

Home is the place where opportunity begins for each of us. Our early learning begins at home – our sense of self and others, and the world; our expectations of safety and security; our understanding of our self-worth and the potential we have to be successful – all begin at home.

The relative stability and security of that home makes the difference between a life of mere survival, and a life of opportunities to grow, thrive, and pursue our dreams. Our community thrives when all experience the benefits of a safe and stable home, with enough food, safety, and access to quality healthcare and education. The lack of a stable home can place barriers to success that can last a lifetime, dramatically impacting the lives of our children, and the health and stability of the entire community.

The experience of adverse events as children, including housing instability and homelessness, drives problems that can impact them across their entire lifespan.

- Housing instability drives increased health-risks and accidental injury or death, as well as an increase in food insecurity, which has a well documented set of health and achievement impacts on youth, adults and seniors. (Benton County Health study)
- Children experiencing housing instability have weaker vocabulary and problem solving skills, increased behavioral problems, and lower academic achievement – as youth and as adults. (2013 Urban Institute study)
- Low educational achievement is directly related to low income potential, driving the cycle of poverty from generation to generation.
- Children who experience housing instability and homelessness are more likely to become homeless as adults, are more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse, and are more likely to be incarcerated as adults.

We all know the value of a healthy, stable home – either because we had one, or because we didn't, and know the struggles that generated in our own lives. Yet we continue to tolerate a level of family and youth homelessness and housing instability in our community that damages us all. While it's easy to dismiss homelessness as being a problem centered on those we can see, those sleeping on the streets or camped under bridges, we miss the larger problem of housing instability across our community.

While the visibly homeless in Benton County might all fit in a few school buses, those we don't see – those doubled up with other families to make ends meet, or who struggle daily with choices between food, medical care, utilities and rent, and are one unexpected bill away from losing their home – would come close to filling Reser Stadium.

23% of Benton County residents are at or below the federal poverty level, and another 18% above the poverty level, but still face tough choices about which bills to pay, making less than the "survival" income required to meet basic needs. With housing costs rising, and wages stagnant, this problem grows daily.

The health and vitality of our entire community is at stake, when so many struggle to get by. We need to break the supply chain of poverty, homelessness, and pain, by supporting policies that will increase

the availability of affordable housing, and reduce the crippling effects of housing instability. If you believe, as I do, that a safe and stable home environment is crucial for the well-being of all in our community, please contact your state representatives and voice your support for:

- An increase in the Document Recording Fee dedicated to provide resources to support safe, affordable homes for all Oregonians
- Dedication of state funds to support development of Permanent Supportive Housing, and the outreach, treatment programs, and transitional housing required to help families move from homeless to home
- Funds to support local innovation, such as waivers of system development costs, down-payment supports to encourage home ownership, incentivized inclusive zoning, and programs to support seniors and the disabled to retain their housing

Together, we can ensure that all in our community benefit from a safe and affordable home.