

# Piloting Change

## Unsheltered Homelessness in Portland

Our team at NWPP has seen firsthand how, over the years, barriers to stable and affordable housing have grown more and more challenging in our region.

For low-income older adults, the risk of becoming homeless has skyrocketed because of several factors:

- a dramatic rise in housing costs,
- profound scarcity of deeply affordable and accessible units,
- and the widespread lack of income and service supports to keep seniors housed.

“Seniors are the fastest growing age group of people experiencing homelessness across the U.S.”

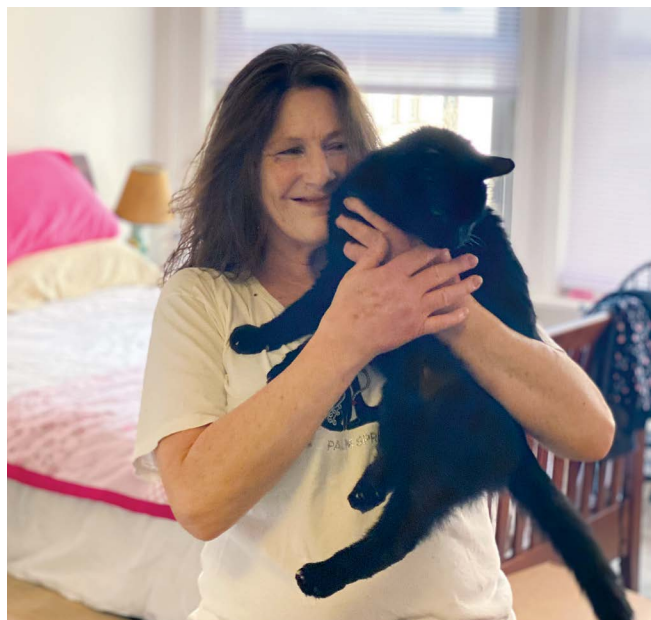
Between 2007–2017, the share of individuals experiencing homelessness that were seniors jumped from approximately one out of every 5 unhoused people to one out of every three.

### WHAT is *unsheltered* homelessness?

Not everyone experiencing homelessness is living outside. Some definitions of homelessness include staying in shelter programs, living in transitional housing, or couchsurfing.

However, according to Multnomah County’s most recent official count (2019), slightly over half of the people counted were in living situations that are considered “unsheltered,” meaning they slept outdoors, in public spaces, in vehicles, and in places “not meant for human habitation.” This high level of unsheltered homelessness fits in with national data, which show a steady increase in unsheltered homelessness across the U.S. between 2015 and 2020.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, ours was among a large number of homeless service systems throughout the country that were unable to complete an official count



*After three years living in her car because of an accident that led to job loss, Lori, 61, enjoys her new apartment in downtown Portland with her 20 year old cat, Vincent.*

of unsheltered people in 2021 due to safety concerns. Even without new count numbers, service providers in a national survey say they have seen both an increase in requests for assistance as well as evidence of increased unsheltered homelessness.

### WHO is unsheltered?

There are some commonalities among the population that is unsheltered, no matter what city or town we are talking about:

- People living unsheltered are predominately experiencing homelessness as individuals and not within a family group.
- They are more likely to identify as men, but national data shows a rise in the number of unsheltered women and transgender people over the last several years.
- They are much more likely to suffer from disabling health problems. A 2019 California study showed that

*Continued on page 6*



*From the*  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Laura Golino de Lovato

**Trash, gun violence, and homelessness.** These issues have captured our attention here in Portland, Multnomah County and the region. It seems these problems are everywhere we look, whether in the media or on our streets. I understand why the public is frustrated with efforts to address homelessness in the Portland area; it seems not much has changed from what we see on the streets. I still see camps, trash and suffering every time I drive through the city and county. It's heartbreaking for all of us at NWPP because we care so much about the low-income seniors in our community.

We know that seniors are being housed from homelessness and kept from becoming homeless because that is what we do as an organization every day. But we also know that for many in our community it may not seem like progress on this big issue is being made. And while we focus on providing housing assistance to a specific population in Multnomah County, we are well aware that homelessness affects all sectors of our community. NWPP direct service staff members have seen firsthand how, over the years, barriers to stable and affordable housing have grown more and more challenging in our region. We've provided an overview about unsheltered homelessness and some answers to frequent questions on page 1.

This is a good time to remember that people who are experiencing homelessness are also from all sectors of our community: working people whose wages aren't enough to cover rent, food, travel and medical care; families; youth exiting the foster care system; women escaping domestic violence; those with behavioral health issues; and seniors living on limited incomes. And not everyone experiencing homelessness is living outside.

This is also a good time to remind ourselves that there are key societal and policy factors that have led to the homeless crisis we see on our streets. Forty years of disinvestment in housing by the federal government, systemic racism in every aspect of our society, skyrocketing rents, extreme wealth inequality, and a social safety net that no longer provides the safety intended.

One solution to addressing homelessness and the housing crisis is the Supportive Housing Services ballot measure passed in May 2020. The collection of taxes that funds the program began in Jan 1, 2021. For NWPP, funding from this measure is already making a difference. Read on for an update about our newest program.

*Laura*

Laura Golino de Lovato, Executive Director

## Ballot measure enables move to permanent housing

Thanks to the voters of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington Counties we received new funding in July 2021 from the Supportive Housing Services (SHS) ballot measure that was passed in May 2020.

NWPP has made new and rapid progress creating a new Older Adult Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Project to assist seniors experiencing chronic homelessness. This included the hiring of five new case managers. Since October, we have assisted 33 seniors who we otherwise could not have helped. By the end of June, 2022, we expect our new program will have assisted approximately 60 seniors to find stable housing.

One key part of the SHS measure is the funding of Regional Long-Term Rent Assistance (RLRA) in the form of ongoing rent vouchers. This program was the direct outcome of NWPP's Long-Term Rent Assistance pilot program in partnership with Multnomah County and Home Forward. Our new PSH program has already connected 18 seniors with long-term vouchers.

In total, 17 households have moved from homelessness or temporary housing into permanently affordable housing in the past six months. We have enrolled 11 households from the COVID-19 Motel program into our PSH project. And three have been housed.

Stay tuned as we are just getting started!

# Experiencing Homelessness

## *Two formerly unsheltered men answer candidly*

**Brian, age 58**

**What is your personal experience with homelessness in Portland?** I never slept on the street. I always found a property...where I could sleep and not be seen. I got there at night and left by 6 a.m. I always kept it clean and removed all of my trash. I never got a tent because it felt to me like getting a tent meant that you're a "lifer" that you're accepting the lifestyle and it feels permanent.

I'm a PSU alumni so I have a \$55 per month membership at the fitness center where I could take a shower. I also had a full-sized locker at PSU – a game changer for someone who is homeless because it allows you to store your belongings. I've sold *Street Roots* for 8 years to provide money for the fitness membership and other expenses.

**Where are you living now?** A subsidized studio apartment in the central city made possible by NWPP. I moved into my apartment in December 2021.

**What allowed you to move from living unsheltered to housing?** I have a regular group of people I sell *Street Roots* to every week. A woman named Susan Emmons asked me one day how old I was and when I told her she asked me if anyone had ever given me the name and number of Northwest Pilot Project. I believe the type of outreach that Susan provided to me is crucial for people who are now homeless. So many people have given up hope, have no idea that there is a possibility of housing when you are living in a marginalized condition. Northwest Pilot Project moved

quickly to help me with an application and getting through the process. They also made it possible for me to be vouchered into a hotel during the last few very cold rainy weeks before my apartment was ready, and the application process was being completed.

**How has it been to live in an apartment?** Physically I'm much more rested, I can think more clearly. Having my own bathroom so I can have good hygiene – it's so basic, something that everyone needs. I'm not in a crisis right now. When you're outside you're always just working on survival.

**Has homelessness in Portland changed?** It's increased. People I knew deteriorated, their hygiene worsened – there was no place to get clean. There are more homeless who have been outside for a long time and increased alcohol abuse, drug abuse, untreated mentally ill – many of these caused by not having housing.

**What would you like people to know about homelessness?** It's not a natural state for any human being to be living in. People have been reduced to survival – recycling cans, selling papers, but never getting enough that would equal a month's rent, a deposit. When people get marginalized they feel like no one cares about their lives – why should anyone care about how they keep their space? – trashy campsites, etc. Before I was homeless I kept myself meticulous – that's part of who I was. Homelessness changed me – I still have things I need to overcome. When people are marginalized and start suffering, it's dehumanizing.

**Robert, Age 66**

**What is your personal experience with homelessness in Portland?**

I didn't become homeless until I was 60 years old. But now I've done it all– I've been in shelters, staying outside, in cars. . . wherever I could cover my head. I realized how different people get treated. When you get a lot of "No" or "We don't have anything for you," you lose faith.

**Where are you living now?** I live in a senior housing building.

**What allowed you to move from living unsheltered to housing?** It was a three year process. It wasn't like turning on a light switch. I applied to places, got rejected, and kept being persistent and trying. In 2021, I got connected with NWPP and I finally got this place.

**How has it been to live in an apartment?** It is still a difficult transition, even months after moving in. I still have to learn how to function again.

**Has homelessness in Portland changed?** Homelessness seems worse. Too many people have accepted homelessness as being a part of their life.

**What do people living outside need to move into housing?** People need hope. Workers are doing a good job but when people come in, you're dealing with people who have a different mindset. For some people, homelessness is a situation, not a destination.

**What would you like people to know about homelessness?** If it could happen to me, it could happen to anyone. Homelessness doesn't make you a bad person. Remember that this person is a human.

You can help others like Brian and Robert, see page 7.





# The 43rd Walk-A-Thon is right around the corner!

**Live & in-person Sunday May 1, PSU South Park Blocks**  
*Of course, we will be following current CDC guidance for in-person outdoor events.*

You can still participate online as an individual or team if you are not able to come to the in-person event.

Our goal this year is to raise **\$150,000!** And we need your help.

Fundraise as an individual or join/start a team for the 43rd Walk-A-Thon. All fundraisers need to register on our event platform, even if you registered last year. It's simple and free and should take less than five minutes.

<http://secure.qgiv.com/event/nwppwalk2022>

## Register Online Now!

### How to register in 5 easy Steps:

1. Go to our event website: <http://secure.qgiv.com/event/nwppwalk2022>
2. Click register as a fundraising participant
3. Register as an individual *or* join or start a team
4. Set a fundraising goal
5. Enter your personal details

That's it! You are ready to start fundraising! You can now click on your fundraising dashboard, personalize your page and share it with friends. It's so simple!

If you need further help registering or setting up your fundraiser page, contact Wendy Rudman at 503-478-6877 or by email: [wendy@nwppilotproject.org](mailto:wendy@nwppilotproject.org)

Can't participate this year but still want to contribute? You can! Visit our site where you can support one of your NWPP friends! Just visit





## Lots of Fabulous Prizes!

Check out this year's prizes! The structure and levels are the same whether you register as an individual or as a member of a team.

**Here's how it works:** when you raise

- ▶ **\$100** you receive a Hot Lips gift card (\$10)
- ▶ **\$500** you receive a Powell's gift card (value \$25) + (1) Raffle ticket to win a Sonos Sound Beam to enrich your home entertainment! \*
- ▶ **\$1,500** you receive a Madehere PDX gift card (value \$50)
- ▶ **\$3,000** you receive a REI gift card (value \$100)
- ▶ **\$5,000** you receive a Pendleton Woolen Mills gift card (value \$200)
- ▶ **\$10,000** you receive an Airbnb Gift card valued at (value \$500)

At each level you reach with your fundraising you will receive the prize for that level AND the prizes from the levels below it. For example, if you raise \$3,000, you will receive four prizes (\$100 Level, \$500 Level, \$1,500 Level, and \$3,000 Level). Top Individual and Team Fundraisers receive prizes above, a 43<sup>rd</sup> Walk-A-Thon trophy and your picture in the Summer 2022 Newsletter.

**Note:** All participants (individuals and team members whether participating solely online or in person) must register and create a fundraising page to be considered for prizes.

## Fundraiser Raffle!!

Raise \$500 or more and earn a raffle ticket\* for a chance to win a **Sonos Sound Beam** – the latest generation of Beam, now with Dolby Atmos. Enjoy clear panoramic sound for shows, movies and games when the TV is on, and stream music radio and more when it's off. It will take your home entertainment or gaming experience to a whole new level!

\* One ticket per fundraiser who raises \$500 and over.

## Special Event Days

We will again have some special event days throughout the month of April, where you can be entered to earn prizes or even get matching dollars for donations. You will receive email notifications of these special days in April once you are registered, so don't wait, register now!

## Be a Sponsor!

For event sponsorship opportunities and benefits contact Laura Golino de Lovato, Executive Director at 503-478-6868 or [laurag@nwpilotproject.org](mailto:laurag@nwpilotproject.org)

## Let's Walk!







## Confronting Homelessness continued from page 1



One in 5 people experiencing homelessness in Multnomah County are aged 55 or older.

unsheltered respondents were 4 times more likely to have a physical health condition than sheltered respondents, 1.5 times more likely to have a mental health condition, 5 times more likely to have a substance use disorder, and **25 times more likely to have all three types of health conditions.**

Locally, over 1 out of every 5 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Multnomah County are aged 55 or older. The high prevalence of disability seen nationally is also echoed here, where over half of all people with disabilities who were counted in our 2019 *Point in Time* study were experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Among all people experiencing homelessness in Oregon, there are stark racial disparities that lead to people of color, especially Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native people, to be at higher

likelihood of losing their homes due to structural, systemic, and institutional racism and racially exclusionary policies in housing.

These disparities are also visible in who experiences unsheltered homelessness in our county: Black/ African American people are almost two times more likely to be unsheltered than whites, while American Indian/Alaska Native people are over five times more likely to be unsheltered.

### Frequently Asked Questions

We at NWPP have seen up close how unsheltered homelessness has severe health and social impacts on those who are living through it. We also know that our housed neighbors often feel powerless to help and make a difference in the many efforts taking place to end homelessness. Here are some of the commonly asked questions we hear from supporters and community members who want to better understand what our unsheltered neighbors face:

**Why does it seem like unsheltered homelessness has increased during the pandemic?**

Because the pandemic limited communities' ability to collect data on unsheltered homelessness, it's unclear exactly how much of an increase has taken place. But there are many clues as to why the picture looks different than before: to limit potential exposure to COVID-19, congregate emergency shelters (traditional facilities where many people live and sleep in close quarters) have to serve fewer people to allow for social distancing. Many of these shelters also had long waitlists even before the pandemic began, so many who hope to enter a shelter are forced to remain outside while they wait.

It's also important to note that many services and supports that unhoused people rely on—housing navigation, day centers, meal sites, and transportation—continue to have limited access and hours, leading some to camp in more visible, accessible areas than before to be closer to assistance.

**Is the solution to unsheltered homelessness just adding more congregate shelter beds for everyone who is outside?**

The short answer to this is, “No.” There are many valid reasons that not everyone is willing to access a congregate shelter. Some may have had traumatic experiences while living outside that make it feel impossible to live and sleep so close to strangers. Others may be reluctant to even temporarily part with a spouse, close support network, or a beloved pet, and many shelters are not set up to allow them to stay together in a program. Some shelters may have extremely strict program requirements or limit length of stay to 30-90 days, so because of wait times for affordable housing, this can lead to participants returning to the

streets. Most important to remember is the fact that shelter is not equal to housing, and because of negative past experiences with shelters, people may be reluctant to try them again, especially if they come with no assurance of housing placement.

### **Is unsheltered homelessness just the result of more addiction or substance use disorder in the community?**

It's true that substance abuse can lead to an individual losing stable housing and becoming unsheltered, and a significant portion of people experiencing homelessness struggle with behavioral health conditions. However, the data just doesn't back up the claim that substance use disorder is responsible for increasing local and national rates of homelessness, or even just unsheltered homelessness. In fact, many advocates and people with lived experience point out that substance use can begin or greatly worsen during experiences of unsheltered homelessness.

What the data does show is that housing affordability is the main driver of homelessness across the U.S. And if we remember how vital housing is to maintaining one's well-being—both mental and physical—it stands to reason that increasingly limited access to housing would result in worsened health for the most vulnerable among us.

### **Are unsheltered residents working towards getting a job?**

A 2021 data analysis from the University of Chicago showed that **40% of people under the age of 65 who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness were already employed**. But there are a couple of key things to remember when we consider this number:

One, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the hourly amount an average worker needs to earn in order to be stably housed in Oregon (\$25.14 per hour) is the 11th highest Housing Wage in the country. This also means that a minimum wage worker would need to work 79 hours per week to afford a home. Two, the high prevalence of disabling conditions among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and the increase in seniors who are unhoused (see above) means that many are relying on extremely low, fixed incomes that can't stretch far enough to cover the average rent. So there's just no getting around it: more deeply affordable housing is necessary to house everyone, whether they are in the workforce or not.

### **Isn't the new regional Supportive Housing Services measure supposed to have reduced unsheltered homelessness by now?**

NWPP has worked over the past two years to help design and imple-

ment the new Metro Regional Supportive Housing Services measure programming, which is funded by a high-earners personal income tax as well as a new business tax, and is expected to eventually generate about \$248 million in revenue across the tri-county region.

However, as we approach the end of implementation year one, we are still in a very early stage for this innovative regional effort. Although we have been thrilled to see clients begin to access new services through this measure over the past few months, we know that it will take time before much of this funding reaches everyone who is in need. And because we know that truly ending homelessness requires many decades-overdue investments in our entire housing system, we will continue to advocate for policies that finally address the root causes of homelessness, especially for the most vulnerable.

By Marisa Espinoza, NWPP Policy and Systems Advocate

## **How You Can Help**

- Be a friendly face to your unhoused neighbors. Say hello, introduce yourself or just smile.
- Get to know resources that exist for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis while unhoused. Multnomah County Crisis Line: 503-988-4888, available 24/7
- Volunteer with your faith community or neighborhood association to provide supplies and support for people experiencing homelessness.
- Learn more about homelessness!
  - HereTogether <https://heretogetheroregon.org/understandinghomelessness/>
  - Portland State University Homelessness Research and Action Collaborative (HRAC) <https://www.pdx.edu/homelessness/>
- Support organizations like NWPP that focus on providing permanent, deeply affordable housing to people experiencing homelessness! Visit [nwpilotproject.org/support-us/](http://nwpilotproject.org/support-us/)

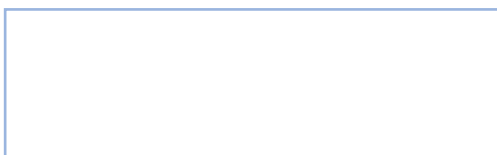


## NORTHWEST PILOT PROJECT

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### Remembering John Dudek

John Dudek, a valued volunteer and long-time supporter of NWPP passed away in August 2021. For 11 years, John and his wife Dee supported NWPP as volunteers and community advocates.



*John and Dee Dudek*

Year after year, John and Dee harnessed their network of friends and co-workers to provide NWPP's clients with bedding kits, hygiene items, and holiday stockings. John was a fixture in the kitchen at the annual NWPP Client Holiday Luncheon, managing the volunteer kitchen staff. He used his connections with his employer CenturyLink to assist Northwest Pilot Project with a grant to purchase beds for clients. In 2016, NWPP honored John and Dee with the Mover and Shaker award at the annual Volunteer Luncheon.

John felt deeply about giving back to organizations in Portland. His commitment to philanthropy was something he shared with his wife of 42 years. "I wouldn't have gotten to do any of the volunteering I did without John," said Dee Dudek. Over the last decade, supporting seniors became a priority for John and Dee. John appreciated NWPP for being a "lean, mean fighting machine" for low-income seniors in need of affordable housing. He will be greatly missed.



## NORTHWEST PILOT PROJECT WALK-A-THON

Mark your calendars

**Sunday, May 1, 2022**

**1:00 pm**

**PSU South Park Blocks**

FUNdraise to help very low-income seniors in our community with housing support and more

Find all the details for the 2022 WALK-A-THON on pages 4 and 5