

# UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS



When you pass homeless people on the street, do you wonder why don't they just get a job or go to a shelter? Do you assume that they have chosen to be homeless, or that they have lived on the streets for a long time?

Misconceptions about homeless people are common. In addition to enduring the hardship of having no home, homeless people are alienated and discriminated against because of myths and stereotypes.

## Please take a moment to examine MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

- MYTH:** *The homeless population is a fixed group that remains homeless for long periods of time.*  
**FACT:** Most homeless people are only homeless for a short while, but may move in and out of homelessness periodically. On any given day, less than half of Pasadena's homeless population is chronically homeless (without residence for more than one year) and over the course of a year, only 15% of the homeless population is chronically homeless.
- MYTH:** *People are homeless because they want to live that way.*  
**FACT:** The vast majority of homeless people - including the mentally ill - would prefer to have a home. Approximately 85% of the total homeless population in Pasadena is homeless for less than one year.
- MYTH:** *Most homeless people are men.*  
**FACT:** Families with children are the fastest growing group among the homeless. In Pasadena, displaced women and children make up 48% of the local homeless population, outnumbering homeless men.
- MYTH:** *All homeless people are alcoholics, drug addicts, or have a mental illness.*  
**FACT:** About half of our adult homeless population suffers from mental illness, and approximately one-third currently has a substance abuse problem. Other contributing factors to homelessness include loss of a job, low-paying jobs, poverty, domestic violence, lack of affordable housing, illness, physical disabilities, lack of health care, and a shortage of government and private support programs.
- MYTH:** *All homeless people are unemployed and on welfare.*  
**FACT:** A growing number of homeless people are employed but unable to afford the rising cost of living. 44% of homeless people surveyed in the 2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count reported receiving no money from government sources, and only 21% reported receiving more than \$500 a month.<sup>ii</sup>
- MYTH:** *There are so many agencies that help the homeless. It is not my problem.*  
**FACT:** The explosion of our homeless population has surpassed the capacity of local government and charity organizations. On any given night, more than 88,000 people are homeless in Los Angeles County, including 10,471 homeless people in the San Gabriel Valley. With only 17,000 shelter beds in L.A. County (including 990 beds in the San Gabriel Valley), there is 1 bed available for every 5 people in need in the County; there is 1 bed available for every 10 people in the San Gabriel Valley.<sup>iii</sup>

## OUR LOCAL HOMELESS POPULATION

On any given night in the City of Pasadena, nearly 1,000 people are homeless. This group is diverse: 52% are men, 26% are women, and 22% are children under 18. In Pasadena, 38% of homeless adults are Caucasian, 29% are African American, 23% are Hispanic, 2% are American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1% is Asian, and 7% self-identified as Other. Approximately 3,600 people become homeless each year in the City of Pasadena.<sup>iv</sup>

Continued →

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO OUR HOMELESS CRISIS

### Poverty, Unemployment, and Low-paying Jobs

According to the U.S. Census 2000, 18% of Los Angeles residents were living below the poverty line. Approximately 15% were living in poverty in the San Gabriel Valley. One in three single-parent families were poor.<sup>v</sup> In order to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles County without spending more than 30% of their income, a worker earning minimum wage would have to work 130 hours a week, 52 weeks a year.

### Lack of Affordable Housing

Most homeless people would prefer to have a home. Gentrification, abandonment, and demolition have reduced the availability of affordable housing. Fair market rent in 2008 for a two-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles County is \$1,300 per month<sup>vi</sup> (\$15,600 per year). Because the poorest people pay the largest portion of their income for rent, a growing number of working people are homeless or at high risk of becoming homeless. Many people in the lowest paying jobs – cashiers, food preparation staff, stock clerks – cannot afford the rising rental fees. A recent study showed that 63% of low-income renters spend more than 50% of their income on housing, and many spend as much as 70% of their income.<sup>vii</sup>

### Domestic Violence

Victims of domestic violence are often forced to choose between a dangerous home-life and a life on the streets. In Pasadena, 65% of homeless women and 45% of all homeless people have experienced domestic violence, often citing it as a contributing factor to their homelessness.<sup>i</sup>

### Lack of Medical and Mental Health Care Coverage

For many individuals, ongoing health issues (including physical disabilities and mental health conditions) contribute to their homelessness, or prevent them from earning income. Persistent health care needs plague 38% of our local homeless population.<sup>viii</sup>

### Changes in Family Structure

The increasing number of single-parent households means one parent is carrying the burden of taking care of his or her children while also working to support them. With diminished resources and support, a lost job, illness, or eviction can catapult a family into homelessness. Nearly 100 families live on the streets or in homeless facilities every day in Pasadena.

---

## WORKING TOGETHER TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF HOMELESSNESS

Hunger and homelessness are not merely caused by a lack of food and shelter – they involve a variety of unmet physical, economic, and social needs. Union Station Homeless Services helps homeless individuals and families identify the root-causes that led to their homelessness, and helps them gain the tools and resources to end the cycle of homelessness and lead productive, stable and self-sufficient lives.

Union Station provides 2,000 per year with intake and assessment, shelter, meals, case management, referrals, medical and mental health services, career development and job search assistance, substance abuse recovery support, specialized family services, housing search assistance, and adult classes in parenting, anger management, money management, nutrition and life skills.

---

## YOU CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION!

Call (626) 240-4550 or visit [www.unionstationhs.org](http://www.unionstationhs.org) to find out how you can end homelessness in our community.

---

<sup>ii</sup> Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA), *2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count*, January 12, 2006

<sup>iii</sup> Shelter Partnership, *2006 Short-Term Housing Directory of Los Angeles County*.

<sup>iv</sup> Institute for Urban Research and Development, *City of Pasadena 10-year Strategy to End Homelessness*, 2005

<sup>v</sup> Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty at the Weingart Center, *“Just the Facts: Poverty in Los Angeles,”* March 2003

<sup>vi</sup> Danter.com

<sup>vii</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, *“Out of Reach 2005” housing report*, 2005