

Opportunity, support keys to end homelessness



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BY JOHNNY WILLIAMS
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Homelessness is a problem that cannot be fixed just by throwing money at it. You can throw money at a fire all day long, and it will never put out the fire. Only helping people to get the things that they missed — i.e. education, job training, and such — will change homelessness. Others just need a place to live cheap and save money for a place of their own.

The homelessness problem can seem so overwhelmingly out of control. There are many services available, but only during certain days and hours. They don't help much.

"Must have" are two words that cause the catch-22s that keep people from getting up. You must have a GED, experience, references, a phone, certification and such. If we want to truly help a person, let's start with those things.

There are some who have multiple issues. Let's say a person has worked as a caregiver, but it has been a while back and the company you worked for didn't require a GED or a CNA. The person, who although has experience, now needs to go through a class and be taught what he already knows, just for a piece of paper. If the person can't get a GED, it's hopeless. Or it seems that way.

The majority of the people who are homeless have had something happen, something that sent their lives into a whirlwind, and they ended up being homeless. I have never heard of a child when asked, "what are your aspirations?" answer with wishing to be homeless and eat out of a garbage can.

What most of society sees as they are going through a day is all the homeless people standing around doing nothing. The problem is most services are too far away to walk to and the times of availability are typically only business hours. People who have lost almost everything will carry everything that they have left on their back to keep from losing it. That in itself is

crippling. Also people who have no money for food will not travel far from where they can eat. So if the self-help classes are not within a small area, it makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to get back and forth between different sides of town, especially if using a shopping cart to carry belongings in. People need a place where they can leave their things, knowing that they are secure.

The stage of homelessness is an obstacle: People find it hard to get up. They start to give up. To understand how a person can become accustomed to being homeless, consider the opposite. That would be institutionalization. At first, you hate being locked up. But after a while, you start to get used to the walls. And with enough time you find that you depend upon them. Being homeless and sleeping on the ground, feeling like no one really cares, it is easy to turn to drinking and such. It helps to hide the pain of knowing that you have no place to sleep but the ground. Or harder yet: Having to watch your spouse lie down and sleep under a bridge can be too much.

You cannot allow the bottom to fall out. Take for example a box, full of very fragile items. If the bottom of this box opens up everything inside will fall out. Starting with the bottom item, all the way to the top. Then you have an empty box and a real mess to clean up. If you allow the homeless to just drop out, it will not be long before the Joneses will find themselves on the bottom — and then onto the streets.

The government cannot afford to completely support everyone. If you want to help someone who has no physical or mental illness, the best way is to educate and/or give them employment opportunities so that they can help support the country, rather than the country support them!

John F. Kennedy said, "Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future." It's time we take responsibility and help the homeless in responsible ways.

The Who Poem

by T.M. Otto

Who will cry
For the mentally ill
Who will share
Their pain
Who will be there
For them
When the world
Turns on them
Who will ever
Erase
The stigma
That they face
It's a daily
Battle
That can never
Be won
Who will lend them
A shoulder
To lean on
When the rest
Just turn away
Who I ask you
Who

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