

Barriers & Solutions for Eradicating the Institution of Homelessness

These barriers (in parenthesis throughout the document) have largely been compiled from the actual statements of 100s of currently and formerly homeless people, who were interviewed from 2001-2004 as part of Sisters' Research Project. The solutions are the Research Team's formulation of ideas of possible actions that could be taken by the community in general to address these stated barriers.

Group #1 – Services should be easily accessible (Barriers to Accessing Services)

1. **Ensure services are easy to access without red tape or hoops to jump through (Barrier = Red Tape and Hoops)** The high amount of paper work, approval processes, and forms that homeless people have to complete in order to get services and access to housing (both temporary and long-term).
2. **Fund services to the level they are effective for ending homelessness (Barrier = Scarce Resources within Organizations)** The lack of resources including informed personnel, training, time, and funding within service organizations whose mission it is to help the poor and/or homeless.
3. **Ensure staff are trained, informed and welcoming at all homeless service organizations**
4. **Make services easy to access by putting them in close proximity to each other (Barrier = Decentralized Services)** Homeless people seeking help expend precious time traveling to many uncoordinated service providers, waiting in lines, and filling out redundant paperwork. This slows down the process of ending homelessness and often results in homeless people getting incomplete, contradictory, or misleading information
5. **Support services in working collaboratively & (safely, respectfully) sharing information (Barrier = lack of collaboration and too much redundant paperwork)**
6. **Advocate for full-effective funding in public assistance for those that rely on it (Barrier = Decline in Public Assistance)** The declining value and availability of public assistance is another barrier to ending poverty and homelessness. This is at the federal, state and local levels and is linked to, or maybe results from 11, 12 and 13 below.

In the Institute for Children and Poverty study, 37% of homeless families had their welfare benefits reduced or cut in the last year. More strikingly, in Bucks County and Philadelphia, PA, and Seattle, WA, more than 50% had their benefits reduced or cut...Among those who lost their benefits, 20% said they became homeless as a direct result. Additionally, a second study of six states found that between 1997 and 1998, 25% of families who had stopped receiving welfare in the last six months doubled-up on housing to save money, and 23% moved because they could not pay rent. (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2001).

7. **Ensure that those who should be on SSI are on SSI (Social Security) – (Barrier = Difficulty getting on SSI and Social Security)**

8. **Ensure affordable healthcare for all is a high priority for all progressive politicians and the general public (Barrier: Unaffordable Healthcare)** Lack of affordable access to healthcare both forces people into homelessness and perpetuates it. For families and individuals struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction. (National Coalition for the Homeless.) Costly emergency care consumes precious public resources that could otherwise go towards directly ending homelessness.

Group #2 – Ensure Employment & Training Opportunities for those who are able to work (Barriers to Employment)

1. **Support Livable Wage Employers and Only Contract with those Organizations providing a Livable Wage to Employees (Barrier = Low Wages)** Existing entry-level wages and the jobs that offer them are inadequate to enable homeless people to escape the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

“Fully 30 million Americans - one in four U.S. workers - earn \$8.70 an hour or less, a rate that works out to \$18,100 a year, which is the current official poverty level in the United States for a family of four. These low-wage jobs usually lack health care, childcare, pensions and vacation benefits. The working conditions are often grueling, dangerous, even humiliating.”
Beth Schulman - The Washington Post

2. **Connect people experiencing homelessness with available jobs (Barrier = Lack of Jobs)** There is an insufficient and decreasing number of jobs (at any rate of pay) available to the homeless people who seek them.
3. **Advocate and support jobs for people who have previously been incarcerated. (Barrier = Previous Incarceration)** Having been convicted of a crime and served time in jail creates barriers to entering the job market and gaining housing.
4. **Advocate for a economic system that allows all people to thrive, not just a few. (Barrier = Economic System)** Over accumulation of capital in the hands of a few corporations promotes profit over the public good.
5. **Provide access to education for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness (Barrier = Insufficient Education)** Many homeless people lack the basic educational skills for employment like reading, writing and math ability.
6. **Provide support for learning employable skills and capabilities (Barrier: Lack of Skills and Capabilities)** Homeless and poor people frequently cite a lack of the employable skills and capabilities that would make them eligible for jobs.

Group #3 – Clear the Path to Accessing Housing (Barriers to Accessing Housing)

1. **Fund new affordable housing and protect existing units! (Barrier = Lack of Housing Units)** There is a shortage in low-income housing within our county and city. The gap between the number of affordable housing units and the number of people needing them has created a housing crisis for poor people.

2. **Work to make sure housing costs are kept affordable in general (Barrier = Cost of Housing/Rentals)** Many, many people are not able to afford current housing prices in Portland, Oregon.
3. **Make it illegal for landlords to discriminate based on irrelevant previous incarcerations and Work with landlords to rent to individuals and families with irrelevant previous incarcerations (Barrier = Previous Incarceration)** Having been convicted of a crime and been in jail creates barriers to entering the job market and to gaining housing.

Group #4 – Don't blame poor people for being poor (Barriers Caused by Prejudice and Fear)

1. **Work to end stereotyping of people who are homeless by sharing stories in the media and creating venues for cross-class dialogue (Barrier = Biases and Stereotypes)** Homeless people are hindered by all the preconceived, negative, and untrue notions about them and about the causes of homelessness. (Police harassment and profiling of homeless people are included in this category.)
2. **Educate policy makers, advocates as well as the general public on the systemic causes and the truth of why there is an epidemic of homelessness (Barrier = Ignorance about the root causes of Homelessness)** Not understanding the causes of homelessness, the scope of the problem, and the barriers to ending homelessness create additional and difficult barriers.
3. **Stop criminalizing (ticketing, harassing, moving them around) people for being poor (Barrier = Criminalization of Homeless People)** Laws and ordinances have been and are being passed that unjustly penalize the homeless population. This includes anti-camping, anti-panhandling, and sit-lie.

Group #5 – Make Ending Homelessness a City/National Priority (Barriers Caused by Lack of Prioritization of Issues Causing Homelessness)

1. **Create/increase the general public's and the policy makers' will to end homelessness (Barrier = Lack of Political Will to End Homelessness)** The failure of government to make ending homelessness a priority greatly hampers its solution.
2. **Ensure ending homelessness is high on the agenda for all progressive policy makers (Barrier = housing is not a priority for many candidates)**
3. **Involve those with experience with homelessness in the community, in creating solutions to end homelessness and in other policy making that affects them (Barrier = lack of involvement by those with experience with homelessness - lack of invitations to the table, lack of valuing their input and lack of support for them to be at the table)**

Group #6 – Ensure that a Person's Personal History does not keep them in Homelessness forever (Barriers Related to Personal History)

1. **Provide funding for services for people ready to begin recovery from their addictions (Barrier = Addictive Disorders)** Drug and alcohol abuse and addiction interfere with ending

homelessness. Many people who are addicted to alcohol and drugs do not become homeless, but people who are poor and addicted are clearly at increased risk of homelessness.

2. **Provide safety, housing & financial and social supports to families leaving domestic violence (Barrier = Domestic Violence)** Emerging from a background of domestic violence is a barrier to ending homelessness. In addition, battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness.
3. **Provide free, accessible mental health counseling (Barrier = Family Background Issues)** Many homeless people are effectively handicapped by family of origin issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, physical and mental abuse, abandonment, absenteeism, etc.
4. **Make a place for more diverse backgrounds in general** – Minimize barriers to full social involvement (employment, etc.) for those with different backgrounds, physical health and mental health. Increase awareness of and change the middle class values that we use to evaluate people and things. Use a more wide ranging and reality based set of values so more people can participate fully.

Group #7– Ensure people have access to community and positive interactions while they are experiencing homelessness (Barriers to Wholeness)

1. **Provide places of community, dignity and respect for people experiencing homelessness (Barrier = Self Limiting Beliefs)** Many homeless people buy into the perceptions of others that they are not valued members of society.
2. **Work with the media and the general public to ensure our community cares about and sees people who are homeless (Barrier = media that does not accurately portray the epidemic of homelessness)**
3. **Share power and responsibility (Barrier = Systems set up on charity and entitlements)**– create and support barter programs in which people can participate in dignified work to meet their basic needs without taking away from their ability to seek affordable housing or employment at a livable wage.
4. **Evaluate and fund service providers based in evaluations by the homeless themselves (Barrier = Homeless Provider and “Client” Interactions that are disempowering)** Services are provided in a way that degrades and disrespects the dignity of the person. Service providers often treat people seeking services as though they are not important. Many service agencies use a charity model, but this approach can make homeless people feel like victims or start believing that they are owed. Religious requirements made by faith-based service providers, such as listening to a sermon before receiving a meal, sometimes creates resentment. Sometimes people who are homeless experience damage to their self esteem from interacting with service providers. They start asking themselves, “Why do they treat me like a criminal or make me humiliate myself to get basic services?” or “Why does everyone make my life miserable while I wait for housing?”