



Individuals and communities
transformed through human services

LINK

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Thank you
for planning,
participating,
and attending
your Spring
Conference!

2016 National Conference October 19 - 22, 2016 Tampa Bay, FL

The New “Realities” in America: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead

In every sense of the word, America is a much more complex society than ever before. From diminishing funding sources to new measures of evaluating the use of those funds, from increased workloads with fewer professionals in the field to greater accountability expected of workers, from a more diverse client population in terms of ethnicity, age, lifestyle and socioeconomic status, to name a few, to newly-imposed limits on what can be provided to these clients, human service workers face challenges that they have never experienced.

This year’s conference is dedicated to examining many of these topics in an attempt to understand the dynamics of them and how they impact the human services profession as well as attempt to uncover new and emerging issues so that the profession may be prepared for them.

Field of Dreams

Jamie Benward

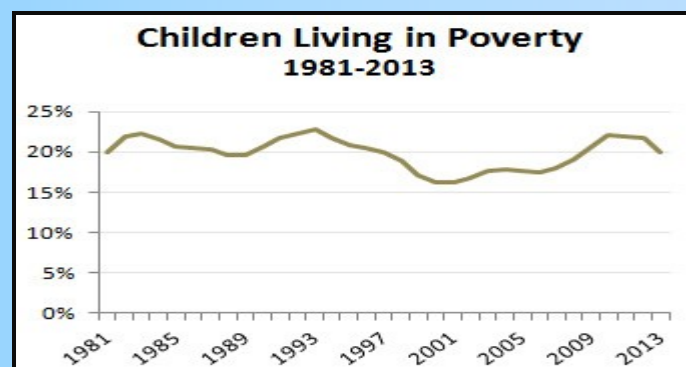
I need to be honest here. I want to stress the significance that volunteering at the local housing authority has had in my life. I had to volunteer for three different classes this semester, so I needed to do a lot of hours. Little did I know this would be nothing like the quick 20 hours that I was used to...get in, get out. This amount of time allowed me to build relationships with people and gain a new perspective of gratitude for what I have and am able to buy, and it literally changed my life in an astounding way.

It probably seems ludicrous. Surely volunteering with a bunch of poor people couldn't have skewed so much of my thoughts and now behaviors. And honestly, I never thought that something so insignificant could do that to me either. Going into it, I was very close-minded and only focused on getting through my hours in a timely fashion. However, as time went on, I saw myself opening up to what was taking place around me. I saw myself connecting with people that resided in the housing authority, and I saw myself fulfilled by helping and serving them. It was a good feeling. It felt so good to give.

The first time I started noticing these changes is when I helped out at the Kid's Center. There are a few residents within the housing authority that are supervisors there. These were about five of the roughest looking women I had ever seen. They were on the heavier side, they often had an odor, some of them were missing teeth, and a couple of them had some serious mental health issues. Yet, these were the nicest ladies I had ever met. Honestly, they never said an unkind word to me, and they were so welcoming of me every single time I was there. I felt so convicted from judging these ladies before I had even gotten to know them. It was like a slap in the face to me, and I think it was exactly what I needed.

Just as impacting were the kids that attended the center. They demonstrated some of the highest potential I had ever seen. They were so thankful for what they had, and they had so little. It was sad yet rewarding to see these kids everyday smiling and just so happy about being around their friends and receiving a snack from the center. I have never felt so guilty for being so selfish about what I want. I have more than I need, and these kids go without every single day.

Another time that seemed so insignificant yet will remain with me forever is when I had to make phone calls for different events to the residents. I hated making these phone calls. I felt like I was soliciting, and I'm just not a very straight forward person. One day I made over 90 phone calls, but not once were any of the residents rude or snappy with me. Some did decline the events I was proposing, but never did a single person make me feel bad about it. They were so nice, and some of them even stayed on the phone with me just to converse. Some of them just wanted someone to talk to. I not only feel more confident now about having to make phone calls if I ever need to in the future, but I am so thankful that the housing authority was my first experience in the secretarial field.

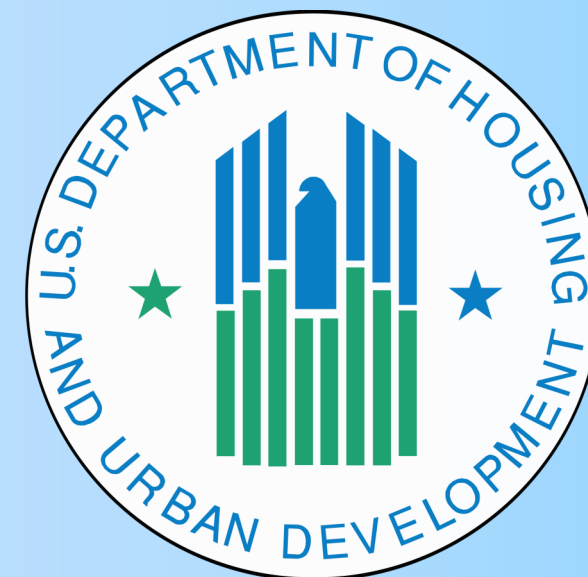


Probably my favorite event was the Health Fair. This is a great time for residents because they can receive free blood pressure checks, sugar level checks, free food, door prizes, and drawings. It's a time for everyone to get together and socialize, while receiving some free gifts. I was just there to help people carry food and do some drawings, but it was the best feeling to see those people light up after winning a prize or even able to eat a well-rounded meal. I don't know all about their lives or struggles, but I know that most of the residents have been through a lot. Most of them have a story. This was a great day for them because everything got to be about them.

I did many other tasks while volunteering. I did the Food Pantry, which is filling canned and boxed food for residents. I assessed the elderly, which is basically interviewing them in order to see what kinds of services they need or want, all provided by the housing authority. I met with residents and informed them about the many changes that would be taking place the next few years with renovations, and so on.

The housing authority has been serving residents in this area for over fifty years now. There is equal housing opportunity for all. It is funded from HUD, but also a big portion of money comes from the rent that tenants pay. Speaking of rent, residents are only required to pay up to 30% of their monthly income for rent, and this includes all utilities. The housing authority here is currently serving almost 3,000 people with 755 apartments. Most of these residents consist of children and the elderly.

I could go on and on about the housing authority. I just want to emphasize how life-changing this experience has been for me. I had been just trying to get my hours completed. But with all the hours I needed, it forced me to open up to the residents, their situations, and their stories. It has been more rewarding for me than for them, I'm sure; leaving felt like I was saying goodbye to family. These are some of the most genuine and selfless people anyone would ever have the honor of meeting and serving with. I still plan to visit, and I hope others can learn to do the same as I have learned to do. I appreciate my time at the housing authority and would recommend it to those who are ready to work hard and learn a thing or two about empathy.





The Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) and the NBCC Foundation are pleased to announce that the application deadline for the 2016 Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) scholarships has been extended to July 15, 2016. The available scholarships are the Global Career Development Facilitator (GCDF) scholarships, the Board Certified Coach (BCC) tuition assistance program, the CCE professional development awards, and the newly added Approved Clinical Supervisor (ACS) training awards.

- New this year, the ACS awards advance the professional identity and development of counselors throughout the nation by providing financial assistance to individuals who commit to apply for the Approved Clinical Supervisor credential. Five awards in the amount of \$500 each are available.*
- The goal of the GCDF scholarship program is to increase the number of available professional counselors providing quality career development services. Three scholarships of \$5,000 each are available, one domestic and two international.*
- The BCC tuition assistance program provides financial assistance to individuals pursuing the training necessary for the BCC certification. Two awards of up to \$3,000 each are available to cover the costs of an approved BCC training.*
- The CCE professional development awards advance the professional identity and development of CCE credential holders. Four awards in the amount of \$500 each are available.*

The application period ends on July 15, 2016 so don't miss out!



"The HS-BCP opens doors and gives credibility to the work that I do."

Tommy Lopez, HS-BCP, Chair, Human Services Technology at Central Piedmont Community

The Human Services-Board Certified Practitioner (HS-BCP)

Employers are looking for top candidates to fill human services positions. The Human Services-Board Certified Practitioner (HS-BCP) credential can help you get noticed in today's competitive job market. It shows employers that you have met professional credentialing standards in education based on academic and practical knowledge and experience in human services.

The HS-BCP is a credential created in a partnership between the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) and the National Organization for Human Services (NOHS) in consultation with the Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE). The credentialing program, administered by CCE, identifies qualified individuals who have satisfied the established knowledge standards.

Students enrolled in participating degree programs can get a head start in the job market by taking the HS-BCP Examination (HS-BCPE) while still in school. Students may transfer a passing score to the HS-BCP credential application. In order to become a certified HS-BCP, all other credential requirements must also be met, including a conferred eligible degree and verification of experience.

HS-BCP credential holders and applicants have the obligation to maintain high standards of integrity and conduct, act in a manner that protects the welfare and interests of clients, accept responsibility for their actions, act consistent with accepted ethical and legal standards, continually seek to enhance their occupational capabilities, and practice with fairness and honesty.

A Response to Gun Violence in American Society

Robert W. Olding

Episodic violence involving guns and assaults on even the most innocent appears epidemic in American society. Yet the focus of this article is not on gun control as there is already massive public debate and efforts to limit the access to at least the most lethal of these types of weapons at the highest levels of government. What I am focused upon is the inadequacy of this one dimensional approach to the conditions of violence in our society that plague our national consciousness and have brought horror to so many in recent years.

It is my basic assertion here that we have bred conditions of such episodic violence in multiple ways over the past decade. Gun control is necessary, but not sufficient to curb the type of violent acts we witness on a national scale and that are heavily projected through the news media. There are in fact two other major areas of concern that I would point to that are critical concerns that must be addressed yet receive minimal voice in the discussions of this issue.

Mental Health Services

Despite much rhetoric directed to the rationalization of decreases in available mental health services (and the management of such services on a purely cost basis), it is yet obvious that such critical areas of outreach and prevention working with those who are isolated and essentially untreated has progressed to serious deficits that increase risk for such individuals to engage in aberrant forms of (frequently violent) behavior. Human Services as a professional field provides for a first level of contact in many ways for this rather invisible, underserved population. I would submit the proposition that we as a society have reinterpreted individualism to mean that individuals have no community responsibility toward those that we perhaps live next door to. Further such an interpretation of individualism appears to assume that it is the troubled individual's responsibility to seek assistance through some program by presenting themselves in the agency lobby and navigating through the requirements of insurance coverage, payment plans and arrangements before any actual therapeutic actions are initiated. It is instructive to make a community based assessment as to what prevention and early intervention efforts are available at local levels.

If you undertake an analysis of the various episodes of gun related attacks on groups to include children, one common theme appears to emerge. The perpetrators of such horrendous incidents share a common history of instability and a general isolation from their communities and those around them. Often they appear lost in the crowd and demonstrate few or no personal relationships with others (discounting social network presence where they may project their rants without personal contact). In an active community where there is a form of shared responsibility for the welfare of members, such isolation would be noticeable.

Entertainment Media and the Fascination with Violent Acts

The other area that must be mentioned here is perhaps the least discussed. I would assert here that the contemporary mass media (particularly that which is entertainment oriented but is harder all the time to separate from what we yet refer to as "News"), has a seemingly obsessive fascination with content that projects the most grotesque images of violence to the intricacies of detail. A content analysis of violent acts involving guns on popular television shows a disturbing high frequency of occurrence. Video games accessed by even young children allow for the selection of sophisticated weapons including virtual representations of assault weapons that have been targeted for control in Congress. It is not difficult to watch programs in prime time that involve living beings being devoured alive by zombies while brave defenders take out as many as possible with head shots. Murder is a common entertainment theme with various representations going to the most gruesome detail. Even the news media attempt to present highly graphic images of violence in their reporting of various incidents.

While these are all matters that the media tends to defend under the First Amendment as protected forms of speech and expression (as opposed to the "Second Amendment" relied upon by gun advocates), there is yet the question of responsibility in what is being perpetuated as material for public consumption. Is it their position that such representations have no effect upon those that habitually watch such entertainment? Unfortunately, the media as a whole tend to avoid this discussion and debate. Can you imagine a national debate such as that going on over gun control as to what content is acceptable for movies and television regarding the representations of violence? Think about that when you watch the movie "Bullet to the Head." An historical analysis of media programming can clearly demonstrate a movement away from censorship to a position of pushing the limits as to what graphic representations of violence (often with guns) can be displayed even during hours that were once reserved for family entertainment. Whatever happened to self-regulation of media in the public interest?

A Scenario

Imagine if you will, an individual with a history of mental health issues and instability, isolated within their community, superficially treated (if at all), medication non-compliant, and perhaps self medicating with alcohol or illicit drugs. In this person's isolation from actual human contact, they may engage in periodic superficial contacts and rants through social media outlets. They may even participate in online "team games" that involve virtual combat with sophisticated virtual weapons. Otherwise they sit alone and watch television with a preference for such shows as "The Walking Dead" of the zombie genre or even "Criminal Minds" presenting the drama of serial killers of various sorts torturing and murdering innocent victims. They are perhaps depressed and angry, perhaps have some symptoms and tendency to bipolarize (and become escalated). Even as they watch the news, they see the detailed stories of others not unlike themselves who are being glamorized as the infamous.

Reduced to an equation it appears as: Isolated from Community + Emotionally Unstable + Medication Non-Compliance and Self Medicating + Lack of Human Services (perhaps via outreach) + Media Input focused on weapons and violence + Virtual involvement with gaming involving weapons + Access to Guns = ???

Conclusion

As human service proponents and professionals, I will close in saying that we have a responsibility to broaden the discussion and debate beyond basic gun control to the larger scope of the problem in our contemporary society. I urge each of you to engage everyone you can in the discussion from a solution focused perspective. It is something that we should seek to engage as many as possible in deliberative communication that is solution focused. I believe it is essential to advocate for a wider scope of services involving prevention and early intervention that are perhaps beyond the realm of managed care. Finally, I would submit that we as Human Services professionals should engage in advocacy and community building at every opportunity. It is something that we have responsibility to undertake.



TRANSforming Human Services

Steve Cockerham

“NOHS is a medium for encouraging social justice and human equality. As such, advocacy is a process for influencing and challenging public policy as well as perceptions about human service related issues and concerns through persuasive arguments for the rights of all members of society.”

You’ve probably seen this statement recently in NOHS emails. It is always important for human service professionals to advocate and especially so when issues take national notice. In the conversation of humankind, our field has its very specific advocacy for human service issues along with a general advocacy for controversies at large. Most prominently, we advocate for “services without discrimination or preference in regards to age, ethnicity, culture, race, ability, gender, language preference, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, or other historically oppressed groups” (Standard 10) as stated in the 2015 Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals. As a profession, we are focused on our clients and their families, friends, communities, nations, and the world. Concurrently, we “advocate for social justice and seek to eliminate oppression. They [HSPs] raise awareness of underserved populations in their communities and with the legislative system.” (Standard 16).

Of course, there are so many issues to discuss, and we all have our priorities. Currently, one stands out – restrooms for all. Based on our ethical standards, it is quite clear that human service professionals advocate for people the freedom to choose the facility of their gender identity. It is particularly aggravating that we should have to confront this issue. People should be able to rest in peace and privacy. But, it may be necessary to contest this in order to educate and advocate so that all will know how we can accommodate those who need to choose their gender regardless of their sex. Many are just not familiar with the situation and react based on prejudices and pathology related to sexuality. Now is a good time for our people and communities to grow ethically and morally, gaining an understanding to meet the diverse requirements of everyone.

First of all, the need for restrooms affects everyone. For myself, I like privacy. I know that’s not always possible for those of us who have had to suffer group lavatories...nothing like standing side by side in a line of too many men attempting to aim the stream carefully into a long trough at a sports event. You may wonder how all us introverts, especially, handle this. Well, one is not supposed to look. And, if one does, one is very circumspect. Ogling, glaring, staring, or other “ings” should not be done unless one is three years old. Conversation is not needed even though some cannot resist. The point is that people should be able to eliminate as comfortably as possible. Do we need to make this constitutional? As a constituent of the wealthiest country in the world, I would like to encourage a national effort for privacy in restroom facilities.

I must add that I reside on an isolated mountain farm where I frequently use the out of doors as a place of relief. It is private but a different kind of private. Here, no one can see me, not that there is much to look at...it’s just that one doesn’t need privacy screening when deep into forest. There are no gender laws for what particular bush or tree to use. There are no rules on where to go and who can go there when attempting to climb Mt. Everest. I’m sure our next phase here in the Southern Appalachian region will be gender specific outhouses. Having dug too many latrines in wilderness therapy, I think that two seaters should be discouraged.

You may think I’m kidding, and I wouldn’t blame you, but I have invented a new outdoor toilet. As an aging but avid backpacker, I took an ultralite backpacking stool and converted it to facilitate number two in the great outdoors. I can no longer squat easily due to age and old knees. A very useful book, *How to Shit in the Woods*, by Kathleen Meyer did not cover this infirmity. Now, though, I’m set! And, of course, calling it a stool is uniquely appropriate. Next, I want to convert an umbrella such that opening it will drop a round curtain in case I need to go quickly near trails. I realize now that I need a pink one and a blue one so people won’t get confused.

Seriously though, this issue is personally important to me, for one, because I have a close relative who has transgendered. Like so much of diversity, once you open your mind and heart to people whose lives and experiences are not identical to yours, you gain a newer, deeper understanding and appreciation for what it must be like and then also, who you are. We all share the travails of growing, the challenges of acceptance, the agony of rejection, and the feeling of not being understood. Compassion, caring, and consideration are awakened by truly hearing the struggles of people to be their true selves and to experience the privilege of that freedom. My cousin, Sarah, has blossomed into a beautiful, confident, loving, proud, and psychologically healthy person. The story of her life and the transition into the truth of her gender is one that only those who are ignorant, hateful, judgmental, sexist, and destructive can fail to be transformed. Caitlyn, move over!

While North Carolina suffers the conservative falsehood of local control, Tennessee and South Dakota politicians listened to the stories of transgendered students and did not enact despotic legislation. As reported by Eesha Pandit in Yes! magazine (Summer, 2016), these were Republican lawmakers that listened to transgender voices and resisted the lies of transphobia. Even so, 44 anti-transgender bills have been considered in 16 states this year. In the land of the free, the brave continue to struggle for equality. It is estimated that over 15,000 transgendered soldiers are currently dedicated to keeping America safe. In another example of remarkable leadership, President Obama has spearheaded an end to discrimination against these patriots.

Some people use religion as a justification for their hatred and intolerance. Well, God has been used throughout history to condemn, torture, and kill. That does not make it right. I prefer to see God as a force for loving one another as ourselves and for doing unto others as we’d like it done to us. Just recently in the area where I live, two pastors were arrested for having sex with children. I cannot find any record of arrest for anyone being in the wrong restroom; in fact, there are no recorded instances of non-transgender people being harassed by transgender people in restrooms (Media Matters, 2015). Around here, it may be safer in a stall than behind the pulpit. Perhaps the true danger lies much closer than we think and not with those who are simply trying to be who they really are.

Elemental to this issue is a reality both sad and funny. Once people have made the transition to the other sex, they will likely look, dress, and act accordingly. Imagine the surprise of people who advocate restroom use according to one’s birth certificate when actually sharing facilities with a person who genuinely looks and acts like someone of the opposite sex. It will be like the new law made us share the restroom with someone in the wrong one! Talk about unintended consequences. The level of intelligence for some politicians in NC matches their penchant for tyranny and control by the state.

Here is hatred and ignorance in practice: Many cisgender people have been harassed by anti-transgender people and forced to leave restrooms because they just don’t happen to physically appear as their biological gender (It’s Pat). Half of all transgendered people surveyed recall being harassed or assaulted in restrooms (Transgender Training Institute). In schools that permit choice, no incidents of harassment or inappropriate behavior have ever been recorded. Some states are attempting to pass laws that give bounties to individuals reporting use of restrooms by transgender people. This could give new life to Dog, the bounty hunter.

It is not funny when you have to go, and there’s nowhere to do so. A colleague of mine was waiting in line to use the restroom at a local restaurant. Commonly, there is no line for the men’s room yet one for the women’s. Also waiting were two women lamenting about this issue, clearly on the side of discrimination against transgender choice of restrooms. Suddenly, one of the women cried, “I can’t wait any longer!” and she rushed into the men’s room. My friend, one of the nicest persons I know, asked them, “Do you not know or care that other people can hear what you are saying?”

No matter what, I think you'll agree that we should be able to provide a comfortable spot where all can have privacy when engaging in eliminatory actions. We should not promote bathroom monitors. How would we like spies in our restrooms, people peeping at our privates to see if we have the right equipment? Again, these laws may inadvertently support true perversion. We should not jail or fine those who have to go for going where they need to go. As an elder male with a prostate, I am entirely sympathetic with this need. It is impossible not to add humor to what should be a non-issue, but it is more important to realize how serious this is. It is deeply painful to be aware of the hurt and fears instigated by those who discriminate, assault, and penalize innocent people. I am aghast and disappointed how people can be so thoughtless and cruel about this.

It's not about safety. It's not about the children. It's not about God. It's not about modesty.

It's about ignorance. It's about xenophobia. It's about oppression. It's about hatred.

The struggle for equality continues. The challenge of understanding and acceptance remains. There is no better action for human service professionals than to help those who need us. There have always been people at every point in the range of gender identity, regardless of biological sexual organs or sometimes because of it. What we have now is the opportunity to create a society more caring, understanding, and accepting. Enabling a society where people are free to choose their deepest and most pervasive sense of gender self is a remarkable development in a more democratic, healthy, and caring society.

This is a challenge of love. Can we continue to grow as people in letting everyone be as male or female, as masculine or feminine, as they wish? What's wrong with being wherever you are on the continuum? What's wrong is distorting your gender by engaging in violence or oppression toward either sex. What's right is the freedom to identify your gender, even if it changes, and to be able, in this case, to simply engage your natural functions. What's right is to stand up for those who suffer, to show our love for one another. I hope you will join this cause as human service professionals and help make this world a better place for everyone.

Websites for Information

<http://www.transequality.org/issues> Website for the National Center for Transgender Equality.

<http://www.transstudent.org/> Trans Student Educational Resources organization website.

<http://www.transstudent.org/gender> Gender Unicorn, an updated version of the Genderbread Person.

<http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2015/03/the-genderbread-person-v3v/> The *Genderbread Person* is helpful in explaining the differences between sex, gender, sexual orientation, sexual behavior, attraction, etc. This website has other useful information, too.

<http://www.wpath.org/> World Professional Association for Transgender Health

<http://www.transpeoplespeak.org/> Stories and affirmations transgender people and allies.

<https://www.pointfoundation.org/> National LGTBQ Scholarship Fund

<http://www.sundance.tv/series/transgeneration> TV show about transgender persons.

<http://transgriot.blogspot.com/>

Transgendered American Veterans Association

Books and Training Materials

www.teachingtransgender.org/

www.teachingtransgender.org/flush-discrimination-a-free-lesson-for-teaching-about-bathroom-bills/

www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/transgender/ Foundations for Psychological Practice with Transgender & Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) Clients

www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.aspx

www.impactprogram.org/lgbtq-youth/transgender-101/

<https://petersontoscano.wordpress.com/2009/10/15/privilege-of-non-transgender-people/>

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Trans Training Google group - an online group built up specifically for support. It is the Trans Trainers Network at trans-training-network@googlegroups.com and has grown from a need among many of the members of WPATH. Please feel welcome to contact them and join. There are many resources in the group and plenty of willing support.

http://staging.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/Trans_Ally_Manual%20rev%2010_26_2011.pdf Here's a link for the training at the University of Illinois.

Sylvia Rivera Law Project – provides training for service providers:

http://srp.org/trainings/?gclid=Cj0KEQjwvtS6BRC8pcKn8OXlg_wBEiQAqtpiz_rqd9ZSI3ltYAm6T2wMF0JzIE27KTQCQBY0Rk81HxsaAqgq8P8HAQ

The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens and Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity (2015) by Rylan Jay Testa, Deborah Coolhart, Jayme Peta

Where's My Book? A Guide for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth, Their Parents, and Everyone Else (2015) by Linda Gromko, MD

Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community (2014) by Laura Erickson-Schroth

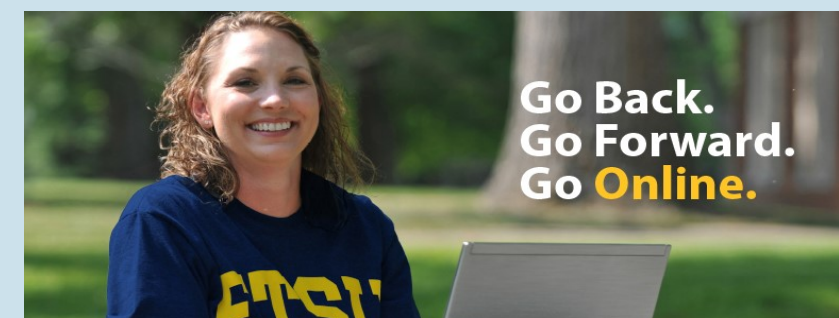
Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue (2012) by Nicholas M Teich

Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children (2011) by Diane Ehrensaft, PhD and Edgardo Menvielle, MD, MSHS

Helping Your Transgender Teen: A Guide for Parents (2011) by Irwin Krieger

Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family (2011) by Amy Ellis Nutt

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals (2008) by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper



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<http://www.etsu.edu/coe/chs/humanservices-grad/>

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Home(less) of the Brave

Pateyn Christopher

A few weeks ago, I stood facing an older gentleman as he wished his fellow veterans a halfhearted farewell. He wore jeans with an odd print on the front right pocket, as if a key ring full of keys had been kept there for many years. His shirt was thin and tattered, and his shoes had holes around the toes and heels. Despite his outward appearance, this gentleman had a handsome smile that danced on his lips, and yet his eyes seemed to stand still with a twinkling sadness.

When asked where he would be going, his shoulders seemed to stoop out of pride and into sadness. "To the Salvation Army," was his quiet reply. This may not seem like a big deal to some, though more so due to lack of knowledge of this issue or due to the inability to realize that two and two are some of the puzzle pieces that make up this very real and very present problem. Allow me to explain.

There are many places in almost every city that aid those in need, whether it be a clinic, a halfway house, a program of sorts, etc. However, each of these places has a limit as to how much time can be spent there, how much of the services can be used by a single person, and, of course, the requirements that must be met to have either of these in the first place. This particular gentleman fought for the United States of America in Vietnam, risking his life to bring freedom and prosperity to his family, his friends, and his country. For this man to be on his way to the Salvation Army means that this man does not have a place to call home. He does not have a steady job. He does not have the physical capabilities to maintain a home and job on his own. This means that he is, without a doubt, homeless.

What our nation does not acknowledge is that veterans are very susceptible to homelessness due to being left disabled in either a physical or mental manner. This could be anything from anxiety to PTSD to a type of illness from overseas to a severed limb. This specific veteran had spent his allotted time in one place and was now headed to the next place that he could receive shelter from for a short period of time.

So why have people not taken action to prevent the men and women who dedicated the better parts of their lives and their health to bringing about freedom to each of the citizens in this country? Some would say that if homelessness were cured, there would be no profit from it. Others would say that homeless veterans are lazy perverts who can do nothing for themselves, rendering them homeless and unable to work. Both of these conclusions are wrong.

The government does not benefit from homelessness in dollar signs; in fact, it spends money on legislation that puts limitations on homeless individuals so that they struggle more than necessary to regain their financial composure. Most of those laws have something to do with sleeping in public places or even in private cars. A man I recently had the pleasure of meeting shared a story from his life while living in New Jersey. He had been homeless there for a few months due to being laid off from a job and being unable to find work that would allow him to keep up with his bills. He explained that he had been arrested for falling asleep on a park bench and, fearing he would seem exhausted and unattached at job interviews, began sneaking in naps on the subways.

Is this an injustice on the part of our country as a whole? Is it the fault of our government and its systems? Is this a problem caused by each individual citizen? These questions plague the minds of students who study further into homelessness or, more specifically, homeless veterans. Our country tends to focus on and treat the symptoms rather than the causes of the problem. Instead of making opportunities for our veterans to obtain a decent job and housing, our country builds more halfway houses and shelters to accommodate them while they are homeless. This is a problem because we are trying too hard to keep certain aspects of homelessness unacknowledged instead of taking into account *why* these men and women are homeless.

Everyone always wants to know what exactly causes homelessness. The question is what *one* event or problem can be used to pinpoint exactly why people are homeless. The answer is simple: there is no one cause. Most of the homeless individuals that I have had the opportunity to talk to have all had a similar story: parents have problems (bills, jobs, communication, illness, disabilities, age, mental status, addictions...) and cause problems for their children and the only way the kids know to deal with problems is to do as their parents did. Substance abuse is one of the major aspects of homelessness, along with traumatic events, personal crisis, and mental illness.

When the state of Utah decided to end homelessness, they did not let anything stand in their way. This war on homelessness was declared more than a decade ago and has resulted in decreasing the homeless population by 91 percent as discovered by Kelly McEvers with NPR in 2015. They started a movement called Housing First, and it does exactly what it says. Instead of requiring people to meet a certain list of eligibilities, Utah took the homeless off the streets and *gave* them homes. After the individuals were able to have a roof over their heads and an address to use for interviews, they were able to obtain steady paying jobs so that they could get back on their feet and become financially stable.

This problem has become more than a small fray in the network of our country; it has become a gaping hole in the fabric that holds our nation together. If there is to be any kind of change regarding our homeless veterans, our nation's officials and citizens must be willing to step up and take control of it. This is not something that will simply cease to exist if there is no acknowledgement of it. It will persist and it will become bigger and it will be a problem that our mothers, your fathers, your sisters, your brothers, and your children will begin to see in a more glaring light. It will become a problem that is literally at our doorsteps. It will seep into our minds and our clothes and will make our homes reek with heartache. It will begin to slowly destroy this country from the inside out.

To have homeless veterans in this country is to tell them that we do not care about their sacrifice. It is to tell them that, though they may have given up their whole lives for us, they could have done more. Is this how we want the men and women to be honored? By making it known that they should have done more?

Homelessness is a major problem in the United States. The number of homeless veterans that our borders contain is unacceptable. Too large a percentage of people homeless are veterans. That means nearly 50,000 veterans are homeless in our country. Since 2010, the federal strategic plan, Opening Doors, has reduced homelessness for vets by 36 percent. Several states and cities such as Virginia, Houston, and New Orleans have declared that no more homeless vets reside in their communities (http://www.va.gov/homeless/about_the_initiative.asp). For all of us who deeply appreciate our freedom, there is still so much work to be done. Please support the national effort to reduce homelessness.





Individuals and communities
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LINK

Newsletter of the National Organization for Human Services

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