

Housing in Central Oregon is at a premium. Hence making it very difficult for someone with mental illness to find affordable housing. My youngest son, 22 yrs. Old, is finding this out the hard way. I would like to share his story with you. J2 is diagnosed as bipolar undetermined. He suffers with fairly severe anxiety. He has been thru 4 jobs in the last year. Currently he is working the late shift at Subways. This is a great shift for someone who is bipolar as sleeping is difficult for him. It has been since birth, he has taken medication to help him sleep since he was 2. He works 30 to 40 hours a week. He has days when his illness keeps him from going to work as the anxiety and depression cause many GI problems for him. Because of that he can only budget himself on more like 20-30 hours of pay.

It is very difficult to find somewhere to rent for under \$1200 a month plus utilities. He and his roommates have been evicted without cause and are desperately trying to find a new rental. They have been in their duplex for a year. They have paid rent and utilities on time during this year. So, with limited income he is looking at becoming homeless on April 7<sup>th</sup>. I so want to write a letter to the property management company pleading for them to let the two of them stay but I can't. I am afraid that if I said he had a mental illness they'd use that against him. It's bad enough that he boys feel they are being evicted because they are gay. I know that's not the reason, however I can understand where they are coming from.

For many months we had a homeless friend of his camped on our couch. I couldn't get him to leave, he was a horrible influence on J2. I can't say for sure but I am convinced that the behavior that took place in the next paragraph was from his influence. I finally told him to get out of my house or I'd call the police. J2 let him sleep in his car and that caused a problem with neighbors (one of which was our local sheriff, who told my brother to tell me to get that guy off our property as we are breaking the law).

A little over a year ago he stole some money from me. In order to get him to cooperate and get help I decided to have the police issue him a citation. Had I have known what a theft charge would mean down the line for him I would have never chosen that route. My hopes were for him to get into mental health court and get treatment and therapy. Of course that backfired, he wouldn't make appointments and follow through. Now he can't rent. Rental management firms will not rent to him because of his record.

He is a good person. One of the kindest people out there. Very impulsive, doesn't think about consequences for bad decisions, everyone he meets likes him ,and can be very shy because of his anxiety. He doesn't deal well with large groups and is a private person.

Mental illness has impacted his life dramatically at this point. His self- esteem is so low, he feels like a failure. I just spent 2 hours with him with his face in his hands, unable to speak to me, because of feeling embarrassed and ashamed of himself. He struggles staying on his meds, which in the long run is going to impact him with his job as I'm afraid he will sink so low he won't get out of bed and unemployed status will start again. He doesn't want to move home, he wants to be on his own, living with his boyfriend and facing adulthood, but not being homeless.

If there was housing here for mentally ill, that was somehow available like being on a list for low income housing it would be so helpful. It is a disability and shouldn't be hindrance to keeping these young

adults from becoming independent. I read where there are communities that are building “tiny Houses” communities. This would be an ideal situation for our area. I see this as a starting point for a young adult to get his/her start in adulthood. Not only the young adult, but older adults living with mental illness challenges would benefit from a community that offered housing.

Wouldn't it be nice if with the hundreds of apartments opening in Bend and Redmond the next few months, 15 to 20 percent of them were made available to people with mental illness. It's nice to dream big. Or any new rentals being made vacant because of the new one, they were made available to folks living with mental illness.

Not everyone needs housing like those that Telecare offers, however I'm sure we would benefit from more homes like they have to offer. There aren't enough “therapy homes available either. I'm sure it's difficult for those leaving therapy homes to find housing once they are ready to be on their own. Most of us as parents want our children to be able to live independently.

Now for scenario #2:

My other son J1 (27years old) lives with schizoaffective disorder, paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar or whatever the most current diagnosis is. He was fortunate to find housing with the VA system in a group home. However, after a year he decided that dual diagnosis would win and he left the home so he could medicate with marijuana. As parents that worry about him constantly, we were crushed. Because of a previous violent outburst, where he attacked his dad out of the blue, he cannot return home. That left him homeless. After being in the hospital then jail, he lived at Bethlehem Inn—a homeless shelter. He managed to put himself together while living in the VA home, got a job, and seemed to be doing ok. With a job, but on a single income that wasn't full time and no chance of renting, He lived in his car for 2-3 months, becoming more delusional by the day. He quit/was terminated from his job, then in a totally delusional state, he drove to Beverly Hills, didn't find what he was looking for, the next day he left for Oregon. To make a long story short he is now living with a relative in Portland, working a little with his cousin and seems to be holding his own for the time being. Had the snow and ice not prevented him from getting back to Bend, he would be again living in his car, pawning everything he can live without, and calling us constantly for monetary help.

J1 wants to live independently, his military career was cut short because of an injury, it was his life dream to have a military career, only to be cut short. While I respected his wants to be in the military, he came home a different person, some of the changes were good, but some were not. This is when I look back was when his psychosis began. Medication issues are a battle for him, like so many when he takes his meds he does well, but then the need to self-medicate takes over, and things can go downhill fast. We too, want him to live independently.

We live comfortably but by no means can support one, let alone two of our adult children. If he comes back to Bend, and believe me I pray that he doesn't, I don't know what we will be able to do for him in finding housing needs

Both of my boys need to get into outpatient therapy to help them learn to live with their illnesses. At this point neither of them would agree to a group house but I know if they were given the opportunity to have assistance with housing they would agree to outpatient therapy. J1 told me last week that he knows he really needs to get back into treatment.

The thought of either of my kids being homeless just makes me ill. I don't know what we are going to do. It's a cruel world to those with challenges, mental, intellectual or physical. Housing is so important. It's hard to have a productive life without somewhere to live. The basics of a warm dry place to live, take a shower, and cook a warm meal all start with housing. A mental illness should not prevent someone from getting housing, it would be wonderful to know that it opened a door into a safe place to live.

[Please Support House Bill # 3063](#), folks living with mental illness carry such a burden and need all the help they can get. Remember 1 in 4 people are affected with mental illness, and those that live with more severe diagnosis, are definitely in need of assistance.

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