



Research Article

Micro Housing Solutions: Evaluating Tiny Homes as an Innovative Approach to Homelessness in Oregon USA

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ABSTRACT

The homelessness epidemic, which has grown to be a significant issue in many parts of the US, is mostly affecting Oregon. This study investigates the current state of Oregon's homelessness and how tiny houses can be a creative way to deal with Oregon's rising homelessness problem. The state has seen a sharp increase in homelessness since COVID-19, which has affected several groups, particularly men. The study uses several secondary data sources and case studies like Dignity Village and Tallahassee's "The Dweller Project" to investigate the efficacy of tiny dwellings while taking into account their affordability and safety. The quantitative data show how serious the homelessness problem is in Oregon and how urgently a solution is required. Several Oregon communities, including Portland and Eugene, have launched tiny home projects in an effort to tackle homelessness. They were all successful in giving people a sense of security and lowering their rate of homelessness.

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1. Introduction

Oregon is among the states most affected by the homelessness crisis, which has become a serious problem in many regions of the US. Homelessness has grown in recognition as a social issue during the last 15 years, causing concern among the general public, the media, academics, and policymakers. In the United States, about 150,000 families with 330,000 children are housed in homeless shelters each (Brennan et al., 2017). Millions more, nevertheless, are at risk of homelessness and live in unstable housing.

During this time, the federal government's housing budget and the quantity of academic publications on homelessness have increased significantly (Toro & Warren, 1999). The UN recognizes homelessness as a human rights violation and as a "potential death sentence" in relation to COVID-19 (Farha, 2020, para. 3). As access to affordable housing declines and income inequality rises, homelessness in the United States persists despite service systems' prioritization of the problem through shelters and longer-term solutions, like permanent supportive housing (Alliance, 2020a; Byrne et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2016).

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), In January 2023, there were 653,104 homeless persons in the United States, more than half a million people, and there were 20,142 homeless persons in Oregon. This

statistic is supported by further data showing concerning increases in homelessness, particularly since 2022. According to the report, 12.1% was the year-over-year rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness. This recorded the greatest increase since data collection began in 2007. Despite making up only 1.3% of the US population, Oregon's homelessness rate has skyrocketed, accounting for 2.6% of all homeless people in the country. According to NAEH, the number of homeless people in Oregon increased by 15% between 2007 and 2023. In this state, there are 48 homeless persons for every 10,000 residents. Low income, housing inaccessibility, fleeing violence, and racial disparities are being detected as the primary causes of homelessness, according to the NAEH's most recent (2022) report.

Many of the tactics employed to help the homeless over the past few decades have been band-aid solutions. For example, soup meals, emergency shelters, and transitional homes have been implemented utilizing both public and private funding to combat homelessness (Homelessness, 2018; Wright, 2017). Undoubtedly, many homeless persons have been able to get back on their feet because to these helpful-hands-up methods. However, it is evident from the high number of people who are obviously homeless that these approaches are inadequate. Permanent supportive housing concepts have been used more and more in recent years to combat homelessness (Homelessness, 2018; Segel, 2015; Tsemberis & Eisenberg,

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2000). In order to establish stable living conditions, this approach offers people social resources like case assistance or mental health provisions in addition to long-term affordable housing (Homelessness, 2017).

The tiny house movement started in the early 19th century in the USA. Numerous initiatives with differing degrees of effectiveness have been used to combat homelessness, ranging in theory and strategy. Development of transitional housing and, more recently, "tiny homes" are growing strategies to address homelessness (Jackson et al., 2020). Over the past ten years, small homes have become more and more well-liked as a more respectable and inclusive housing choice for people who are homeless (Calhoun et al., 2022). In the United States, tiny homes currently make up 0.36% of all residential listings. In the US, there are roughly 10,000 tiny houses (Mariotty, 2024).

To combat homelessness, a number of Oregon localities, such as Portland and Eugene, have started tiny home initiatives. One prominent example is the Kenton Women's Village in Portland, which offers safe, transitional accommodation with a focus on individual freedom and community. These initiatives have produced favorable results (Leickly et al., 2024). North America is witnessing the fastest growth in tiny home sales. North America accounts for 59% of the tiny house market, according to a survey that examined changes across continents Mayfield, (n.d.). According to a recent HomeAdvisor survey, a startlingly high number of Americans (86%) said they would live in a tiny house. Ninety-one percent of the 1,800 respondents were millennials (Lerner, 2022).

There haven't been many scholarly conversations about tiny houses and their purported viability as a long-term sustainable housing solution because of the movement's recent inception (Anson, 2014). However, also there hasn't been a systematic or organized attempt to record homeless people's little house villages (Evans, 2020). The purpose of this study is to assess small housing critically as a possible long-term remedy for Oregon's homelessness problem.

1.1 Objectives

The study aims to evaluate tiny homes as an innovative solution for the Oregon homeless people. The main objectives of this study are:

1. To assess the current scenario of homelessness in Oregon, US
2. To assess the effectiveness of tiny homes in reducing homelessness

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, about 150,000 families with 330,000 children are housed in homeless shelters each (Brennan et al., 2017). Millions more, nevertheless, are at risk of homelessness and live in unstable housing. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), In January 2023, there were 653,104 homeless persons in the United States, more than half a million people. This statistic is supported by further data

showing concerning increases in homelessness, particularly since 2022. According to the report, 12.1% was the year-over-year rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness. This recorded the greatest increase since data collection began in 2007. In 2023, there were 70,642 more homeless people than in 2022. Overall homelessness has increased in 72% of Continuums of Care (CoCs). 64% of CoCs reported a spike in unsheltered homelessness. Overall homelessness, unsheltered and chronic homelessness, have all grown every year since 2016, as depicted in Fig. 1.

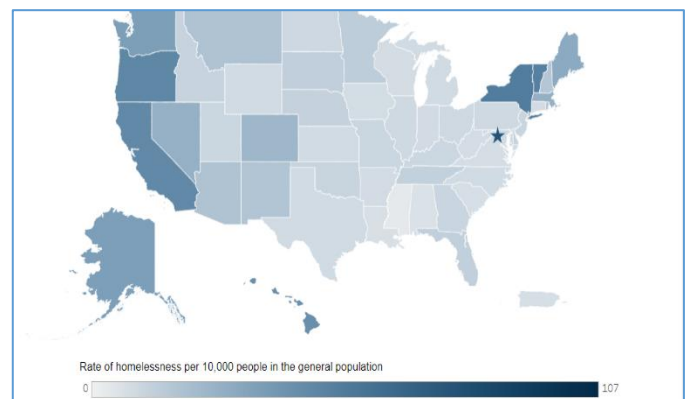


Fig. 1. Rate of Homelessness over the USA

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023 annual homeless assessment report to congress (AHAR); U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 population estimates

Oregon is among the states most affected by the homelessness crisis, which has become a serious problem in many regions of the US. Despite making up only 1.3% of the US population, Oregon's homelessness rate has skyrocketed, accounting for 2.6% of all homeless people in the country. According to NAEH (2023), the number of homeless people in Oregon increased by 15% between 2007 and 2023, while the number of sheltered people decreased by 14% and the number of unsheltered people increased by 40%. In January 2023, there were 20,142 homeless persons in Oregon. In this state, there are 48 homeless persons for every 10,000 residents (Fig. 2).

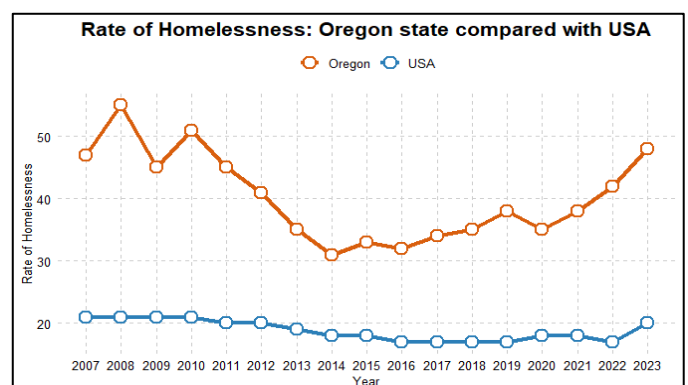


Fig. 2. Rate of homelessness in Oregon and the USA.

It has been estimated that 71.5% of individual adults make up the vast majority of those who are homeless. Unsheltered homelessness affected 51.2% of these people. Families with children comprise 28.5% of the population. The racial/ethnic

group most likely to be homeless is Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Individuals who are Black, African American, or of African origin, or who are American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Indigenous, likewise have greater rates of homelessness than the general population. A sharp increment in homelessness has been noticed in Asians (91%), Hispanic or Latino (59%), American Indians (53%) and Native Hawaiians (21%). Low income, housing inaccessibility, fleeing violence, and racial disparities are the primary causes of homelessness, according to the NAEH's most recent (2022) report. One of the worst shortages of affordable housing in the country's history is currently occurring. 11 million extremely low-income households are in danger of homelessness and housing instability because they now spend at least half of their income on housing.

The "tiny house movement" has become more well-known in the general public in recent years. Thoreau and Emerson's romanticism of the 19th century served as the inspiration for the movement's broader interest in "minimizing, de-cluttering, and downsizing" (Anson, 2014; Morrison, 2014). The minimalist concept of the 20th century, "less is more," has also impacted the movement's evolution. The key principle of the tiny house movement is that by minimizing their spatial footprint, homeowners may lower their environmental effects and improve cost (Ford & Gomez-Lanier, 2017). Additionally, the movement's supporters have been upbeat about how tiny homes might help with a variety of housing problems. Indeed, tiny homes have been suggested as a solution for the homeless (Johnson, 2016; Priesnitz, 2014), temporary housing and guest houses (Hunter, 2015; (Robinson, 2016), mobile housing for busy travelers (Shahani, 2015a), and housing in urban areas with high population densities (Maghribi, Wakatsuki, & Defterio, 2015; (Priesnitz, 2014).

The tiny-house movement is a social and architectural movement that advocates for smaller, simpler living areas (Shahani, 2015b). The tiny house movement pushes the ideas that smaller is more affordable, smaller is more sustainable, and smaller is prettier (Shearer & Burton, 2019). Tiny homes have been marketed as a dwelling solution for the homeless and as offering cheaper and occasionally environmentally friendly characteristics in the housing market (Kilman, 2016). Modern tiny homes are a relatively new phenomenon, and some people believe they are the answer to unsustainable development and housing affordability. Since there is still no clear definition of what a tiny house is, it is challenging to evaluate these claims with any degree of objectivity (Shearer & Burton, 2023).

Middle-class people began to feel the effects of Reagan and Thatcher's neo-liberal economic policies and the deregulation of the housing financing sector in the 1990s. According to Hodgkinson and Robbins (2012), this resulted in a widening income gap, sharply rising housing costs, and a decline in employment. This economic situation was perfect for fostering transformation. For instance, Jay Schafer's foundation of the Tumbleweed Tiny House Company in 1998 had a significant impact on the growth of devoted tiny house builders and the popularization of the modern tiny house movement.

Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon, was the first official usage of small homes as a solution to homelessness in 2000 (Mingoya, 2015). As of 2019, there were around 115 tiny home villages for homeless people (Evans, 2020). Furthermore, small homes have been presented as a means of advancing the right to housing as the discussion surrounding this issue develops in the United States (Alexander, 2018).

As a countercultural reaction against excessive materialism, a desire for "freedom" and individualism, and a desire to live more simply, the trend toward smaller residences in the US started as early as the 1850s (Anson, 2014). Although the dollhouse appearance, eco-friendly practices, and fine craftsmanship of the tiny house have captivated alternative housing aficionados for more than 20 years, many Americans are still perplexed by tiny homes (Kilman, 2016). In the United States, tiny homes currently make up 0.36% of all residential listings. In the US, there are roughly 10,000 tiny houses (Mariotty, 2024).

With the United States and Canada accounting for the majority of purchases, North America is witnessing the fastest growth in tiny home sales. North America accounts for 59% of the tiny house market, according to a survey that examined changes across continents Mayfield, (n.d.). Many people find smaller living appealing but according to a recent HomeAdvisor survey, a startlingly high number of Americans (86%) said they would live in a tiny house. Ninety-one percent of the 1,800 respondents were millennials. The distribution of the millennial respondents in the US is as follows: The Midwest has 8%, the Northeast has 26%, the Southeast has 15%, the Southwest has 13%, and the West has 38% (Lerner, 2022). According to a survey of 2000 respondents, more than half of Americans would consider living in a tiny home in 2020, with affordability and efficiency ranking as the main justifications. According to the survey, only 24% of Americans indicated they would not live in a compact home, while 56% said they would. Google trend data also indicated the same result (Ling & Petrova, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

The effectiveness of tiny homes as a homelessness solution in Oregon is assessed in this study using a mixed-methods approach, which also looks at the prospects and problems for growing such programs. Both Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

3.1. Quantitative Data

Data Source: Numerical data were collected and examined from different articles on homelessness and tiny homes like "Rethinking Shelter and Tiny House Communities: Dignity Village, Portland, and Lessons from San Luis Obispo", "Exploring Tiny Homes as an Affordable Housing Strategy to Ameliorate Homelessness: A Case Study of the Dwellings in Tallahassee, FL", "Oregon Statewide Homelessness Report 2023".

Key Parameters: The study included the key parameters obtained from the relevant articles and websites. The parameters are mentioned below:

1. Sheltered and Unsheltered homelessness
2. Resident Demographics

3.2. Qualitative Data

Case Study: To have a deeper understanding of the procedures and results related to small home projects, a case study approach was employed. For this analysis, the two main case studies are:

Dignity Village, Portland, Oregon: Founded in 2000, Dignity Village is the nation's oldest and most established tiny home (or pod) village. About 60 villagers live in this self-governing community at any given moment, and over the years, it has assisted innumerable other homeless people (Ferry et al., 2022). The case study was thoroughly examined from the article: "Rethinking Shelter and Tiny House Communities: Dignity Village, Portland, and Lessons from San Luis Obispo." The data represents only the participants who were elected to participate in the interview, not the entire population of the village. 42 villagers, 9 village support staff, 7 village designers, 6 village builders, 16 neighbors, and 2065 Portland residents who answered an anonymous survey participated in the study's interviews and surveys.

The Dwellers, Tallahassee, FL: The goal of this tiny house project was to reduce homelessness in Tallahassee, Florida. The case study was thoroughly examined from the article: "Exploring Tiny Homes as an Affordable Housing Strategy to Ameliorate Homelessness: A Case Study of the Dwellings in Tallahassee, FL".

Data Collection: For these case studies, information was gathered from a variety of secondary sources. All semi-structured interviews with residents, staff, important stakeholders, and other pertinent participants were gathered. The document was examined in detail.

The flowchart below (Fig. 3) demonstrates the methodology, which was employed in the study to evaluate the efficacy of tiny homes as a homelessness solution in Oregon.

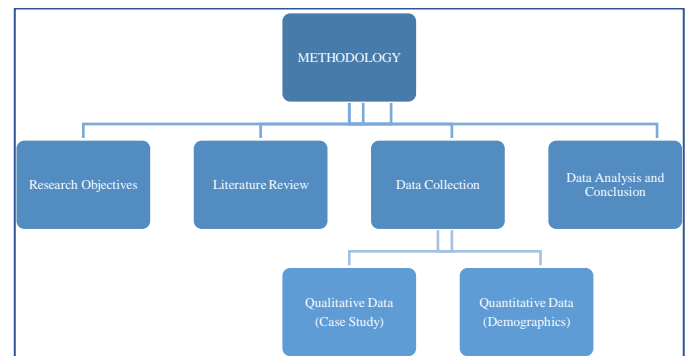


Fig. 3. A flowchart of the methodology of the study.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Current Homeless Scenario in Central Oregon, US

The number of unsheltered homeless people in Deschutes and Jefferson has significantly increased. The number of homeless people in Crook County has decreased by 57.6%, whilst the number in Deschutes and Jefferson has climbed (Table 1). According to Oregon's 2023 PIT count, 13,004 people, roughly 65% of all homeless people, were unsheltered. This was an increase of 1,913 people, or 17.2 percent, over 2022 (Greene et al., 2024). Oregon had the second-highest rate of unsheltered homelessness in the US, according to data from the 2023 AHAR to Congress.

Table 1. Unsheltered and Homelessness in Central Oregon.

CoC	County	2022 count	2023 count	Numeric change	% change
Central Oregon	Crook	42	22	-20	-47.6%
	Deschutes	904	1075	171	18.9%
	Jefferson	57	91	34	59.6%

The number of sheltered homeless people in Deschutes and Jefferson has significantly increased. The number of homeless people in Crook County has decreased by 14.8%, whilst the number in Deschutes and Jefferson has climbed by 73.9% and 400%, respectively (Table 2). During the 2023 PIT count, 7,106

Table 2. Sheltered Homelessness in Central Oregon.

CoC	County	2022 count	2023 count	Numeric change	% change
Central Oregon	Crook	27	23	-4	-14.8%
	Deschutes	226	393	167	73.9%
	Jefferson	9	45	36	400%

individuals in Oregon were found to be experiencing sheltered homelessness, which represents almost 35% of all homeless individuals. Compared to the prior year, there was a 4.2 percent increase of 285 individuals (Greene et al., 2024).

4.2. Resident Demographics

4.2.1. Gender

There are only 23 sheltered homeless people in Crook County, with 9 females and 14 males, according to data from Greene et al. (2024). In Deschutes County, which has a higher number of homeless persons, there were 140 women and 247 men, 3 non-

binary people, 1 person who was being questioned, and 2 cases with no information, for a total of 393 people. With a total population of 45, Jefferson County recorded 18 females, 25 men, 1 non-binary person, and 1 case of missing data as shown in Table 3. Thus, this numerical data depicts the real situation, which has been extensively researched. Several studies have found that men are more likely to experience homelessness (National Alliances, 2022).

Table 3. Sheltered homelessness by gender.

CoC	County	Female	Male	No Single Gender	Questioning	Transgender	No Data	Sum
Central Oregon	Crook	9	14	0	0	0	0	23
	Deschutes	140	247	3	1	0	2	393
	Jefferson	18	25	1	0	0	1	45

There are only 22 unsheltered homeless people in Crook County, with 14 females and 8 males, according to data from Greene et al. (2024). In Deschutes County, which has a higher number of unsheltered homeless persons, there were 417 women and 600 men, 13 non-binary people, 5 people who were

being questioned, and 33 cases with no information, for a total of 1075 people. With a total population of 91, Jefferson County recorded 38 females, 52 men, and 1 case of missing data as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Unsheltered homelessness by gender.

CoC	County	Female	Male	No Single Gender	Questioning	Transgender	No Data	Sum
Central Oregon	Crook	14	8	0	0	0	0	22
	Deschutes	417	600	13	5	7	33	1075
	Jefferson	38	52	0	0	0	1	91

So, men outnumbered women in both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, according to the data. In addition, Deschutes County has the highest concentration of homeless people in both sheltered and unsheltered categories for all age groups. In addition to highlighting a notable gender gap, this indicates that Deschutes' homelessness problem is getting worse when compared to other counties.

4.2.2. Age

The information shows how unsheltered homelessness is distributed by age in Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties

in Central Oregon. All age groups in Crook County have relatively low numbers, with a peak of seven people in the 25–34 age range. Notably, neither those under the age of five nor those over 65 are unsheltered in this group. Deschutes County, on the other hand, has far higher numbers, especially for the 35–44 age range, where 280 people are homeless without a shelter. Next in line are those in the 25–34 age range (171) and the 45–54 age range (183). Jefferson County has some notable numbers, particularly in the 25–34 age group (17 people) and the 65+ age group (11 people). This suggests that even if overall counts have decreased, issues about particular age groups still exist. Table 5. Shows unsheltered homelessness by age.

Table 5. Unsheltered homelessness by age.

CoC	County	<5	5-12	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Central Oregon	Crook	0	3	0	1	7	6	3	2	0
	Deschutes	20	66	48	103	171	280	183	134	51
	Jefferson	0	5	6	13	17	20	5	14	11

The age distribution of unsheltered homeless people in Table 6 shows recurring trends throughout the counties. The numbers in Crook County are still low, with two people in the 18–24 age range and three in the 5–12 age range, indicating a small presence of children and young adults. Deschutes County's large population once more makes it stand out, especially when it comes to adults between the ages of 25 and 34 (62 people) and 35 and 44 (79 people). These figures show that middle-

aged persons in this area are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. There are very few people in Jefferson County in most age groups, with 12 people in the 25–34 age range and 11 in the 35–44 age range. This implies that even if Jefferson County's total population is smaller, there are still sizable groups of young and middle-aged persons in need of care and support.

Table 6. Sheltered homelessness by age.

CoC	County	<5	5-12	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Central Oregon	Crook	2	3	0	2	3	4	3	4	0
	Deschutes	16	17	8	32	62	79	74	70	29
	Jefferson	0	0	0	0	12	11	12	8	2

4.2.3. Race/Ethnicity

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2015), 63% were male and 37% were female. According to this study, more White people are living there than Black people in Dignity Village. However, according to the National Law Center and National Alliances, people of color are more likely to become homeless and stay there for a very long time. Similarly, according to the Oregon Statewide Homeless Report 2023, White people are the highest in number, both sheltered (337) and unsheltered (785). Fig. 4 shows race.

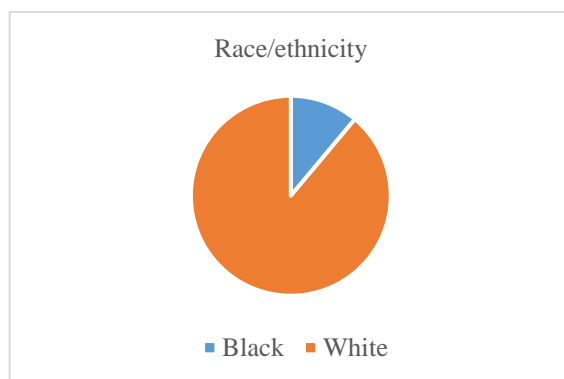


Fig. 4. Race.

4.2.4. Relationship and Parents

The majority of people (44.4%) are single, followed by married people (33.3%) and people who are separated or divorced (22.2%), as presented in Fig. 5. This suggests that a large section of the population comprises single people. Given that 55.6% of the population is a parent, there appears to be a significant familial presence in the neighborhood. On the other hand, 44.4% are childless, shown in Fig. 6. This demographic data, which emphasizes the high percentage of parents and the frequency of single people, is crucial for comprehending the community's social dynamics and

relationship patterns. The results are similar to the NAEH (2018) report and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2015). Fig. 5,6 shows the relationship & parents.

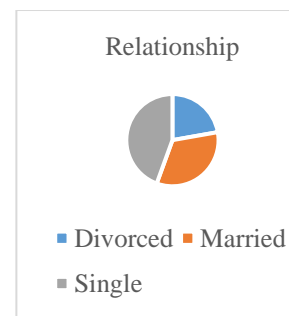


Fig. 5. Relationship.

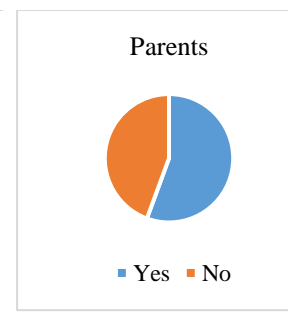


Fig. 6. Parents.

4.3. Case Study: 01

4.3.1. Dignity Village, Portland, Oregon

As a compromise to "institutional warehousing" (shelters) or "doing nothing" (sleeping on the pavement or by the creek), DV (Dignity Village) satisfied several high-level and low-level practical goals. Both the local population and the larger non-resident community benefit from DV.

4.3.2. Key Findings

In between permanent housing and short-term fixes, middle-ground housing offers a secure and suitable living space. Residents can avoid the ongoing dread of eviction that comes with typical shelters thanks to this stability.

Middle-ground housing provides a financially accessible option for those experiencing homelessness, with monthly fees as low as \$50, making it simpler for them to find stable living arrangements

Locals take part in the planning and administration of their neighborhoods, which promotes independence and a feeling of possession over their living areas

This housing model permits couples and people with prior convictions to live together, as well as pets.

The study concluded that because of their simplicity and modest size, unconventional tiny homes can offer comfortable and safe living spaces with easy upkeep and financial flexibility. Dignity Village is a prime example of how these types of living arrangements may change people's lives by fostering community and stability for both housed and homeless people.

4.3.3. Challenges

People who live simply are frequently viewed negatively by society; there are "visible" and "invisible" homeless people. Visible homeless people are more undesirable than invisible ones. Homelessness frequently results from trauma. A lack of awareness and societal failure are present.

There are some organizational challenges too. It is difficult to find a village site. The village's location should be near employment hubs and city facilities, but it also needs to be a location where there aren't many neighbors to disturb with visual disarray, smoke, noise, and other effects.

4.4. Case Study: 02

4.4.1. The Dwelling Project, Tallahassee, FL

According to Housing (2018), currently, Tallahassee and the surrounding area are home to 35 low-income housing projects. Many are reserved for people with impairments or those over 55. Low-income Housing, 2018. Participants must pay roughly 30% of their household's "adjusted" income for the more than 541 apartments and dispersed site houses owned and operated by the Tallahassee Housing Authority (Authority, 2018) in Leon County. The CESC (Connecting Everyone to Second Chances) initiative, "The Dwellings," the region's first small home community, was the main theme of the study. The Dwellings is the nation's first tiny home development devoted to reducing homelessness and the third and last phase in improving homelessness.

4.4.2. Key Findings

Tiny homes and other affordable housing options are in high demand, as seen by the community's full occupancy and waitlist. The Dwellings' layout promotes social interaction amongst residents, with common areas serving as a platform for support systems and relationships. They supported diversity by housing people from a range of age groups and ethnicities.

Nevertheless, even though it was intended to address Tallahassee's lack of reasonably priced housing, by definition, it is not considered affordable, transitional,

or permanent housing. However, they are very keen to offer a range of sizes and prices to accommodate the many kinds of homeless people.

4.4.3. Challenges

Finance is the main obstacle. Few of the towns under examination were able to depend on more reliable revenue streams, including government grants. The Dwellings are fully funded by CESC, a 501(c) (3) business that was established through donations and is still operated using these funds. The Dwellings' original development concept received a lot of negative comments from the neighborhood. The idea of "tiny homes for the homeless" was disputed by nearby residents since, regrettably, homelessness is frequently seen as a detriment to surrounding property values. Several interviewees identified community concerns and financial considerations as obstacles to creating tiny homes for the homeless.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Oregon's homelessness problem is concerning, with numbers sharply rising since COVID-19. It affects people from all walks of life, with men being the most affected. One strategy to further the cause of the right to housing is the construction of tiny homes. The affordability and safety of tiny houses make them a potential answer, but financial difficulties cast doubt on their long-term viability. According to the case studies, tiny homes might be a good temporary fix, but their durability depends on adequate finance and government support. To learn more about how well small homes work to reduce homelessness on a bigger scale, future research should examine the wider social, mental, and environmental effects of these housing units. To ascertain their actual potential to tackle homelessness holistically, more investigation is required.

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