

Myth Busters: the Facts on homelessness in Utah

On any given night, 3,316 Utahns are homeless. As many as 16,000, or .06% of the state, will experience homelessness in a year.

Who are they, and how did they wind up on the streets?

The answers may surprise you. So may their stories of healing and hope.

“I’m finally in control of my life.”

Maria, 42, escaped an abusive 19-year marriage, but had no safety net, nowhere to go. From the foundation of supportive housing, she was able to complete college and nurture her three children in a loving, disciplined environment.

“Living here affords me the time I need to fix Bill.”

Bill has been clean and sober for 18 years. But the 58-year-old Vietnam Veteran says “that doesn’t fix everything.” Now in supportive housing, he’s finally getting treatment for his post-traumatic-stress disorder.

“I want to stay off drugs, find a job and see my kids.”

Julie’s kids lived in foster care while she served time at the Utah State Prison. Last month, mentors helped her look for an apartment where she hopes to regain her footing, dignity, and perhaps, custody of her children.

The Facts

Homeless people suffer from the hardship of their condition, but also face alienation and discrimination fueled by stereotypes. Here are some of myths and realities of homelessness.

MYTH: People who are homeless stay homeless for a long time.

FACT: The vast majority of homeless Utahns - 86 percent - are **temporarily** homeless. They stay in shelters for brief periods, for days or weeks, and often do not return.

MYTH: Most are single men.

FACT: Persons in families are the fastest growing, comprising 41 percent of Utah’s homeless population.

MYTH: The homeless population is transient, migrating to cities with the best services.

FACT: 85 percent of Utah’s homeless population lived in Utah when they became homeless. They hail from urban and rural areas, small towns and affluent suburbs.

MYTH: Homeless people are dangerous.

FACT: The homeless are more likely to be victims of crime. Though prone to commit non-violent, petty crimes like loitering and trespassing, they are less likely to commit crimes against a person or property.

MYTH: They are to blame for their situation.

FACT: Many are victims of circumstance: illness and trauma from violence or abuse. About 26 percent are children.