

Did the Weather Cause Canada's Mass Homelessness?

Homeless-Making Processes and Canada's Homeless-Makers

DISCUSSION PAPER

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"Homelessness does not occur in a social vacuum.

"In general, the events that make people homeless are initiated and controlled by other people whom our society allows to engage in the various enterprises that contribute to the homelessness of others.

"The primary purpose of these enterprises is not to make people homeless but, rather, to achieve socially condoned aims such as making a living, becoming rich, obtaining a more desirable home, increasing the efficiency at the workplace, promoting the growth of cultural institutions, giving cities a competitive advantage, or helping local or federal governments to balance their budgets or limit their debts. Homelessness occurs as a side effect.

"Yet it is a consequence of these enterprises, and therefore the discourse on homelessness must be broadened to reach into those areas of housing, income production, health care, and family life where the events and people contributing to homelessness are situated."

– Rene I. Jahiel, MD, PhD, from Chapter 18 in *Homeless: A Prevention-Oriented Approach*, R.I. Jahiel, editor, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

The following is a worksheet adopted from the article quoted above.

We start with the recognition that the weather does not cause the mass homelessness common in Canada today. Further, we recognize that some homeless people do have personal problems and that some have made poor decisions that may have led to their being homeless.

Why, however, did mass homelessness start happening in the 1980s? Were there no people with personal problems and people making poor decisions about options in the lives before the 1980s?

Since the 1980s there have been a number of *homeless making processes* set in motion. These 'processes' are not caused by 'nature' – such as an earthquake, ice storm, or flood. They are human made processes. People, in public and private institutions and organizations large and small, from households to corporations and governments, have set in motion and have left

unchecked these homeless making processes. People able to stop or redress the harm fail to do so.

Homelessness in Canada will not be eliminated until we can specifically name the people and groups who create, promote, refuse to redress and who benefit from these homeless making processes. They are Canada's homeless makers.

Canada's homeless makers prefer to believe, and take every opportunity to promote the belief, that the men, women and children who are homeless did this to themselves. It is their fault they are homeless. Some should be put in jail (for substance abuse or for being a public nuisance), some should be locked up or their own good in mental institutions, and the rest should take a bath and get a job. This self-serving ideology deflects the blame and protects those who benefit from the homeless making processes.

Such a wealthy and successful nation has tens of thousands of people sleeping in the streets and under bridges and in temporary shelters, scavenging food and begging for handouts, for but one reason: *because we allow it to continue.*

HOUSING SECTOR

Homeless-Making Processes:

1. evictions
2. displacement by rising rents
3. failure to find affordable housing
4. failure to find supportive housing
5. discrimination
6. _____
7. _____

Pressures Towards Homelessness:

1. insufficient production of low-cost housing
2. loss of low-rent housing by demolition, conversion or gentrification
3. loss of public housing through sale
4. loss of rent-gearred-to-income subsidies due to budget cutbacks

5. rising price of housing and residential land
6. _____
7. _____

Homeless-Makers:

1. landlords
2. developers
3. banks
4. business
5. upper- and middle-income households
6. international interests
7. government
8. _____
9. _____

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE SECTORHomeless-Making Processes:

1. denial of public assistance
2. inadequate level of public assistance
3. _____
4. _____

Pressures Towards Homelessness:

1. changing attitudes about the poor
2. political isolation of poor people
3. inadequate public assistance programs
4. _____

5. _____

Homeless-Makers:

1. conservative political and business interests
2. middle classes voters who do not understand the issues
3. government policies and procedures
4. _____
5. _____

EMPLOYMENT SECTORHomeless-Making Processes:

1. exhaustion of financial resources due to unemployment
2. failure of wages to keep up with cost of living
3. failure to find employment
4. minimum wage, part-time, temporary employment
5. _____
6. _____

Pressures Towards Homelessness:

1. market factors
2. intentional cyclical unemployment
3. redistribution of income upwards within corporations

4. pressures making workers bargaining with employers less effective
5. decreased effectiveness of unemployment insurance
6. ineffectiveness of approaches to reemployment
7. _____
8. _____

Homeless-Makers:

1. business and corporations
2. financial interests
3. professionals
4. contractors
5. government
6. _____
7. _____

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SECTORS

Homeless Making Processes:

1. economic impact of illness or disability
2. discrimination
3. expulsion because of behaviour
4. leaving, running away from residential setting
5. _____
6. _____

Pressures Towards Homelessness:

1. insufficient support services in the community
2. lack of adaptation of services to needs
3. insufficient supportive housing and supportive employment opportunities
4. discrimination in housing and employment against the chronically ill, people with a

mental illness, or people recovering from substance abuse

5. _____
6. _____

Homeless-Makers:

1. family or household members(spouse, parent, child or others in the household)
2. social workers, educators, and other professionals
3. government policy makers and administrators
4. _____
5. _____

FAMILY SECTOR

Homeless-Making Processes:

1. abuse
2. being tossed out of the family home
3. running away from conditions at home
4. _____
5. _____

Pressures Towards Homelessness:

1. violence, abuse or fear thereof, or other family conflicts
2. failure of home to meet emotional needs
3. inequality within the family
4. foster care and related problems

5. _____
6. _____

Homeless-Makers:

1. family or household members(spouse, parent, child or others in the household)
2. social workers, educators, and other professionals
3. government policy makers and administrators
4. _____
5. _____