

Homelessness #2

Written by

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PEJ News - Richard Walpole - Homelessness in developed, First World countries appears at first blush to be a problem of individuals who are either sick or lazy. It is perfectly acceptable in certain sectors to poor-bash with vigour. Governments know their constituents will not be too critical of difficulties placed in the path of those who need assistance. However, there now appears to be a little change that is working wonders.

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Richard Walpole

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After more years than some people want to remember, there appears to be a change in the way governments have traditionally set policy and practices for the poverty-stricken and the homeless. The financial reasons for change have always been there, it being more expensive to fund temporary shelters, and all the support services that requires, than to house people in more permanent homes.

Developed nations with middling or strong economies have many negative attitudes towards the poor and homeless, the most common being that lazy people would rather be on welfare than work. Poor people are bad, a disease, and that is why they are poor.

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Government social service ministries have long adopted regulations that are impossible for many homeless people to meet, and for the poor but still housed to fill. Even people who are in the middle class would find some of the requirements onerous. A paper nightmare meant not to prove need, but to delay valid assistance.

That a deputy minister, for example, gets a bonus for lowering the caseload, however that happens, is obscene.

Now, an experiment in Vancouver has become so successful it is being copied in other jurisdictions even before it is finished. Every day, an outreach worker goes out to find a homeless person who wants to have a place to live. The outreach worker takes this person in hand, and not only successfully guides them through the province's rules and regulations, but also finds them a place to live that night.

One person per day in any jurisdiction is a start, but in Victoria it would take two years or more to perform this miracle, and even then only if nobody falls into homelessness during that time.

The other change is more nebulous. It involves the selection and appointment of a poverty commissioner, just as there is now a commissioner for children and families. There needs to be a broad, active and continuous movement to show the decision-makers the advantages of such a position.

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To use a well-known metaphor, the tide does not raise all boats equally, and the market/consumer economic system does not, obviously, work for everyone.