

Letter to the Editor,

I have been trying to make a difference for the homeless in Indianapolis for a few years now. It has been an interesting adventure. There are so many people in need, and so many people trying to help out. It is a complex problem: teenagers, to middle-agers, to senior citizens. The situations are further complexified by mental illness, addiction, and economic challenges. And, veterans, who have sacrificed for our country, are in abundance.

Based on my interactions, there are some folks who will move out of homelessness, but there are many who will not. On my first visit to the Terry and Buford camp, my thoughts were that they just had to get a job and repatriate into normal society, whatever that means these days. I have totally changed my naïve initial views. The situation is not that simple. It is a conundrum for me, but it is a consistent response that many homeless folks do not want to stay in the formal shelters; rather, prefer to be in their own camp. This comment is just an observation, not a judgment on either side.

There is no solution proposed in this message: just a challenge to all that can make a difference, to work together to make a difference. There is clearly a gap that needs to be filled here. Proposal 291 has content related to protections and a Homeless Bill of Rights. Based on my relatively limited experience, my actions are driven by a Bill of “what people deserve”, i.e., a Bill of Deservability. The major gap I see is a right to being warm and dry. With respect to food and water and clothing, the homeless have access to these through many excellent outreach efforts. What they don’t have is predictable access to shelter. The motto of our group of volunteers is to find a way to keep people “warm and dry”.

Just for awareness, I will share a few comments often heard. I am not agreeing or disagreeing with these views.

They (the homeless) can only stay at the formal shelter for part of the month, which necessitates the need for a second place to stay, so why not stay at the second location all of the time so they don’t have to worry about their possessions being stolen.

The rules are quite restrictive at some of the formal shelters, and they struggle with this.

At some of the formal shelters, they feel like it is a “negative reinforcement” environment, vs a “a positive reinforcement” one, and they need the positive..

Again, I am not passing judgment on this situation, just sharing a few comments on what I have heard.

This flurry of awareness generation is timely as we are hitting temperatures of less than 10 degrees. As a city, all of us deserve to be warm and dry.

By the way, I am a Republican. :-> All of us are not heartless! We all just need to work together.

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