



The Invisible People

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Around the United States there is a new type of homelessness population on the rise. They are the working homeless. They work often full-time jobs, yet they have nowhere to go because of the steep housing prices. Many of these people live in cities where the wages can't keep up with the steady increase in housing costs. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, renters need to earn a wage of at least \$21.21 per hour to afford a two-bedroom house in the U.S. The average hourly wage for renters is \$16.38.

Axios reports that the working homeless are often an invisible population. Cities don't typically keep track of their homeless population with employment, and the federal government simply does not collect enough data to show the full scale of the working homeless issue. Megan Hustings, the director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, says that the statistics could be as high as 40-60% of the homeless population in America hold at least some type of employment for various amounts of time.

A 2017 report of the homeless population in metropolitan Washington D.C. showed that out of the homeless population 22% of the single adults surveyed had some kind of employment. 32% of adults with families had some sort of employment as well. Among these homeless families 44% say that their primary source of income comes from their employment, yet these families are still living in shelters and hotels because wages aren't enough to cover housing costs and the other expenses that they need for basic needs.

In New York City the Center for Urban Community Services is trying to expand services to help the working homeless. They have a \$33 million contract to reduce street homelessness in Manhattan. To get this contract they had to broaden their definition of homelessness, often they would only focus on those who were chronically homeless. The organization is opening more shelters and adding more beds. They even have staff at the shelters who work to help with finding employment.

The nonprofit organization called Invisible People interviewed a man on their YouTube channel named Eric. Eric is one of the working homeless in Traverse City, Michigan who works a full-time job as a cook in a restaurant. Between the high cost of living and the other obligations that he has, such as child support, Eric is unable to afford rent and lives in shelters and on the street. In the winter he stays at an emergency shelter. Unfortunately, the emergency shelters are typically set up for those who are chronically homeless and not those who work full time jobs, especially those who work second and third shifts. Many times, Eric would get to the shelter after midnight and not be allowed to shower, or only receive one blanket. He also often had to eat at work because he would get there too late. After getting in at midnight or 1 in the morning, and sometimes after not falling asleep until 2, he would have to be up by 7 because everyone had to be out of the shelter at 8 the next morning. Despite his situation, Eric remains optimistic about the future and hopes to run one of the restaurants that the company he works for owns.

All over our country there are many people like Eric who work full time but can't afford housing because of the cost of living. Because these working homeless are often overlooked many people don't even know that they exist. We need to bring awareness to these invisible people of the homeless population, because everyone deserves to have their voice heard. No one deserves to be invisible.

Sources:

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