



## Disability & Homelessness

By: Ashley Bleoaja

There are many who wish for a world where no child will go hungry. A world where the ill are taken care of. Where those who are helpless receive an outstretched arm. But this fantasy is far from reality. In the United States of America alone, over 554,000 people sleep with no roof over their heads. 554,000 people have no shelter from the heavy rains or scorching heat. No guarantee that they will have food in their stomach the next morning when they lie down to sleep. 554,000 people in America are reported to be homeless. However, even more tragic, more than forty percent of the homeless population struggle with a disability. This number has been on a rise for the past decade. According to the DisabilityScoop, “Just 17.7 percent of the general adult population reports having a disability meaning that a significantly larger percentage of people with disabilities are homeless compared to the rest of the population”.

Studies show that the links between poverty, risk of homelessness and living with disabilities have been well documented. Those who live with disabilities are often marginalized and do not receive the proper care they need. Due to their incapacity to work “normal jobs”, much of the disabled population lives in poverty. According to the NPR, a United States citizen who has a disability is twice as likely to be underprivileged than someone without a disability. Furthermore, that individual is also more unlikely to be unemployed. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act which was intended to ban discrimination based on disability and ensure equal opportunity in employment — as well as government services and public accommodations, commercial facilities and public transportation. However, the ADA has not always stayed true to its intent.

Few are quick to deny the issue of homelessness in America. However, the process of ending homelessness is far from simple. Some have offered suggestions as to how to take people off the streets and

place them in housing while offering them assistance and employment. Even modest successes in ending homelessness are overwhelmed by the increasing number of individuals and families entering that state of crisis. In ending an issue, it is most important to discover the cause of the problem and begin the restoration process at the source. Prevention may very well be the solution. Especially in the disabled community, it is vital to offer the resources and assistance people need to stay off the streets. The Huffington Post once wrote on this issue by saying, “Prevention will require a big view that can look across multiple systems—housing, healthcare, homelessness, education, child welfare, criminal justice, employment, and many others—to identify pathways into homelessness, then design solutions that catch people before they fall.” This work will neither be easy nor simple, but it will well be worth it.

Our communities are important. Our veterans, our elders, our children, the disabled in our neighborhoods and cities are the building blocks to a stronger society, a stronger country, a stronger “us”. It is time we take the stand and put in the work to end homelessness and ensure safety and wellbeing for every American citizen.

**Resources:**

Huffington Post, 4 Simple Ways to End Homelessness, Jeff Olivet

NPR, Why Disability And Poverty Still Go Hand In Hand 25 Years After Landmark Law, Pam Fessler

HomelessHub, People with Disabilities, N/A

DisabilityScoop, More Than Two-Fifths Of Homeless Have Disabilities, Michelle Diament