

Disability

The good news is that resources are *relatively* good for securing housing for someone with a traditional and recognized physical disability (relative to the dearth of services for other populations).

The bad news is that mental illness is rarely treated as compassionately as other disabilities. This disparate treatment of mental illness is one of the major contributing factors of homelessness in America,² especially among the chronically homeless.

The other bad news is that individuals wait a long time for disability benefits to be approved.³ At our shelter we regularly see people who are clearly too disabled to work, but are waiting for their benefits to be approved. The unacceptable backlog of cases creates a housing crises for disabled individuals.

Gender

Single mothers face special challenges in relation to homelessness, and with regard to housing more generally. We, as a society, demand that a single mother work yet provide inadequate subsidized childcare resources and penalize families where the mother sacrifices parenting duties in order to work. For example, we are now serving a single mother whose whole family was evicted from public housing because one of the children broke housing authority rules by shooting off fireworks and having a joint in his pocket.

Age

The good news is that we have *relatively* little difficulty finding housing for the elderly.

The bad news is that the number of homeless children continues to rise and the negative effects of homelessness on children are clear.⁴ One clear advancement in this area in the last ten years was the inclusion of education rights for homeless children in the No Child Left Behind Act.⁵

General Comments

While we have a long way to go, policy changes in the last five years targeting chronically homeless individuals with a disability for permanent supportive housing are *very* innovative and *very* effective. I do not have any documentation to back up my claim, but I would strongly suspect that these policies are particularly helpful to groups above that historically face additional discrimination, especially minorities and the disabled. While children (and by extension single mothers) were initially left out of these innovative practices, that gap has been remedied.

² The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that 20-25% of homeless individuals have a serious mental illness.

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/homelessness/>

³ http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/01/29/waiting_and_waiting_for_disability_pay/

⁴ <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/51/6/721>

⁵ <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>