



A Growing Homeless Epidemic in a Land of Wealth

by Brett T. Mazzoni

Palm Springs, California has long been known as a winter playground for the wealthy, a place where celebrities vacation. It is a town located in Southern California where former presidents have retired to spend the rest of their days playing golf. It is the only place in the country where the entire city council is made up entirely of gay or transgender men and women. The shops located downtown carry the most expensive and fashionable of brands, not to mention bars and restaurants galore. However; there is a dark side to the glamour and diversity of the city, a growing problem that is ignored in Palm Springs and surrounding areas and that is the number of those who are homeless is rapidly growing.

In April 2017, KESQ CBS Local News reported that according to The Point-In-Time Homeless Count Data Report Summary, an annual study conducted by Riverside County that counts the number of homeless throughout the county found that, the homeless population in Palm Springs increased 66 percent in one year, and throughout the county as a whole, the population increased by 11.45 percent from 2016 to 2017. The report also revealed The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition, a nonprofit organization which helps low-income earners find affordable housing reported that nearly 423 students throughout the Coachella Valley are homeless or is at severe risk of being homeless. As the number of those in need of help grows, the resources available to them are drying up.

The only emergency shelter in the area which was once the 90-bed Roy's Desert Resource Center in Palm Springs, closed its doors permanently in June of last year due to a lack in funding, leaving many without a place to stay and overwhelming the other shelters in the area who are forced to turn people away due to a lack of resources and beds. It's said that money which was given to Roy's and other shelters by cities and the county could be better used to assist the homeless with finding permanent housing, though the number of those who are camping in parks and sleeping on bus benches continues to grow. Travel thirty minutes east

down California State Highway 111 into Palm Desert, another city where there is a considerable amount of wealth and you will find people on the corners and near shopping centers asking for help and for food. For months, an entire family stood on the corner of Highway 111 and the Desert Crossing Shopping Center asking for help.

The increase in homelessness in an area with so much wealth all around may be due to a lack of funding and resources, but why? Are those who can afford to help greedy or not interested in helping those in need? Or is it due to how we as a society view the homeless population? Far too often, one can travel in this area and hear people referring to those on the streets as “bums”. They also say things such as these people are all drug addicts, drunks and that they’re lazy. Shop owners in Palm Springs often say such things and complain that the homeless are “dirtying up” the town. We often forget that many of those living on the streets are down on their luck and are unemployed, not because they’re lazy but because they lost their jobs and with the cost of living so high in the Palm Springs region, minimum wage can’t pay the high rent and all of life’s expenses. We also forget that many of these people suffer from mental illness and they have nobody to care for them.

For an area that is so accepting of diversity, especially the LGBT community and with so much wealth, it’s unacceptable for so many to be homeless. Perhaps the homeless epidemic in such a lucrative area can shed light on the bigger picture which is the number of homeless throughout the United States. Whether it’s a city and the surrounding area that is wealthy or the wealthiest nation in the world, we as a society can be viewed by how we treat those who are less fortunate and the record shows that we don’t treat them very well.

<http://www.kesq.com/news/data-shows-homeless-count-increased-by-66-in-palm-springs-over-last-year/448203147>

<http://dpss.co.riverside.ca.us/files/pdf/2017-rivco-pit-city-data-v2a.pdf>

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/health/2017/02/17/roys-coachella-valley-homeless-shelter/97944944/>

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2016/06/27/homeless-issue-downtown-palm-springs-businesses/85725090/>