

Mental Illness and our Homeless Friends

What an amazing week! Sometimes there just aren't words to describe an encounter and the impact it makes on you, but I'm going to try. I had the honor of being a guest a few times last week at the home of some new friends.

Their home was not fancy in any way, but it was tidy, very organized and quite functional. My friends were quite proud of their residence although they had a dirt floor and an amazing view. They were very welcoming to our team during a surprise visit and to me during subsequent visits. Yes, my new friends are part of our area's homeless population.

I had never visited a homeless camp before and I must admit I was a bit shocked. These men taught me so much in such a short time. I can only hope if circumstances were to change in my life that I could respond with such grace and not sink into a deep depression. They were thankful for so little and so appreciative of prayer and any kindness shown. I was surprised when one of the gentlemen responded "It just means so much to know that someone cares." I assured him that many in our community do truly care

·
Actually there is such power in simply caring and allowing others to be heard. Everyone needs to know that they matter and that their life's story is important. This sharing and caring is one element which contributes healing power to community groups and twelve step programs. My homeless friends have a special way of caring for their fellow street people, but they also welcome love and respect from the rest of us

·
I encourage you to slow down a bit and to look into the eyes of those you pass in your day to day journey. We are all walking past people with souls and feelings-not "walking statues". Ask them how they are truly doing and actually wait to hear their responses. You do have something powerful to offer even if it is simply respect and a little of your time.

I never expected my counseling career to have homelessness as a focus, but now it appears as a natural part of the journey. Statistics from the NAMI report which referenced the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress show that the mentally ill make up a significant part of the homeless population. It quotes that

26% of adults at shelters have a serious mental illness and 46 % of them have a mental illness or /and a substance abuse addiction.

Our local NAMI group, www.namiwheeling.org, has worked endless hours to advocate for the housing needs of the mentally ill. It is scary for aging parents to be concerned that their loved one could end up homeless when they are no longer able to care for them.

In recognition of the National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Recovery and Understanding

we will be co-sponsoring a special time of prayer. A Candle Light Prayer Service will be held at 6:30 p.m. on October 7th at the St. Michael's Church, 1225 National Road, Wheeling. Our speaker, Amy Gamble, will be sharing her story "From Olympic Athlete to Bipolar Patient-Who Am I Really?" I hope you can join us in this interfaith prayer service as we pray for those families and individuals suffering as a result of mental illness.