

Homeless shelter

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Homeless shelters also referred to as "**Rescue Missions**" are a type of homeless service agency which provide temporary residence for homeless individuals and families.^[1] Shelters exist to provide clients with safety and protection from exposure to the weather while simultaneously reducing the environmental impact on the community. They are similar to, but distinguishable from, various types of emergency shelters, which are typically operated for specific circumstances and populations - fleeing natural disasters or abusive social circumstances. Extreme weather conditions create problems similar to disaster management scenarios, and are handled with warming centers, which typically operate for short durations during adverse weather.



The Peachtree-Pine shelter in Atlanta, Georgia

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Hardships of the homeless population

Hundreds of homeless individuals die each year from diseases, untreated medical conditions, lack of nutrition, starvation, and freezing to death. In a mild-wintered San Francisco in 1998, the death rate for homeless people was 58% larger than that of the general population. In New Orleans, approximately 10,000 homeless were unaccounted for after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.^[2]

Clients of homeless shelters may also be exposed to bed bugs which have been growing more prevalent in countries such as the United States, Canada and in Europe.^[3] Some clients of shelters have reported sleeping in roach-infested spaces at various shelters.^[4]

In Washington, D.C., statistics indicate that 63% of homeless people suffer from a lack of access to regular bathing. Another 58% within the same city are unable to obtain sufficient levels of sleep. Areas such as showers and bathrooms in shelters often have restricted access with limited hours.^[5]

Homeless individuals also have great trouble finding storage locations for their belongings.

Homeless individuals in the United States are subject to being arrested and held in jail for "quality of life" violations or for public intoxication.^[6] In Hawaii, homeless people are banned from sitting or lying on the streets.^[7]

LGBT people and homeless shelters

The LGBT homeless are at increased risk of violence compared to other groups.^[8] Transgender people are also at danger of being placed into the incorrect shelters. Transgender women can be turned away from women's shelters since they were born biologically male.^[9] This can place their safety at risk.^[9]

Men and homeless shelters

In a national survey conducted in the United States the findings showed that of the surveyed homeless, two-thirds are men and most likely to be single adults between the ages of 25 and 54.^[10]

One out of every four men experiences domestic violence.^[11] In addition, young men who have been abused as children are more likely to become homeless and are at risk of becoming chronically homeless if they are not living in a permanent situation by age 24.^[12]

Women and homeless shelters

Women are at great risk of both homelessness and poverty because they are most likely to bear child-rearing responsibilities and vulnerable to become victims of family members or "intimate partners."^[13] In a survey conducted in the 2013 showed that in an emergency shelter in Texas, women were the majority population.^[14]

Homeless women, both those with children and without, experience higher rates of physical illness than men.^[15] They are also more likely to be hyper-vigilant and have high levels of stress.^[16] Women seeking refuge from domestic violence are not always able to find rooms in shelters.^[17] Some women have been turned away from homeless shelters because shelter staff believe that turning women away will stop people from having sex inside the shelter.^[18]

Homeless women who are of childbearing age also face unique hygiene issues because of menstruation.^[19] Homeless shelters have noted that both tampons and sanitary pads "top the list of needs at shelters" because of their high cost and because they are not donated often.^[19]

Alternative models and management philosophies

Housing first practice

The homeless shelters across the country act merely as emergency shelter systems that can only hold a fraction of the rapidly increasing homeless population. The Housing First practice provides an alternative to the current network of homeless shelters. The program targets the large problem within the United States which is a lack of affordable housing. This methodology attempts to place homeless families back into independent living situations as quickly as possible. The Housing First practice has achieved success from the fact that homeless families are more responsive to social services support once when they are in their own housing. It provides crisis intervention, affordable rental housing, and gives each family a grace period of six months to a year of social service to allow the family to get back on their feet. The effectiveness of this concept is that it assists homeless families in identifying their needs and recognizing the choices they must make. From this point families can create better options for them and plan strategies for living on their own.^[20]

Empowerment model

Some shelters propose "empowerment models", where instead of serving "clients", they empower "participants". The goal is to become agents in their own futures and destinies.

Such models tend to focus on assisting participants to access their rights and to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. Sometimes this includes contributing financially towards the provision of the shelters they are residing in. In Australia, legislation requires those residing in Government funded shelters to contribute a figure similar to 25% of their own income, in return for support and accommodation. Consequently, many shelters in Australia rely on participant contributions for as much as 20% of their budgets.^[21]

Religious shelters

Another model is Dorothy's Place in Salinas, CA. It is actually a day center which coordinates with multiple church and synagogue congregations to link up to night time shelter opportunities. Dorothy's Place is closely affiliated with faith based community service groups, including the Franciscan Worker and Companions of the Way Interfaith Dharma community. They propose that they are in search of "possibilitarians", a theme resonating with the prominent ministry of "possibility thinking" promoted by Reformed Church of America minister Robert Schuller.

The Rescue Mission in Milwaukee, Minnesota is an extreme example of helping the homeless through religion. In order to receive a free meal at the Rescue Mission, clients must first attend a Christian prayer service.^[22]

The Salvation Army is a social support service organization that also functions as a religious group.^[23] The programs of the Salvation Army are designed to assist women, children, elderly men, families, and those who are battling drug addictions.

Vehicles as shelter

Around the late 2000s, in Santa Barbara and other areas in California, groups of recently homeless began to camp out in their cars in parking lots with the coordinated support of a local non-profit group.^[24] These individuals and families were often unable to afford rent or mortgage, but still had jobs, cars, insurance and other types of support structures.^[24] In Santa Barbara, an estimated 55 individuals camped out every night in various private and public lots, some reserved for women only.^[24] As more people began to camp in their vehicles, California cities began to pass laws against sleeping in vehicles, like the 2013 ordinance passed in Palo Alto.^[25] However, many of these laws in different municipalities were later struck down in higher courts as unconstitutional,^[25] like the Los Angeles ban which was judged by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2014.^[26] Some cities chose to repeal their own bans on sleeping in vehicles.^[25] In Los Angeles in 2015, approximately 9,500 homeless have turned their cars into homes.^[26] In Hawaii, a Honolulu-based company is retrofitting five retired city buses into mobile shelters which provide a place to sleep and get a shower.^[27]

Community attitudes

Community attitude towards homeless shelters varies widely, but one study found that older people, men, homeowners and all people making larger incomes were often adverse to the concept of homeless shelters in general.^[28] Calgary neighborhoods recognize the need for shelters, but many don't want to situate a shelter near their own homes.^[29] A similar response came from residents in Oahu.^[30] In communities such as Portland, Oregon, where the weather can be quite harsh, there is an extensive network of supporters. These operate an informal restaurant, the "Sisters of the Road" cafe, which supports both homeless shelter clientele and also some unsheltered persons. At the opposite end of the spectrum, jurisdictions such as Santa Barbara, California, feature ongoing disputes in an often highly adversarial mode.^[31] Disputes have even reached such schemes as re-arranging benches on city sidewalks to discourage panhandlers. In another 2011 incident, an eight unit supportive housing project which had been approved was called back onto city council agenda the following week in order to allow approximately 35 public comments pro and con, despite the fact that the measure had just been approved.

There have at times been concerns raised about the transmission of diseases in the homeless population housed in shelters, although public health professionals contend that such concerns are inflated.^{[32][33]} In addition, a study published in 2014 conducted in Marseille, France found that respiratory illnesses in homeless shelters were not significantly different from the general population.^[34] In addition, during the peak influenza months, the shelter occupants did not test positive for the flu virus and the researchers hypothesize that being isolated from others may have been the reason they were virus-free.^[34] However, outbreaks of tuberculosis in have been reported occurring in shelters within three large Ohio cities in the 1990s.^[35]

A question has been raised as just how much money donated to the charities that run the shelters actually gets to the homeless people and the required services. In many cases, there is a large overhead in administrative costs, which compromise the money for their homeless clients.^[36]

Internal problems in homeless shelters

There is sometimes corruption and theft by the employees of a shelter as evidenced by a 2011 investigative report by FOX 25 TV in Boston wherein a number of Boston public shelter employees were found stealing large amounts of food over a period of time from the shelter's kitchen for their private use and catering.^{[37][38]} Clients have reported that personal items, such as underwear, was stolen by other residents while they were occupied.^[39]

Shelters can become dangerously overcrowded when too many occupants are allowed entry to the shelter.^[40]

Shelters sometimes are unable to meet state standards for occupancy, such as testing fire sprinklers or ensuring that exits are clearly marked.^[40] In New York city, 2015, the state withheld funding from many shelters which did not meet standards or which had poor conditions.^[41]

Shelter employees are sometimes at risk from violence perpetrated by the clients they are serving.^[42] In order to address problems faced by employees who are trying to help the homeless in New York, the Department of Homeland Security increased security at some shelters and conducted security assessments of shelters in 2015.^[43] While many employees of shelters know that there is a risk when working in high-crime neighborhoods or with individuals who are mentally ill, they continue to work at homeless shelters because they feel that they are performing a public service akin to the police or firefighters.^[43]

External problems of homeless shelters

Several problems emerge when a homeless shelter is present. Homeless shelters have been argued by some to have a negative effect on businesses.^[44] Businesses for years have complained that they frequently witness pedestrians being stopped outside their stores by homeless people begging for money. Such instances have led to the creation of local laws that prohibit "aggressive panhandling." Another problem is that it is often difficult to decide on where a homeless shelter should be built and how to zone the area where a shelter can be built.^[45] Neighborhoods, as well as schools, argue that homeless shelters bring in bad elements to their surroundings. There are additionally far too many shelters that have become nothing but housing facilities; they fail to provide job training or education that would assist the homeless population with gaining their own housing. Housing through homeless shelters offers no lasting solutions, just temporary ones. Drugs and alcohol also tend to surround homeless shelters. Most shelters prohibit residential use of illegal drugs and alcohol, but enforcement is sporadic in many locations. Lastly, no classification system for shelters has been put into effect. There are no mechanisms or facilities to separate those who have mental illnesses from the rest of the shelter population.^[46]

United States

In the United States, the "shelter movement" began to grow significantly during the 1970s when there was a high rate of unemployment, housing costs were rising and individuals with severe mental illnesses were being deinstitutionalized.^[13] In the 1980s, homelessness was becoming a "national epidemic" in the United States and helping professionals created shelters as "temporary havens."^[47] Shelter occupation had more than doubled by the late 1980s and it doubled again by 2000.^[47] Statistics from 2011 show that "on a given night in January 2010, 407,966 individuals were housed inside homeless shelters, transitional housing or on the streets."^[48]

Homeless shelters need to provide a variety of services to diverse clients. Homeless shelters, like La Posada Providencia in San Benito, Texas, may also house asylum seekers, mainly from Mexico, Central America and South America.^[49] Shelters also provide outreach to clients who are unable to use a shelter or who choose not to use a shelter.^[50] Outreach may include providing clothing for cold weather or food.

Most shelters typically expect clients to exit in the morning and occupy themselves elsewhere during the day, returning for an evening meal and to sleep. During times of inclement weather, shelters may provide services outside of their normal hours.^[51] Curfews vary widely but tend to be at an earlier hour than adults typically might return to a home. There are also daytime-only homeless shelters, where the homeless can go when they cannot stay inside at their night time sleeping shelter during the day. Such an early model of a daytime homeless shelter providing multi-faceted services is Saint Francis House in Boston, Massachusetts which was officially founded in 1984. It was based on the settlement house, clubhouse and community center support and social service models.

In the United States, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has shown in recent studies that about 5 million Americans qualify to use homeless shelters. As poverty levels continue to rise, it is estimated that the number of homeless shelters, in particular in the United States, will continue to rise.^[52] Based on a survey of 24 U.S. cities the average stay in a homeless shelter was found to be on average about seven months out of the year.^[53]

Statistics of homeless population within the United States

A study by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimates that 2.3 to 3.5 million Americans experience homelessness annually. Alaska, California, Nevada, Oregon, Colorado, and Hawaii are the states with the highest concentration of homeless people. Around 1.5 million children or one of out every 50 children in America are homeless. Many Americans suffer from the state of "chronic homelessness," which is where an individual has a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for over a year or has been homeless on at least four different instances within four years. About 23% of the homeless population has been tagged as "chronic homeless." Veterans also represent close to 40% of homeless men within the United States. Racial demographics of the Homeless Population of the United States can be represented as:

- Whites: 39%
- African-Americans: 42%
- Hispanics: 13%
- Native Americans: 4%
- Asians: 2%

Approximately 40% of all homeless youth in the United States identify as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender).^[8] In San Francisco, approximately 29% of all the homeless in that city are on the LGBT spectrum.^[54] The National Center for Transgender Equality reports that 1 in 5 transgender individuals has experienced being homeless at least once in their lives.^[55]

Pet ownership among the homeless varies, but estimates indicate that about 5 and 10 percent of the homeless in the United States have a pet.^[56]

Homelessness appears to be largely concentrated within urban areas. Central cities hold 71% of the homeless population while the suburbs have 21% of the homeless population. Only 9% of the homeless class can be located within rural areas.

Operations and role in U.S. society

Homeless shelters are usually operated by a non-profit agency or a municipal agency, or are associated with a church. They almost always have Section 501(c)3 corporate organization with a Board of Directors pulled from various sectors of the community. Often, such Boards include clergy, elected officials, and even shelter clientele and people from the surrounding community.

Shelters which are funded by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) require clients to have identification.^[57]

Homeless shelters often provide other services to the community at large. The classic example is the soup kitchen for persons who are not staying at the shelter. Others include support groups, and/or substance abuse treatment. If they do not offer any of these services, they can usually refer their clients to agencies that do. Supportive housing integrates services in a more assertive fashion. The typical pathway through the interlocking system is that a person may start in a shelter and move through transitional housing into supportive housing and finally independent housing.

Centers in the United States are also often coordinated with outside programs both for their mission-specific operations and for ancillary services. For communication of their availability, most coordinate with the Federally mandated 2-1-1 or the 3-1-1 phone information system which allow needy persons to find out where shelters are located. For transportation to shelters, some offer free transportation,^[15] particularly in cases of persons being released from jail. Some jails have specific staff assigned to placement of persons being released.

List of national organizations in the U.S supporting homeless shelters

Across the United States there are several national organizations that assist in the founding and the upkeep of homeless shelters. The main national organizations are:

- The National Alliance to End Homelessness
- The Salvation Army
- The National Coalition for the Homeless
- The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (United Way)
- The Department of Veterans Affairs
- Feeding America
- Housing Assistance Council
- Help USA.^[58]

United States Libraries

Homeless shelters often work with other organizations in order to support and help the homeless improve their situations, including libraries.^[59] They often work with the coalition to grant a temporary library card for homeless coalition members who can use a shelter as a local address. This is intending to give new patrons the opportunity to utilize the computer services, books, programs, and more that the library offers.^[60]

Government assistance programs in the United States

Homeless individuals within the United States are assisted through various Federal programs. Examples include the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSD) and the Social Security Supplemental Income (SSI) programs. Such applicants may qualify through their medical records. The Social Security Disability Insurance service extends benefits to families if they have earned sufficient work "credits." The Social Security Supplemental Income service offers financial assistance towards individuals in need who are disabled, blind or elderly.

HUD estimates that it costs \$60,000 each year to house a homeless family in a shelter.^[61] Because of this, HUD has various programs in place to help families, including rapid rehousing and permanent housing vouchers.^[61] Housing vouchers from HUD are considered especially important for helping to prevent families with children from becoming homeless and also to help these families be able to leave the shelter system permanently.^[62]

The Department of Veterans Affairs is solely aimed at helping homeless veterans. Although this organization assists a specific concentration of individuals, it currently constitutes the largest network of homeless treatment within the United States.

Other countries

Australia

In Australia, due to government funding requirements, most homelessness services fill the role of both daytime and night time shelters. Shelters develop empowerment based "wrap around" services in which clients are case managed and supported in their efforts to become self-reliant. An example of such a service provider in this area in Australia is Najidah.

Youth refuges in Australia provide both a residential setting for crisis accommodation as well as case management to assist young people to live independently. Youth refuges are a relatively new form of homeless shelters. In New South Wales the early refuges include Caretakers Cottage, Young People's Refuge, Taldamunde Youth Services, all founded in the mid-1970s.^[63]

Canada

Canada has an estimated homeless population somewhere between 150,000 and 300,000 people as reported in 2014.^[64] Canada has responded to an increase in homelessness by increasing the amount of shelter space available to individuals.^[29] A study done in Canada also found that individuals entering shelters and drop-in centers experienced a loss of their own sense of personhood.^[65] Therapeutic Conversation therapy has been tested and found successful in Calgary with a small group of homeless shelter residents in improving their mental health outcomes.^[65] Calgary has seen an increase in the amount of homelessness, partly due to the "lack of affordable rental units."^[66]

A nationwide volunteer group in Canada, the Angels in the Night, sponsored by Invis-Mortgage Intelligence, donates cold-weather clothes and other supplies to the homeless, visiting shelters and individuals on the streets.^[67]

In 2015, Clean the World began a Canadian Operations Center in Montreal order to supply soap for homeless shelters.^[68] Clean the World distributes and recycles hygiene supplies such as soap and shampoo.^[68]

China

In China, homeless estimates vary, since the Social Welfare Department does not consider those living in temporary shelters to be "homeless."^[69] There may be approximately 1 to 1.5 million homeless children who have left their families because of extreme poverty, family issues or abuse.^[70]

In the city of Dali, there is an annual conference for "beggars."^[71] In 2014, a government-sponsored shelter in Henan province which houses 20 homeless individuals was under scrutiny for tying children to trees and providing inadequate sleeping areas.^[72]

India

India defines homelessness as not being in residence of a "census house" which must be a structure with a roof.^[73]

In India, youth can become homeless because of child abandonment.^[74] Youth in Jammu and Kashmir who live in shelters reported high prevalence of emotional and physical abuse, and emotional and physical neglect while living in homeless shelters.^[74]

Homeless individuals and families in India face challenges accessing water and hygiene services. A 2011 Census of India found that safe drinking water coverage in urban areas is at 91.9% while regular sanitation access is at 81.4%.^[73] There is a significant lack of housing in major urban areas in India.^[75] People come from the rural part of India to look for work and when there are no accommodations for housing build their own shelters, often known as "hutments."^[76]

Statistics of homeless population within India

It is estimated that there are between 100 million and 1 billion homeless individuals in India.^[74] In India, the cities with the greatest amount of homeless individuals and families are Greater Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Bangalore.^[75]

Japan

The amount of homeless individuals in Japan as recorded in 2003, was around 25,296.^[77] Numbers of those without homes have been "increasing dramatically" since the "bubble economy" collapsed in the 1990s.^[78] In Tokyo, around 2007, many homeless individuals were cleared out of their temporary residences in city parks.^[79] In 2011, the earthquake and tsunami left many individuals homeless and living in shelters.^[80]

United Kingdom

"Sleeping rough" or "Rough sleeping" is used as terminology in the United Kingdom to describe individuals who are forced to sleep without shelter.^[81] In addition, "not all homeless people are entitled to housing."^[81] Shelter like Jimmy's provide access to those who would otherwise be "sleeping rough." Jimmy's is located in the basement of a Baptist Church in a "university city."^[82]

See also

- Extreme poverty
- Social programs
- Mole People
- Human rights
- Ali Forney Center
- Food bank
- Four penny coffin
- Homelessness
- Horizon House
- Old Brewery Mission
- Penny sit-up
- Food Not Bombs
- Soup kitchen
- Seaton House
- Warming center
- Hopelink
- Le Bon Dieu Dans La Rue (Dans La Rue)
- Hotel de Gink
- Survivalism
- Survival skills
- Emergency management
- Civil defense
- Cooling center

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