all have to navigate the maze. There are roadblocks and problems that every one of us encounter every day. But once you start to lose those bulwarks – like housing, like a car, like a family – it is almost impossible to get through it. Our institutions are not set up to understand the lack of these fundamentals and seem to have no willingness to make it easier for someone without them.

Ronnie

Ronnie was born in Ft. Pike, Louisiana down where the crawdads sing. His father had served in Vietnam. When he was two, his mother and he moved to Silverton. They lived with his grandparents who had a house in the Mill Town neighborhood. In 1980, they moved to Mt. Angel. He recalls a good childhood raised mostly by his mother and grandmother.

By fourth grade, he was always a bit of a wise guy. A teacher once said it was harder to get Fs than good grades. He would show her that he could do it! So he challenged her and flunked the class and pretty much every grade from then until 12th grade. But interestingly enough, they always passed him on. He and a friend broke out all the windows in his 8th grade classroom. When he was 14, he was injured in football practice. He was hit in the neck with a football thrown by a very strong 200-pound young man. No one called an ambulance and his mother didn't take him to the doctor. They didn't have money for that. He was out cold for an hour. He describes the experience as feeling as if he had died. "The feeling came from my toes up to my head." He is missing soft tissue in his neck from the blow and still has problems today with his neck.

He said that he had been tested and had an IQ of 134. But the practical side of that intelligence didn't seem to apply. He finally got his GED when he was 28. They said it would take two days to take the test and he completed it in two hours.

From ages 20 to 28, he describes himself as a street hustler. He was homeless but was able to get by. When he was 28, he joined the National Guard where he worked with combat engineers. When he got back from basic training, he started to work on a grass seed farm near Silverton. His job was cleaning the seed, so it was ready to package and sell. With a machine, the grass seed was separated from the chaff and put in 50-pound bags. He has worked 20 years at that farm and has never received a wage increase. He has always just made the minimum wage. Because this work is not year-round, he made only about \$11,000 annually for the past two years. He was always unemployed during the off season.

In 2006, he was arrested and charged with possessing a controlled substance. He was 34 years old. It was a Class A misdemeanor and he received 90 days probation. In 2008, his mother died suddenly, and it put him in a tailspin.

Today, he cites that he is responsible for where his actions have led him. He has nothing to fall back on. He has dealt with his issues with drug addiction and is now sober. He still has an issue with depression that he is dealing with. He finds it hard to get up in the morning. But he is more positive than he has been in a long time. "I never give up hope," he explains. "There is always another tomorrow. I just need to find ten good things about my life to keep going." The number one item he listed was a bike that a volunteer had purchased for him when his was stolen.

Sheltering Silverton was able to get him an apartment in a complex reserved for farm workers. He would only have to pay \$300 for rent. Donations helped him furnish the place. Several months later after having not been able to work, he lost the apartment. His hand had been injured

in the past and was causing him too much pain. He remained at the Warming Shelter while it was open.

Do Small Towns have Advantages over Cities?

It is interesting to compare the issue of homelessness between a larger city and a small town. Are the numbers of homeless comparable when related to the size of the population? What are the resource differences? Does one size have more volunteers than the other? How about outcomes – are they similar based on the size of their population? To examine this question, Silverton’s response to homelessness will be compared to that of Salem, the state’s capital, located about 15 miles to the East.

Silverton has slightly over 10,000 residents and Salem about 170,000. Salem’s homeless population is estimated to be around 1,200 people. This estimate comes from what is known as the PIT Count (Point in Time) which is done annually in January and is mandated by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for organizations and agencies that provide some type of shelter for individuals who are experiencing homelessness. This count is drawn from people who have voluntarily filled out the questionnaire on the day the count is taken. It misses individuals who do not want to be identified, even if they can fill out the questionnaire anonymously. As mentioned in an earlier chapter on students, many of their families do not want to be identified. The 2019 PIT Count for Silverton, not accounting for the caveats mentioned above, was 42. According to these PIT Counts, Salem has double the number of homeless per citizen than Silverton.

But what are the differences in the resources available and the accomplishments that are achieved? Are they comparable given the different sizes or are there some significant differences? Let’s first look at the issues that Salem is facing and what it has done about them lately. Salem’s dealings with the homelessness population were in the news on a regular basis in 2019 and 2020. In December of 2019, in response to concerns for public safety, as well as complaints from downtown businesses, the City Council of Salem enacted a camping ban downtown. This included the area around the Arches Project which is the housing and homeless division of the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency. Once the new ordinance went into effect, city officials removed any tents and belongings that remained. The city did keep these to be retrieved by their owners if desired. At the time Salem passed this ordinance, they had somewhat over 300 shelter beds for the homeless. When the weather dipped below zero, churches opened their doors to shelter about 250 more. However, because of this gap between shelter bed availability and the number of homeless, the City Council promised to create 140 additional beds by January 1, 2020. None had been created by the time the deadline arrived even though Salem has the largest Housing First Program in Oregon.⁷³ By March 2020 only 10 additional beds had become available. In addition, the ordinance backfired - instead of selected areas of tent camping such as at ARCHES, the homeless moved to sidewalks outside major downtown businesses with their sleeping bags and belongings - just minus the tents. The level of camping downtown extended beyond what is seen in some major cities around the United States – very numerous and very visible.

⁷³ <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/local/homeless/salem-city-council-bans-homeless-camping/283-005ce5f1-c1a1-42c2-9eaa-f3d9bb06bfb1>

As the hue and cry against such camping continued, the City Council considered enacting what has come to be known as a ‘sit-lie’ ordinance which prohibits a person from sitting or lying on a public sidewalk during the day. This has been a controversial decision for other cities in the United States and when Portland, Oregon tried to enact such a ban, it was ruled unconstitutional in 2009.⁷⁴ Regardless of this previous court ruling, the Salem City Council heard a first reading for such an ordinance on March 9, 2020 with a second reading scheduled for March 24.

In Silverton, there has been no camping in visible public areas. The camps sites that do exist are usually outside downtown and under bridges or in remote areas of city parks. The police do not clear these areas but may take action if there is excessive trash or the potential for a fire. They also may receive calls about these areas, but it is not very common. As stated in an earlier chapter, Silverton’s Chief of Police Jeff Fossholm is very supportive of the work of Sheltering Silverton and refers homeless individuals to them. There is rarely someone sleeping on a public sidewalk in front of a business. Why is there such a difference between Salem and Silverton in this regard? One explanation might just be the numbers. In Salem, there are a large number of homeless individuals. When they camp out on a public sidewalk, they are not alone. In Silverton if someone decided to do that, they might be the only one and therefore be less likely to do it. In a smaller community, citizens are more well known. As stated earlier, before the increase in homeless starting in 2008, officials and others knew the two individuals, Johnny and Mike, who were the most visible homeless individuals in Silverton. It is also much harder to be anonymous in a small town than a larger one.

The resources between programs for homeless individuals in Salem and Silverton are vastly different. The ARCHES Project, mentioned above, has \$7 million in its annual budget with a staff of 45. Sheltering Silverton, started in 2015, received \$141,391.79 in grants and donations during their 2019-2020 fiscal year. Most of this went to pay for the use of the Warming Shelter, both staffing and regular cleaning, as well as a part-time staff person at the Resources Center. As of March 2020, neither Sarah White nor Hilary Dumitrescu have received any salary. Much of the work is done by volunteers. There is an advocate available during the four hours the Resource Center is open each day. In addition, in 2019 volunteers prepared 5,200 lunches for the resource center, 120 nights of dinners for those staying at the Warming Shelter, with 1,912 bed nights at the Warming Shelter by 97 unique individuals. By contrast, Salem had over 26,000 Day Center visits, roughly 105 per day. Over 21,000 lunches were provided as well as 1,431 pounds of pet food.

While outcomes are harder to measure, it is notable that Sheltering Silverton was able to connect 35 individuals to housing from the 2019-20 Warming Season. In comparison to the resources and staff available, this is truly remarkable. In a town such as Silverton, people are more likely to help out because someone asked them to or they heard about the shelter and offered to help. This grows exponentially in a small town because everyone sees each other so often.

Salem prevented homelessness for 195 rural Marion and Polk County households with volunteers donating 5,445 hours of service in 2019. 536 households exited the ARCHES Project into permanent housing solutions.

⁷⁴ <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/toolkit/article/563496>

Epilogue

This book was completed just as the COVID-19 pandemic appeared. The pandemic certainly had an impact on the services discussed in this book. Oak Street Church was able to continue its meals in a hand-out fashion, but the First Christian Church had to stop its Wednesday Night Dinners. Sheltering Silverton had to close its Resource Center and SACA ended up giving food out in the parking lot of its building rather than having clients come inside. These are just a few of the changes that occurred. On the bright side, Joy Farm became operational and is housing several individuals. I am confident that once the pandemic is over, most, if not all, of the services discussed in this book will, once again, become operational.

Author



Karen L. Garst received a Master's Degree in French and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She served as a Field Representative for the Oregon Federation of Teachers, the Executive Director of the Oregon Community College Association, and retired in 2008 as Executive Director of the Oregon State Bar.

She and her husband moved to Silverton, Oregon in late 2016. She became involved in the programs helping homeless individuals in 2017.

She has edited two non-fiction anthologies – *Women Beyond Belief: Discovering Life without Religion* and *Women v. Religion: The Case Against Faith and for Freedom*.