

AN URBAN OUTREACH RESOURCE

A Quick Guide
to Understanding
THE HOMELESS



CHARLOTTE EDITION

FROM THE AUTHOR

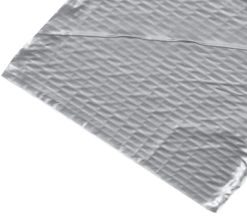
For most of my life I wondered how to help the man or woman I saw holding a sign on the street corner. Typically, I would ignore them—or try to since they made me uncomfortable. Like many I held the normal stereotypes for the homeless.

- I believed many had a criminal record and were dangerous. It was not safe to help them.
- If not criminals, they were just lazy bums who didn't want to work, so they deserved to be on the street.
- Most of them were drug addicts or drunks who probably got themselves into their predicament by their own bad choices. So, it was their fault.
- I heard that many were mentally ill too—put on the streets because the Government stopped funding mental institutions a few decades back. While I might want to help them I was in no position to help someone with a mental disorder.
- There is also the reasoning that some *choose to be homeless* so we shouldn't feel sorry for them. They are doing what they want.
- A more recent excuse to avoid them was because many are making a living begging when they aren't homeless at all. They are beggars by trade.

Maybe you have heard the same stereotypes. Maybe you have believed these stereotypes as well, or do you currently?

The problem was I didn't know the truth. It was all speculation. So, I started to get involved with the poor. I volunteered at a local church that fed the homeless on a weekly basis. During this time my church offered short-term mission trips to





the Dominican Republic and Ethiopia and I eagerly went abroad. I also decided to check myself into the local Shelter in Charlotte as a homeless person to get an even greater understanding of the plight of the poor. Ultimately, because of these experiences, and my studying of the Bible, which implored me to help, I moved into the inner city of Charlotte (demographically speaking) and brought the homeless into my own house. This resulted in the founding of what is now called Hoskins Park Ministries (HPM). HPM currently has 13 houses and cares for 60 previously homeless men.

Living with them changed my life. Those experiences also taught me that the plight of the homeless is much more difficult than I thought. They are beautiful people who deserve our support, but I have found that there is a right and a wrong way to help, or a good and best approach. Hopefully this short guide will challenge some of your preconceptions about the poor and help you to understand how you can make a better difference in their lives—just like me. Furthermore, while you may not ever move in with them like I did, just remember we are blessed to be a blessing—to the poor. Every one of the homeless is a child of two people just like you and me. And each remains a child of God. God compels us to help them so we should. Besides that, it could be us one day. God only knows.

Together we can change a family, community, nation, and world, one person at a time as we love our neighbor like the Bible says, as ourselves!

—*Tom Wheeler*

Demographics of the Homeless in the US*

- Number of homeless in US: 750,000 on any given night.
- 50% are single adult men (up to 40% are veterans).
- 23% are woman.
- 25% are children.
- 13% are homeless families.
- Over 25% have a disability.
- 45% are African American.
- 40% are white.
- 20% are chronically homeless (the typical stereotype).

**These statistics vary from one study to another. I looked at several studies to conclude the aforementioned numbers are fairly average.*

Education

- 38% have less than a high school education.
- 34% have a high school education or G.E.D.
- 28% have more than a high school education.

Main Causes of Homelessness

- **Lack of affordable healthcare coupled with physical illness.** 50 million Americans (or 16% of the population of the US) are uninsured.
- **Major trauma or life transforming event** (ie: hurricane, tornado, flood, loss of job, accident, divorce, health problem, criminal event, legal issues, etc.).
 - **Domestic Violence.** 63% of homeless women are homeless because of domestic violence.
 - **Poverty coupled with the rising cost of rent.** Roughly 12% of the population of the US live in poverty—when there is not enough



affordable housing, they become homeless.

- **Mental health issues.**
- **Addiction.**

Availability of Beds

- Number of beds for the homeless in the US: 450,000
- Shortage of beds for the homeless: 300,000

Fact or Fiction: Are These Stereotypes Accurate?

☐ **The homeless typically have a criminal record and are dangerous. Therefore it is not safe to help them.**

■ **Answer: Partly fact.** About 60% have had an arrest in their lifetime. But that does not mean they are dangerous. “Criminal activity isn’t a staple characteristic of these people. It may be more accurate to think of them as people struggling to get by” (2008 study by New York University, Sean Fischer—American Psychological Association, Dec. 2009).

☐ **If not criminals, they are just lazy bums who don’t want to work so they deserve to be on the street.**

■ **Answer: Fiction.** Of course there are some who are lazy, but for the most part that is not true. Despite our culture’s tendency to think otherwise, deep down all people want to work and be productive. But until we realize we aren’t trash, we become what others keep telling us we are—trash. Then we depend on handouts and assistance because we have become convinced they are right. Judgment produces condemnation and condemnation produces bums and bullies.

☐ **Most of them are drug addicts or drunks. They probably got themselves into their predicament by their own bad**

choices. It is their fault. And since they are addicts, I won't enable them by giving them any money.

■ **Answer: Fact—but.** Most do struggle with an addiction. And many did make poor choices. Haven't we all? But denying them the money to make the same choice you and I have with money might miss some of the ones who would use it correctly. I have wasted far more money in my lifetime on things that could hurt me and yet God had me surrender my burdens to Him rather than cut me off. So, I give money to the homeless and suggest they go get something to eat. Because I do that they see I respect them, am not judging them and most then do what I suggest.

☐ **Many of them are mentally ill—put on the streets because the Government stopped funding mental institutions a few decades back. I am in no position to help.**

■ **Answer: Fact—but.** Most of us have some form of mental illness, as imperfect people living in a fairly upside down world. Therefore, anyone on the street is going to struggle, mentally. But these are not folks who should be committed to a mental institution. Only the very chronic homeless should be institutionalized and they are the very small minority.

☐ **Most want to be homeless so we shouldn't feel sorry for them. They are doing what they want.**

■ **Answer: Fiction.** Most of them want help. They just get judged more than they get real and significant help, so they become numb to those judging them and keep getting high so they don't feel all the pain. Wouldn't you? They don't want to be homeless, they just are.

☐ **Many are making a living begging when they aren't homeless at all. They are beggars by trade.**



■ **Answer: Fiction.** This is just not true.

Of course there are always some who will take advantage of those who want to help, but anyone who has resorted to imitating a homeless person in order to make a living is not right in the head. So even if it is true, they need as much help as those who are really homeless. I wouldn't stop giving to the guys on the street thinking one out of 1000 is not legit though. What if it were your kid who really needed the help? Would you want someone to deny helping your kid because they think he might be a fraudulent homeless person when, in fact, he is legit?

☐ **I think helping the homeless population is fine, but preventing homelessness is a better use of time and money.**

■ **Answer: Fiction.** If you have a problem in an organization and do not handle it, it does not go away. Typically it gets worse and spills over to the healthy parts of the organization. Most of the homeless people we come across have families. While preventing problems is always important, we still cannot neglect the reality of the problem itself. We must do both, simultaneously, or the problem might just get too big for our preventative measures.

How YOU can help

- **Make eye contact.** Look the homeless in the eye and waive to the folks you see on street corners. Show them the respect they deserve as people made in the image of God, even if this is all you do.
- **Talk to them.** Tell them God cares about them—and suggest (kindly) they get help from one of the many organizations located in their city. Just saying that matters more than you think. Furthermore, you can say just about anything to

another person if you truly care about them. If you don't really care, however, it will be hard for them to hear anything you say. People don't care what others have to say until they know how much those same others care.

- **Give them a copy of *Second Wind*.** Ask them if they like to read. If they say yes, give them a copy of *Second Wind*, a book that helps them understand what is going on down here on earth from a biblical perspective, and suggest they read it. Keep a few copies in your car for that purpose (go to: theurbanoutreach.org to order copies). Of course, I would suggest you get a copy and read it first!
- **Feed them.** Bring them some food or take them to lunch.
- **Be a cheerleader for them.** Get your friends and family involved. Share what you are doing with those in your circle of influence. Use social media to follow organizations that you are helping and spread the word.
- **Educate yourself.** Read books that talk about the poor and poverty. Besides *Second Wind*, read: Bob Lupton's *Toxic Charity*, John Perkins *Beyond Charity*, and Ron Hall and Denver Moore's *Same Kind of Different as me*. Watch three movies, *Blindside*, *The Soloist* and *Les Miserables* (either the new *Les Mis* or the 1998 version with Liam Neeson). At the conclusion of the movies, decide what you would have done had you been in the shoes of those characters in the movie who were faced with the needs of another. Consider how you can help the least of God's children.
- **Give a little money.** I know the debate and controversy about giving folks on the street money—should we or is that enabling them? I recommend you give a couple dollars and suggest they use it to get something to eat. There are enough people judging them as



they drive by with their expert opinions on what not to do. Be different, don't judge, encourage them to get help because they mean something to God and to you. By the way, how well do you use \$1 or \$2's? Let's give these folks a break.

- **Serve.** Volunteer with an organization that helps the poor. Get to know the staff. If you want to develop relationships with the clients the organization helps, always be sure to check with the leadership first. LISTEN to the folks in charge too. They know what they are doing, and already have enough people trying to tell them what to do. Remember too, while they want to accommodate you, try not to make them make you the point. Join them. Don't ask them to join you.
- **Pray for them or with them.** Take a moment to ask God to take care of them. He will. But He also might ask you to be His Hands in one of the other ways just mentioned.

What Not To Do

- **Don't judge the poor.** Because I personally moved in with the homeless, I learned that had I walked in their shoes, I would likely be in their situation, if not worse. I did not feel this way UNTIL I got to know "their story." Judging them, like anyone, only hurts them. Let God be their judge. You try to be a friend.
- **Do not take them into your home.** Unless you are experienced with the homeless population, it is never recommended that you take them into your home.
- **Do not begin to financially "support" them.** Direct them to organizations that can help them and support THAT organization. I am not talking about not giving them a couple dollars. Like I said, that is fine. I am talking about supporting them beyond that point—don't do it. When we go one on one with the poor, we

typically do so at the expense of the organizations who know better how to help.

- **Women, it is not recommended you try to help men.**
- **Men, it is not recommended you try to help women.**
- **It is not recommended that you support organizations that do not have some form of accountability.** A sound and active board in good standing with the IRS should be the minimum requirement for a 501c3 organization with a responsible leader and leadership team. But don't overlook some of the smaller organizations that are "under the radar." They are sometimes able to do more good with less resources even though they don't have a big building to show for it.
- **Do not believe your new friend's entire story just because it sounds good to you.** When survival is our goal, most of us will do or say whatever is necessary to get help. Think of their story as a resume; there may be truth in it, but you aren't getting the entire story—they just want a job (metaphorically speaking) so their best foot is forward, at that moment.
- **Try not to judge the organization you are trying to help.** Organizations serving the poor typically have more people that want to volunteer than help them get the resources they need to accommodate volunteers. Give them your time, yes, but also help them financially.

Other Important Information

Having experienced the homeless first hand, by living with them for over 6 years, and having co-founded Hoskins Park

Ministries, a ministry that cares for over 60



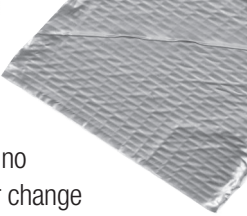
homeless men, there are other important issues that may help.

- **Most of the non-profit organizations helping the poor are underfunded.** If you find trouble with some of the organizations getting back to you, or not knowing how to put you to work, or doing something that simply causes you to pause (or not give), it may be because they do not have the proper resources to do those things. Ask the leader of the organization if they have a plan, a good board, whether they are accountable to a person (or organization other than themselves), if they are in good standing with the IRS, and if the leaders are practicing what they preach. If they are doing things as best they can with the resources they have, help them to do it even better with a financial gift. Don't let what they don't do get in the way of what they are doing—helping the poor that are most often neglected. It is very hard work. At the same time remember, organizations must be organized to be efficient. Some of them are underfunded because they misuse the funding they get.
- **Less than 10% of the budget of most Christian agencies comes from the church.** Many assume the church is funding the majority of this work when it is typically less than 10%. The church cannot do it all—they too need folks like you to give to organizations that help the poor. Portion your tithe accordingly, if you want to help. If you don't, then you can assume the organizations helping the poor are not getting proper funding to do the work as efficiently as if they had those funds.
- **Just because you speak English does not mean you are communicating with our urban neighbors.** In fact, most of the time there is little communication going on between those with means and those without. Different ethnic, educational, and cultural differences prevent a high degree of communication. Until we develop relationships with

one another, which take time, we are often talking without understanding. If you are married, remember how it works in your relationship. Communication is a lot more than words. That is why getting to know the leader(s) of the organization is helpful. You need to at least be able to communicate with them to understand the issues.

- **Volunteers are wonderful but not always dependable.** Non-profits need more commitment for the sake of the organization rather than more places to put volunteers for the sake of a checklist for a volunteer. Think of it this way; if someone called you and wanted to volunteer in your household, what would you have them do? What if they didn't want to do what you needed, but they still wanted to help. What would you tell them? What if they wanted a relationship with your kids, but they were strangers to you. Would you let them? Maybe you get the point. We love and appreciate volunteers, but it sure helps when they ask us what we need and then join us—there. Otherwise we are serving the volunteers rather than the volunteers serving us.
- **Come alongside of leaders who come alongside a cause.** Most of the people I know who want to help the poor have the cause before the leader. Without intent, the leader (and thus staff) become expendable. It's the cause that matters. But Christian discipleship is about coming alongside of people. In this case, it would be coming alongside a leader who has been called to a cause, rather than coming alongside of a cause that has a leader. If the leader is healthy, feels respected, and is acting with a high level of integrity, and you feel called to help, help the leader to fulfill the mission and vision. Try not to become their teacher, if you do not have their experience. Listen to them. Hear them. Help them.
- **Focus and Commit.** Commitment is like glue, keeping everything together. Perhaps that is





why our culture is becoming unglued, no commitment to anything above self. People stay in jobs for less time, get divorced when it no longer feels good, and we generally just prefer change for changes sake. Stay focused through your commitment to God, your spouse and family, a cause, organization, or leader over the long run. Commitment is oftentimes boring, difficult, and more challenging than “change”, but it is worth it and produces greater results in the long run. Focus and commit.

- **Remember, we either help the poor or the Government will.** Unless we start to engage better with the organizations helping the poor, we are delegating this job to the Federal Government while we have our fingers pointed at them for doing it inefficiently. In this case, its time to pass the buck, our buck, to an organization or organizations that are helping the poor so they can do what they do better.

Scripture References Which Encourage Us To Help the Poor

- 1 Samuel 2:8
- Proverbs 14:31
- Proverbs 21:13
- 1 Timothy 6:17
- Matthew 22:39
- Psalm 41:13
- Proverbs 19:17
- James 1:27
- Proverbs 28:17
- James 2:14
- Luke 10:30-37
- 1 John 3:17
- Psalms 82:3
- Proverbs 22:9
- Matthew 25:34-46
- Isaiah 58:6-11

God's Call To All of Us—Help!

The Tsunami in Japan left hundreds of thousands of people homeless. The storm that hit New Jersey and New York left many others homeless. Some people lose their spouse or a significant person in their life and they fall apart, mentally and

emotionally—becoming homeless. Some are living paycheck to paycheck and if they lose their job they will likely find themselves without a home. So, while we might think the stereotypes of the homeless are accurate, they are not. Based on some unforeseen circumstance it could be you or me. That should cause us all to pause before we judge another person in need instead of helping them.

Remember the story of the good Samaritan? (Luke 10:25-37). The person that did right was the guy who stopped and helped the stranger—not all of those who had an excuse to pass the fellow by. Maybe it is more complicated in our day because we see so much need, but we have options just like the good Samaritan—to do something or to make excuses.

God wants us to be His Hands for the sake of His poor. Please. Let's stop talking about this or complicating it by missing the obvious—the person. Let's do something together—as if we were on a mission from our Creator, the one who says:

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:40).

Sources

usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-11-07-homeless-veterans_N.htm

www.thechicagoalliance.org/homelessstats.aspx

www.endhomelessness.org/pages/snapshot_of_homelessness

www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/why.html

www.huduser.org/publications/homeless/homelessness/ch_2b.html



Psalm 41:1-3

*Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;
the LORD delivers them in times of trouble.*

*The LORD protects and preserves them—
they are counted among the blessed in the land—
he does not give them over to the desire of their foes.*

*The LORD sustains them on their sickbed
and restores them from their bed of illness.*

***To order additional copies of this guide, or to order the
book *Second Wind* by Thomas Alan Wheeler, please email
Tom: tom@thomasawheeler.com or go to:***

TheUrbanOutreach.org



This guide is sponsored by:



RESOURCE GUIDE

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Shelter for the Homeless

The following organizations provide shelter for the homeless:

Homeless Men

Men's Shelter of Charlotte

mensshelterofcharlotte.org
704-334-3187

Charlotte Rescue Mission

charlotterescuemission.org
704-334-4635

Hoskins Park Ministries

hoskinspark.org
704-391-3303 or
704-779-5887

McCreesh Place

stpetersshomesinc.org
704-335-9380

Room In The Inn

urbanministrycenter.org
(December - March)
704-347-0278

Meck. County Detox

charmecck.org
704-336-3067

Hope Haven

hopehaveninc.org
704-372-8809

Oxford House

oxfordhousenc.org
704-569-1740

Homeless Women

***Charlotte Rescue Mission
Dove's Nest***

charlotterescuemission.org
704-332-3999

***Safe Alliance Domestic
Violence Shelter***

safealliance.org/shelter-for-battered-women/
704-332-2513

Salvation Army Shelter

salvationarmycarolinas.org/
commands/charlotte/programs/
coh
704-348-2560

YWCA-Women In Transition

ywcacentralcarolinas.org/
programs/women-in-transition-
wit
704.525.5770

Blessings In The Storm

blessingsinthestorm.org
704-309-4796

Room In The Inn

urbanministrycenter.org
(December - March)
704-347-0278

Hope Haven

hopehaveninc.org
704-372-8809

Oxford House

oxfordhousenc.org
704-569-1740

Homeless Families***Charlotte Emergency Housing***

charlottefamilyhousing.org
704-335-5488

Steele Creek Church

steelecreek.org
704-525-1133

Jackson Park Ministries

jacksonpark.org
704-392-4981

Homeless Children***A Child's Place***

achildsplace.org
704-343-3790

Affordable Housing

*If the poor need affordable housing,
they can call one of these organizations to get help*

Charlotte Housing Authority

www.cha-nc.org

704-336-5183

Community Link

communitylink-nc.org

704-943-9490

Charlotte Family Housing

familypromiseofcharlotte.org

704-335-5488

Food

*If someone needs food and cannot afford to buy it,
they can go to one of these organizations*

St. Peter's Soup Kitchen: Urban Ministries

urbanministrycenter.org

704-347-0278

Harvest Center of Charlotte

theharvestcenter.org

704-333-4280

Loaves & Fishes

loavesandfishes.org

704-523-4333

Financial Assistance

*For those who cannot pay some of their essential
bills, they can go here or to their local church*

Crisis Assistance Ministry

crisisassistance.org

704-371-3001

Medical Care

For medical care these options are available to the poor

Emergencies

911

Samaritan's House

thesamaritanhouse.org

704-333-0110

Shelter Medical Clinic

mensshelterofcharlotte.org

704-332-5921

Matthews Free Medical Clinic

mathewsfmc.org / Amy Carr

704-841-8882

Abuse or Other Needs

Check out these sources for other needs

Dept. of Social Services

[charmeck.org/mecklenburg/
county/dss/Pages/Default.aspx](http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/dss/Pages/Default.aspx)

704-336-2273

DSS Food Stamps and Other Government Services

704-336-3150

Charlotte Pregnancy Center

prccharlotte.com

704-372-5981

Your Local Church

theurbanoutreach.org

704-777-1628

This is a limited and incomplete list.

For any emergency call 911 immediately.

*To be added to this list or to make a correction,
please contact: **tom@thomasawheeler.com**
or **theurbanoutreach.org**. Thank you!*

HAVE YOU HEARD THE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE HOMELESS?

Maybe you have believed these stereotypes, or do you currently? The problem is you may not know the truth. It is all speculation.

This pamphlet will bring the truth of the plight of the homeless to light. It will also let you know the best way to help the person on the corner begging for help.

Open its pages and find out what this is really about.

