



The Situation Report

“Honest Reporting”

HOW WE SHOULD REALLY HELP THE HOMELESS

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Although Miami appears to be a vibrant city on the outside, it also has a considerable homeless population. Since thousands of people wander the streets, begging for money, and/or live under bridges, it's clear that homeless shelters and public awareness are not enough to end homelessness. Their desire for money has led to an increase in crime and growing public safety concerns. On the other hand, living under bridges is unsafe, if not dangerous, because its putting more strain on our infrastructure and is a risk during hurricane season. As a result, homeless shelters and public awareness programs are not enough because they obsess over the negative and are used as short-term relief. Therefore, the homeless population needs adequate job training, physical and psychological rehabilitation, and access to quality programs to lift them out of poverty and contribute to society.

In a 2015 report from The Miami Herald, “the total number of homeless in the county is 4,152, slightly down from 4,156 in...2014.” (Burch 2015). However, Miami-Dade County reported a “total number of sheltered AND unsheltered homeless...[at] 4,235” (Mozloom, Obyran, 2016) in 2016. This indicates that current resources, allocated to assisting the homeless population are ineffective or inefficient. Every year, 100 professionals tally up the homeless population in Miami-Dade County, to determine where

homeless resources should be allocated and who needs them. However, more resources need to be dedicated to providing psychological assistance, job training, and housing to lift the homeless out of poverty.

With a growing homeless population every year, Miami-Dade County faces a decline in property values, an increase in crime, and a tourism slump if it cannot find long-term solutions.

Nearly 3,000 miles away, in Portland, Oregon, tourism has declined because the homeless are invading sections of the city. As of April 27, 2016, “more than 1,800 people sleep outside in tents or on the streets every night. That includes children, families, seniors, and people with disabilities.” (Roth, 2016). By invading sections of the city, the homeless prevent tourists from enjoying Portland’s unique charm and the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. With ineffective programs and government policies, the homeless situation has made the city more dangerous for both residents and tourists alike. For Example, “the homeless campers have driven away...a summer camp for kids.” (Roth, 2016). Also, “a homeless camp...was set on fire, - twice.” (Roth, 2016).

With the threat of a Cascadia Earthquake, magnitude 8 or above, the situation makes it even more dangerous for the homeless because the city “allows people to camp on sidewalks and public land.” (Roth, 2016). If an earthquake of that magnitude struck the city, the homeless will interfere with the ability of emergency services from saving everyone else, allowing for a higher death toll.

Although Miami does not face earthquakes, it must still take action to prevent the homeless from invading sections of the city. In 2013, Miami city commissioner Marc Sarnoff wanted “police...to arrest

anyone who blocks a sidewalk, cooks a meal in a public area using a fire, litters, urinates or defecates in public, or engages in lewd conduct” (Webb, 2013) to get people off the streets and into homeless shelters. Sarnoff defended his actions in order to help the homeless and revitalize Downtown Miami at the same time.

Sarnoff’s proposal, however, is not enough to provide long-term solutions for helping the homeless. Of course, the homeless need temporary shelter to provide basic necessities. What the homeless really need are

1. Basic Job Training and/or Vocational Education: To prepare individuals for entry-level employment
 2. Financial Literacy and Advisement: To underscore the importance of fiscal responsibility at the personal level
 3. Mental Health Counseling: To teach individuals how to handle stress without committing crimes and provide psychological assistance
- to transform into effective individuals.

For Example, the 2006 motion picture “The Pursuit of Happiness” followed the story of a homeless man, Chris Gardner (portrayed by Will Smith), who transformed into the founder and CEO of his own company. Despite moving from homeless shelter to homeless shelter, and being evicted from his own apartment, twice, he persevered through the worst of circumstances, all while raising his son, Chris Jr. The movie should serve as a reminder that people can lift themselves out of poverty if they work hard and trust themselves.

If Miami can help the homeless, it must ensure that the homeless themselves have access to job training and effective counseling, in addition to basic necessities.

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