



Volunteer

The aging homeless population

Picture your grandmother. Gnarled, spotted hands creak, pull an ancient scarf down over wisps of white hair. Cataract eyes peer through cloudy glass, gaze into yours through imagined years intermediary. Call it age or gender bias, but she is a woman envisioned in comfortable surroundings, all overstuffed armchairs and well-provisioned kitchens.

Yet a gritty, alternate version of the elderly archetype will become increasingly visible in the years to come. The homeless population across North America is aging rapidly, a process coupled with the simultaneous trend of more elderly adults becoming newly homeless.

According to a report published last month by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, homelessness is beginning to increase among elderly adults. As baby boomers turn 65 the growth of the overall population of elderly individuals will surge. Meanwhile, the number of homeless adults from ages 50-64 is expanding, according to recent reports.

For example, in San Francisco in the period from 1990-1994 to 2000-2002, the representation of people ages 50 and over in the street homeless population grew from 11.2% to 32.3%. In Massachusetts, homelessness among those ages 55 and older increased from 8% of the homeless population in 1999 to 14% in 2003.

Based on the predictions of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the elderly homeless population will increase dramatically between 2010 and 2020.

A 2003 HRSA report explains that numerous external and internal barriers inhibit older homeless individuals from accessing services, and advocates for the minimization of these in order to achieve optimum health and housing security. Obstacles that elderly homeless

persons may face include difficulty using the shelter system-which can be especially harsh for an older adult-lack of affordable housing and transportation, or simple unawareness of resources and benefits, such as SSI or food stamps. Complicating these external barriers is the fact that elderly people experiencing homelessness may experience greater distrust of service providers, out of fears such as that of "being put in a home".

The image of your grandparents clinging to a threadbare blanket beneath a murky highway overpass-or perhaps more realistically, bunking in cots beside nefarious characters in emergency shelters-is likely enough to elicit revulsion and shame. Still, awareness of and solutions to the problem of elder homelessness in America are seriously insufficient.

Dread of "the system" felt by older adults in situations of homelessness is largely justified. After all, the conventional approach to address aging in the contemporary United States is to

sequester elderly persons, to strip them of their independence and individual agency, to silence their voices in civic dialogue-diminished societal productivity is equivalent to death in America.

Elderly persons experiencing homelessness deserve the respect that your grandfather should command when recounting tales of his youth, or the affection you'd feel in the arms of your grandmother's embrace. The onus of change rests on the shoulders of the young. May we be inspired by the wisdom of our elders.

Excerpted from The Big Issue in Scotland.



Volunteer Events

Clothing room and hygiene area volunteers will be gathering on Friday, March 11 from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. in the Our Place Chapel. The gathering will be an opportunity for us to review ways of working, to share any news on the volunteer front or with respect to Our Place's operations and to answer any questions. Refreshments will be provided. All current clothing room and hygiene area volunteers are invited to attend. Hope you are able to join us!

Details of a gathering for dining room and nutrition bar volunteers will be announced soon. Please stay tuned!

Volunteer Absences

A friendly reminder that Antoinette appreciates knowing when you are going to be away, particularly for an extended period of time. And if you haven't already let her know, please take a moment to do so. Much appreciated!

Antoinette

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National Volunteer Week

is a week-long opportunity for non-profit and charitable organizations across Canada to recognize and celebrate the many contributions of volunteers and their impact on our communities. This year National Volunteer Week will be celebrated from April 10 to 16, inclusive. Our Place will be looking for ways and opportunities to demonstrate our appreciation of our valued volunteers during that week. Please stay tuned!



Ourplace: Hope and belonging