

## JUST WORDS

### The Stories of Working People In Our Community

#### Episode 36: Carla

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Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

We're used to seeing the homeless sleeping on bus benches, or in vestibules that shield them from the wind.

But in rural areas, homeless people often turn towards the woods ...where they live out of makeshift tents and cook on portable grills.

**Carla Reeves was once one of them—she lived in the woods in Elkton Maryland, in Cecil County. She is not homeless anymore, but remains an advocate.**

Well, it's a problem. We have more people than anyone would ever know living

in the woods. And a lot of them they are mentally ill or they are addicted. And there is no services for these people or even if they can get the services maintaining going to appointments- it's a problem. It's a problem. They just can't stay on task enough to where they can get themselves viable. They just can't do it. They need help. I have been doing what I can but we have a greater need. There has to be funding where people can get treatment. The state has medical assistance but even getting these people eligible for medical assistance is a task in itself.

**In 2005, over a thousand people were turned away from shelters in Cecil County. Addiction treatment centers have long waiting lists. And so these people wait, in the woods, and sometimes, end up getting hurt. Some even die of exposure.**

We also had the heat exhaustion and this could trigger a heart attack with health problems. Any of these people could become very ill. I know James Grey had an aneurysm in the woods. We like to have never gotten him help. It's sad. And I think back to another man. He's in jail now as he should be and I am not trying to justify his behavior. He was mentally ill, he needed help, he kept hearing voices. We tried to get him to the fourth floor. We took him to Havre de grace, to their mental ward. And he got released. He was hearing voices. He knew something, he knew he was going to hurt somebody, and he did. It was another homeless man. Again, the services are just not being provided for these people that need services.

**Recently in Elkton, the issue of the homeless living in the woods became a point of fierce contention.**

Well I had gotten a call from another one of my boys. He told me, you got to get down here now, he said, the town is bulldozing our camps and they wont let us in to get our food. And he was in tears and it was just a horrifying experience. So I got there as fast as I could and just to see them taking, removing the items in a dump truck, you know...and they wouldn't even let these men in to get their personal belongings, nothing. They threatened them with jail time if they tried to retrieve their items.

**The American Civil Liberties Union has since filed suit, claiming that the constitutional rights of the homeless people were trampled when the town destroyed their belongings, which included family bibles and photographs, birth certificates, and wedding rings.**

**Carla is look for low-cost or free campers for the homeless in Elkton. If you can help, call her at 410-620-0798**

**Music: Neil Young, *Don't Let it Bring You Down***

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### **The Stories of Working People In Our Community**

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

Through a grant by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore. Visit them on the web at [www.osi-baltimore.org](http://www.osi-baltimore.org).