



United Way
Perth-Huron

HOMELESSNESS MYTHS

Misinformation about homelessness is problematic because it contributes to the stigmatization of a population that is already marginalized.

Here are six of the many misconceptions about homelessness, compared to the realities for people who are experiencing homelessness.

1 *Myth: People choose to be homeless.*

Fact: Many factors can contribute to an individual's experience of homelessness. Often, people experience homelessness when all other options have been exhausted and/or they are dealing with circumstances that make it difficult to maintain housing. Obstacles include housing costs being beyond their income (part-time/minimum wage), coping with mental health or living with addictions.

Trying to survive

Jamie found himself locked out of his home without access to his children. He had been training for five weeks to cope with employment barriers, unfortunately his wife lost patience so he was out on the street. Jamie couch surfed with friends for a couple weeks but he was running out of options. Unable to shower regularly and with just a few clothes, Jamie stopped attending class to concentrate on survival. His social assistance wasn't enough for rent and he knew that with his mild disability, immediate employment didn't seem likely. Alone, depressed and caught in a circle of poverty and homelessness, Jamie was convinced he would never see his children again.

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2 Myth: People experiencing homelessness are lazy

FACT: In order to survive, many people who experience homelessness are constantly in search of the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter and a source of income. Just surviving can take a good portion of their day, leaving little time for laziness.

3 Myth: People who experience homelessness are addicts

FACT: Just like in the general population, only a percentage of those experiencing homelessness deal with addictions. People experiencing homelessness may deal with other issues related to their experiences of homelessness including trauma and mental illness.

4 Myth: People experiencing homelessness should just get a job

Fact: It is difficult to find a job while experiencing homelessness. Access to a phone, computer, fixed address and transportation make it difficult to reach out to employers. Regular access to showers is also a huge barrier. It is also important to recognize there are many employed people who are homeless because they earn a minimum wage and/or only work part-time, making housing an impossibility.

5 Myth: There are already adequate supports for those experiencing homelessness

Fact: Many supports are focused on emergency services such as shelters and food banks. For individuals to move beyond the cycle of poverty, there needs to be a focus on the bigger picture of affordable housing and an extended support system to help ensure a successful tenancy.

6 Myth: Property values will go down if we let affordable housing into our neighbourhoods

Fact: Housing prices remain high and there is no evidence to support this myth. Neighbours can be difficult or easy to live with and usually a new tenant with supports in place will prove to be the latter.