

Hospitality: Rethink Homelessness

Must There Be Homelessness?

It is reported in Matthew 26:11 and John 12:8 that Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you.” To justify the notion that poverty, hunger, and homelessness cannot be eradicated, stereotypes have been perpetuated about people in these dire circumstances that suggest that they are entirely responsible for their condition and, therefore, deserving of it.

While the homeless as stranger creates significant distance, the negative stereotypes and myths magnify the distance between “us” and “them” and diminish society’s commitment to an ethic of hospitality.

Carolyn Capern observes that, “Homelessness affects more people than you think, for reasons you may not expect.” The responses of society are driven by stereotypes and false perceptions, not reality: “Get a job. Don’t be lazy. Stop doing drugs. You chose to be out here.” These negative perceptions, though false, limit the willingness of community leaders to get involved.



The myths that exist about the homeless become the justification for inaction.

Homeless people are diverse. They include veterans, families, people with mental illness, those suffering from addiction, and the working poor who cannot earn enough to afford housing. People experience homelessness for various lengths of time (short-term, long-term, or “chronic”). There are also those who experience multiple episodes of homelessness (moving between housing and homelessness). Beyond this are those who are on the edge of homelessness. Any of countless misfortunes can result in them becoming homeless. These include 1) losing affordable housing, 2) lack of a living wage, 3) domestic violence, 4) medical bankruptcy, and 5) mental illness.

Ten Myths About the Homeless

- Myth #1: Homeless people are taking advantage of the system.
- Myth #2: Building housing or increasing services brings homeless people to the city (or our state is a magnet for the homeless).
- Myth #3: Homeless people are different. I could not be homeless.
- Myth #4: Nothing can be done.
- Myth #5: People choose or want to be homeless
- Myth #6: Homeless people are criminals.
- Myth #7: Helping the homeless infantilizes them or is “rescuing.”
- Myth #8: It’s cheaper to let people remain homeless rather than spend money on housing.
- Myth #9: Homeless people are lazy.
- Myth #10: We take care of our veterans; very few of the homeless population are veterans.

For the facts, see <https://www.preblestreet.org/in-the-news/myths-about-the-homeless/>

Beyond HELLO

See the unique work of Kristi Blakeway in Vancouver at her website <https://beyondhello.org/> and her TEDx talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yA9xQB547Yo>

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Rethink Homelessness at <https://www.facebook.com/RethinkHomelessness/>

The Campaign to Rethink Homelessness

In 2013, to reveal the diversity and reality of the homeless, the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness (CFCH) worked with CT Social (social media consultants) to develop a social media campaign to invite people to rethink homelessness and mobilize business, government, and community organizations to provide housing and wrap-around services.

The campaign was remarkably simple and remarkably effective. Two CFCH staff members, armed with handheld video cameras, a set of markers, and pieces of cardboard, offered homeless people a piece of cardboard and a marker. These *Cardboard Stories* became their platform to tell one small piece of their story to the community at large.



As Kate Santich reported in the *Orlando Sentinel*, “By the end of May [2017], the officials announced they had actually housed 168 people — all of whom suffer serious physical or mental illnesses that put them at great risk of dying on the street.” This their goal of housing 100 people. The *Rethink Homelessness* website is at <http://rethinkhomelessness.org/>

The following videos provide important insights into who homeless people really are.

Cardboard Stories | Homeless in Orlando (1:23) This was the original video in the Rethink Homelessness campaign. Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THxtcWNw3QA>

Human | Rethink Homelessness Orlando (1:29) Rethink Homelessness asked their homeless neighbors to tell their story. Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLbP-SpXApv>

Homelessness Through a Child’s Eyes-Aryanna’s Story (0:53) Aryanna and her family were stuck in the hotel cycle of homelessness for over 2 years. Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWO2vOpTMfg>

Rethink Homelessness Real Stories: Yanisa (1:19) Yanisa survived domestic violence and homelessness through her art. Link to Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlCcWx7_J_8&list=PLoOrKl_luNphwRApS5ceBIP5U8kpiIKqF&index=4

Kyle’s Story | Rethink Homelessness for our Veterans (2:30) Kyle served in Mosul, Iraq in 2007 when he was injured by an IED. Once home he became aware of how many veterans coming back from war ended up homeless. Link to Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIH9SCLEgE>

Consider

1. Learning more about homelessness in your community.
2. Creating Care Packages and giving them to homeless people or to shelters for distribution. See <http://www.morewithlessmom.com/index.php/2015/11/18/real-deal-care-packages-for-homeless/>
3. Participating in *Project Night Night* for homeless children in your community. Go to <http://www.projectnightnight.org>
4. Contacting organizations working with the homeless in your community to determine how you can help. The following directory may be helpful: <http://nationalhomeless.org/references/directory/>
5. Sharing this page with those you know so they can learn more and decide how they might help.