



For the Homeless, Disability is a Life Sentence, Not a Lazy Excuse

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According to the National Coalition for Homelessness, of the 564,708 people who are homeless in the United States, 47.6%, or 269,991, are disabled and unable to work (2018). This population has been growing significantly over the last decade, as in 2008, the percentage was only 42.8% (Diament, 2009). These people are arguably in need of more help than an abled person who does not have housing. They have fewer job prospects, are extremely vulnerable, and require access to health care.

It is very difficult to work while being disabled, whether for physical or mental reasons. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only one in five disabled people are in the labor force (Belser, 2010). This low participation rate is most likely caused by health insurance. A physically disabled person's health care costs are much higher than they could possibly earn from a job, and they receive far more useful benefits from Medicare and Medicaid (Belser, 2010). Mentally disabled individuals, on the other hand, do not receive as many benefits, and therefore suffer.

One common critique of the disabled homeless is: "if they can't work, why aren't they supported by Social Security checks?" The truth is: while many have signed up for federal disability support, the application process is extremely long. It can take a maximum of six months to file a denial claim, and another five hundred

days for the first appeal (Shay, 2017). During this nearly 2 ½ year process, the disabled are left unemployed without an income, and thus, cannot pay rent or afford daily necessities. Also, many are disabled by mental illnesses that alter their state of reality. Because of this, they are not mentally sound enough to sign up for such programs. If they are unaware that Social Security exists, they will never receive the support they need.

There have been many programs designed to solve the disabled homeless crisis. The use of Vulnerability Indexes, for example, has been a promising tool for cities to locate populations in need. First utilized in New York City and Los Angeles, Vulnerability Indexes collect data by surveying people who are actually living on the streets (Jean, 2010). Based on their responses to the survey, they are then ranked by how in danger they are of dying within the next 12 months. Those who are considered extremely vulnerable are seen as more of a priority for housing and services, and are given the assistance they require (Jean, 2010). This program could be beneficial to communities across our nation because they pinpoint the people who are in dire need of help. Many of the disabled homeless are so sick or injured that they cannot find resources themselves, so it is crucial that others locate them before it is too late.

Some may also argue that there are disabled non-homeless people who also need our help and should not be excluded from possible reform programs. While this is a true fact, the proportion of disabled citizens in the general population is only 17.7% (Diament, 2009). There are several possible causes for this disparity. The risk of being impoverished is very high in the disabled community, as many rely on miniscule Supplemental Security Income payments (Diament, 2009). While it is important to help out everyone we can, some populations are in need of more assistance than others. The disabled homeless are unfortunately defenseless and fighting for their lives.

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