

Homeless woman yearns for warmth, compassion

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NEW BEDFORD — Homeless and nearly destitute, Carol Medeiros finds herself battling debilitating illnesses and the winter's deadly cold.

"I feel as if the homeless and disabled are looked down at," she said, gasping for breath and fighting back tears.

"It's not fair. My life is tough enough being sickly. I'm so tired of struggling."

Ms. Medeiros, 58, has extreme difficulty breathing because she suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, commonly known as COPD. The illness is a combination of two lung diseases: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. In addition, she has asthma and several other serious health issues.

Ms. Medeiros' road to homelessness began with a hospital admission in Fall River.

Before she landed in the hospital, she was embroiled in a dispute with her landlord about her Fall River apartment's poor living conditions.

"My apartment was full of cockroaches," she said. "My ceiling was peeling. The stuff was coming off the walls in my bedroom."

In an attempt to get the building owner to make repairs, she delayed paying her rent, which triggered eviction.

"The next thing you know, I was put out of my house," Ms. Medeiros said, adding she is uncertain about the whereabouts of her clothes and other personal possessions.

"I lost everything," she said.

Out of the hospital with nowhere to go, she landed at Missionaries of Charity, a New Bedford women's shelter. But her stay there is temporary because of a three-week limit.

"I just got notice that I have to be out, so I guess I'll be on the street.

"The sisters that run the shelter are wonderful," she said. "They've been good to me, but the shelter is not home, and I've overextended my stay."

In addition to the three-week stay limit, shelter rules say residents must be out by 8 a.m. and return no earlier than 4 p.m., with lights out at 9.

Wearing all of the clothes she owns, and carrying almost all of her possessions, Ms. Medeiros spends her days at the library or the bus station to stay warm.

"There's snowstorms and rain "; if it's freezing, you're out there," she said.

Ms. Medeiros said it takes great effort for her just to breathe, which robs her of the limited energy she has and leaves her unable to work.

"I can't get around the way I used to get around," she said. "It's hard for me to even walk."

Her sole source of income is the \$700 she receives monthly in Social Security disability. That's not enough, especially since she expects to have to pay her first and last month's rent and a security deposit — never mind food, utilities and other expenses.

Ms. Medeiros said she wants to stay in New Bedford and is trying to get into subsidized housing but so far has had no success.

"I'm trying so hard to get a place to live. What am I to do? Where am I supposed to go?

"Disabled people are human, too," she said. "We hurt like everybody else. Because we're disabled or elderly doesn't mean you can put us in the closet and make us feel we're worthless — we're not."

Your donations to the Neediest Families Fund will go to help people like Ms. Medeiros during the holidays. The goal of this year's campaign is \$125,000.

Monetary contributions can be dropped off at or mailed to The Standard-Times, 25 Elm St., New Bedford, MA 02740, or made online at southcoasttoday.com/neediest.

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