

As if I Were Invisible

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In society, we are almost *trained* to avoid eye contact with the homeless. The average person on the street will more likely ignore a homeless person than stop and donate some change. However, that percentage of samaritans increases if the homeless person is visibly disabled. Disabled people are seen as more deserving of our help because they are less capable to take care of themselves. So, why are they left to fend for themselves on the streets?

When someone becomes disabled, it can cause them to lose their job. If the individual does not live alone or has family that will take them in, they then become reliant on their caregivers. Yet for individuals without people to rely on, losing their job means they have no way of earning stable income. Instead, they must rely on government-funded SSI (Supplementary Security Income) to pay for their basic needs, such as housing and food. However, it is definitely impossible to survive on this payment alone.

The average annual SSI payment per person in 2009 was \$6,048, but the poverty rate for a one-person household is \$10,830. This means the payment received by disabled individuals is around 44% under the poverty rate, directly translating into being unable to afford both food and rent. They are unable to work because of their disability, be it physical or mental, and they are forced to rely on payment from the government. So, when this payment is insufficient, they have nowhere to go but the streets.

In addition to being forced to choose between rent and food, housing options for these individuals are also very limited. Since they are trying to save money, they cannot afford highly-priced apartments and homes. However, the lower the rent, the lower the quality and benefits of

the establishment. An example of a limitation would be: a person in a wheelchair cannot rent a room on any floor above the first in a building without an elevator.

Even more, the disabled often have *special* housing needs, such as showers with handrails and stoves low enough to be accessed by those in wheelchairs. This means they need to spend longer to search for a home that matches all their criteria for them to be able to live comfortably. It will be rare to find a match, and even rarer to find a match within their price range. Furthermore, houses that meet their needs will likely be higher priced, once again forcing them to choose between paying rent or for food. These special needs further limit their housing options and leave them vulnerable to not being able to find a home at all.

A solution for this problem would be to open more facilities to help the disabled population. The building should be easily accessible with wheelchair ramps with signs written in both English and Braille. The workers must answer calls and emails for all working hours in the day to support the disabled population, which is over 40% of the homeless population in America. The government needs to pay more attention to the disabled citizens who are—and have been—in dire need of assistance.

References

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