

Off-road, off-grid: the modern nomads wandering America's back country

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

Brainstorm reasons why people might become homeless and where they might live when they no longer have a home of their own.

Why people might become homeless	Where homeless people might live

2 Key words

a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. ready and able to do something _____ (para 2)
2. someone who belongs to a group of people who move from place to place _____ (para 6)
3. an aim that is very important to someone _____ (para 7)
4. money that someone pays to support an ex-husband or ex-wife _____ (two words, para 9)
5. material used to prevent heat, cold or noise from passing through something _____ (para 11)
6. very useful and important _____ (para 12)
7. keep something (e.g. a vehicle) in good working condition _____ (para 17)
8. respect that other people have for you or that you have for yourself _____ (para 18)
9. being or feeling successful, happy and healthy _____ (para 19)
10. able to quickly become healthy, happy or strong again after a problem _____ (para 20)

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. My new houseplant is _____ on the bright windowsill.
2. More than half of Jeff's money went on _____ to his three former wives.
3. Rescuing donkeys was Gina's _____ in life.
4. When I fell over in the street, I felt I'd lost my _____.
5. The prime minister wasn't very well _____ for the press conference.

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Stevie Trujillo

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- 1 If you look closely on city streets, campsites and public lands in the desert, you'll see more Americans living in vehicles than ever before.
- 2 "I wasn't prepared when I had to move into my SUV*. I had no money saved. I was really scared," said April Craren, 52.
- 3 April became homeless after separating from her husband. "I could have gotten an apartment but in an unsafe place and with no money to do anything at all," she explained.
- 4 April lived in Missouri, where the average rent for a flat was \$762, slightly less than the national average. Like nearly half of American renters, she would have been crippled by the cost.
- 5 It's not surprising, then, that job loss, divorce or a health or financial crisis can lead to homelessness.
- 6 Bob Wells, 65, helped April to adopt the nomad way of life and change her life.
- 7 Bob lives in a van with solar power and a fridge. His life mission is to promote nomadic tribalism in a car, van or RV** as a way to prevent homelessness and live more sustainably.
- 8 Before becoming a nomad in 1995, Bob lived in Alaska, with his wife and two boys. Bob had a job he hated and worked with people he didn't like to buy things he didn't want. He knew he wasn't happy, but it never occurred to him to live differently.
- 9 Then, when he was 40 years old, he got divorced. After paying spousal maintenance and child support, he was taking home \$1,200 a month, \$800 of which went on rent.
- 10 One day he saw a van for sale and thought: "Why don't I buy that van and move into it?" He thought the idea was crazy, but he used his last \$1,500 and bought the van.
- 11 As his finances improved, he put in insulation and got a proper bed. He started working fewer hours and spent more time camping with his kids, which helped him become happier.
- 12 Realizing he had something valuable to share, he bought the domain name Cheap RV Living. He posted tips and tricks about living in a vehicle.
- 13 Many Americans are interested in van life as an answer to the affordable housing crisis, an idea made accessible by Bob on his YouTube channel.
- 14 With 460,000 subscribers, the videos also make him money from ads and links to sales. His most popular video, Living in a Car on \$800 a month, has more than 4m views.
- 15 Bob started the Home on Wheels Alliance (HOWA) charity in 2018. HOWA helps people who can no longer afford traditional housing. It helps them become contributing members of the mobile community.
- 16 Funded by sponsors and donations, HOWA has so far given away seven minivans, two trailers, one school bus and many tents.
- 17 To join HOWA's programme, April had to sign a three-year contract, show she could maintain her vehicle, and put \$200 a month in an account until she had enough money to buy the minivan and get the vehicle title released to her.
- 18 "Most of HOWA's applicants are older women. They're disabled, or retired and divorced, or simply don't earn enough to afford rent," Bob explained. HOWA helps them keep their independence and dignity while also making friends in the nomad community.
- 19 Today, April camps on public land next to Cliff, a nomad and HOWA volunteer. April's lost weight and feels healthier, thanks to eating fresh foods and living a more active outdoor lifestyle. "I'm not just surviving; I'm thriving," she said.
- 20 Bob admits that his solution doesn't address PTSD***, mental illness or drug addiction, three main causes of homelessness – but he does see it as a way to lower our carbon footprint and make ourselves more financially resilient in difficult times ahead.

Glossary

*SUV = sport utility vehicle

** RV = recreational vehicle

*** PTSD = post-traumatic stress disorder

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3 Comprehension check

a. Find the facts.

1. Why did April become homeless?
2. Where did April get the minivan that she lives in?
3. Where does she live now?
4. How does April feel about her new lifestyle?

b. Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Bob became homeless after he lost his job in Alaska. **T / F**
2. Bob has not seen his children since he moved into his van. **T / F**
3. Bob's aim in life is to help other people lead the best alternative lifestyle that they can. **T / F**
4. HOWA offers special help to homeless people with mental health problems. **T / F**

4 Word pairs

a. Match the word to make word pairs from the article.

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| 1. public | a. title |
| 2. child | b. footprint |
| 3. traditional | c. land |
| 4. mobile | d. lifestyle |
| 5. vehicle | e. support |
| 6. outdoor | f. housing |
| 7. carbon | g. community |

b. Which of the word pairs above describe each of these things? Write them next to the definitions a–g.

- a. an official document _____
- b. a way of living _____
- c. environmental damage _____
- d. money _____
- e. a group of people who move about _____
- f. a house or a flat _____
- g. areas of countryside _____

c. Then use the word pairs in sentences of your own.

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5 Discussion

- What are the most difficult things about living in a vehicle, do you think?
- Are people allowed to live in a vehicle in your country?
- Which other alternative ways of living can you think of?
Who is likely to live like this, and why?

6 In your own words

Watch the video from Cheap RV Living: Living in a car on \$800 a month.

Make notes so that you will later be able to retell the information to someone that has not watched the video.

In particular, make notes about:

- the changes Dee has made to her car
- Dee's essential equipment and where she keeps it
- the dangers and discomforts Dee might have to deal with
- the (possibly unexpected) 'comforts and luxuries' Dee has
- Dee's most useful tips
- other questions you would like to ask Dee.