

A Librarian's (Sometimes Humorous) Take on Homelessness

This was written by and anonymous local librarians who cares about the struggle facing so many San Diegans and Americans.

The mass majority of civilized society is unaware how important libraries are for the homeless. There are NO free spaces in the world but the library. no free outlets--and obviously a religious shelter that steals your personal items and parrots 40-year-old anti-homeless dogma to you isn't going to update and get a whole bunch of charging stations any time soon. There are NO FREE BATHROOMS. If you've never dealt with it, this is an unimaginable problem: throughout your common daily life virtually any private activity requires a bathroom. There are no free beds.

In general, people have trouble imagining the plight of the average homeless person, so the mass majority of things the average person would even say to a homeless individual (like "get a job, have you tried x or y?, I hear -- has some beds, why don't you sleep there?") is much more an absurd slap in the face type deal. Your life is attempting, as best you can, to not succumb to this absurdity so that you don't appear "crazy". Almost all housed library patrons have or start problems with the homeless patrons ranging from "she smells, tell her to leave" to "that 80 year old disabled anorexic lady is eating in the library." Sometimes it's the other way around, but not nearly as often since they're constantly under threat of being removed from the single free space they have to sit in an air conditioned and quiet place)

Many people at the library are sympathetic and do their best, but ultimately, we are severely underpaid social workers. I am constantly trying to balance my duty to morality. This is not in my job description, but I try to help folks as best I can without overstepping in any way (legally or personally) and losing my job or succumbing to some insanity and becoming jaded. This takes the form of computer aid, light legal advice, career aid, and most commonly therapy. That one's on me, since I'm the only one at my location that will listen genuinely, although I'm not giving advice as much as being a vent or a punching bag, which is obviously the reason my coworkers avoid it.

If i had to give any advice, I would say don't donate to the majority of homelessness organizations. They are almost always normal folks trying to profit off of the homeless population and very rarely have the right intentions, and on top of that, the actual money is not going to any aid for the homeless.

I would say donate to the library. Please do this because libraries are actually dying, so even with my grievances about the system, it's an important thing to keep them alive for everyone. But in many cases donations to the library go to a county fund, and they usually allocate the funds to the less busy branches that have no homeless at them instead of your local inner city branch.

I would say to anyone who doesn't understand the struggle to simply donate to the homeless directly. There is an insane amount of propaganda and fear mongering about the homeless. The panhandler isn't making "hundreds a day", the shelters don't discriminate just because "the homeless don't follow the rules of the shelter", the bum on the corner isn't planning to murder you, or faking it, or high, or scamming welfare, or making bad choices.

The biggest point of contention between people who get it and people who don't is "well they're just going to spend that money on booze or crack".

1. No, that is really not as common as people would have you believe. That dude on the corner is actually hungry, and 9 times out of 10 his story is the truth (he needs bus fare, food, water, he's stranded, etc.).

2. Let me paint a picture for you. Imagine the sickest you've ever been, the worst you've ever felt physically. Now imagine i told you that every single day you must run a marathon and if you so much as sit down, you will be arrested, harassed, assaulted, killed, raped, etc. Imagine the hottest day of the summer. Imagine the noise of the interstate overpasses, the trains, the people. Imagine your depression, your PTSD, your autism, your schizophrenia. Imagine the normal people who act like devils that seem to exist in your life solely to torture you, the cops whose literal job is to hassle you for existing. Imagine having NOTHING to do to pass the time.

Now imagine if there was a way that you could simply induce happiness, or pass out and get to the next day, or give yourself energy and motivation, or become numb on command, or remove your hunger pains, or make it all go away. Now you're thinking, do I spend this \$20 that a kind stranger lent me on 2 or 3 small meals made from expiring garbage just to be hungry the next day? Or do i spend it on gin or a gram of meth that will keep me happy, give me the motivation to get through the day, stop the hunger completely, and fill me with total energy. What would you do? I get it—I don't like it, but I get it.