

Six Scary Myths About Homelessness

With nearly 554,000 homeless people in the United States on any given night – in cities all across the nation – the issue of homelessness is scary enough in its own right. Unfortunately, misconceptions or “myths” related to homelessness merely serve to compound the issue further. [Rainbow Village](#) would like to dispel a few of those myths in the hope that we can let go of a lot of the fear associated with the concept of a homeless person and work together towards a solution to this national crisis.



Rainbow Village, Inc.

Myth #1: Many Homeless People Choose to Live on the Streets Because They Suffer from Mental Illness

The sad truth is that homelessness can affect anyone – regardless of mental capacity, sex, race, religious or political affiliation, education or age. Only about ¼ of the homeless population are documented as mentally ill, while the rest are there by no choice of their own due to financial hardship, the need to escape an abusive situation and/or the inability to find housing they can afford.

Myth #2: Homelessness Really Only Affects Adults

Ask just about anyone what their personal stereotype of a homeless person looks like and they might paint the picture of a disheveled old man holding up a “will work for food” sign or an unkempt woman pushing around a grocery cart filled with recyclable cans. Sadly, homelessness impacts entire families – and more than 110,000 of the nearly 554,000 homeless on a single night in America are children under the age of 18. As many as 3.5 million Americans are homeless each year – and of those, more than 1 million are children. As a matter of fact, 31% of all homeless people in 2017 were under the age of 24. Those statistics are even more frightening right here in Georgia, where on any given night there are as many as 27,000 homeless people on our streets and in our shelters and over HALF of those are children. According to the Georgia Alliance to End Homelessness, the average age of a homeless person is now 9-years-old.



Myth #3: Homeless People are Lazy and Just Need to Go Out and Get a Job

Statistics show that up to 60% of homeless heads of households are employed and that most homeless families with children are headed by single mothers earning below-poverty level wages. Oftentimes, they are caught unprepared by a catastrophic event – such as a devastating illness, death of a spouse, divorce, natural disaster, the need to escape an inherently violent situation or sudden loss of job. A major cause

of homelessness is the inability to find affordable housing following one or more of these catastrophic events.

Myth #4: Homelessness Only Affects Urban Areas

Studies show that – in Georgia alone – more than half of homeless students live in suburban or rural areas. In the 2015–16 school year, Georgia had 1,757,237 students enrolled in 203 school districts. That same year, 2.2% of the student population was designated as homeless. Of a total 38,474 homeless students, 32% reported living in the suburbs, 32% reported living in rural areas, 11% declared towns their “home” and only 25% reported living in an urban area. Georgia had the 8th highest number of homeless students and the 23rd highest rate of student homelessness in the U.S.

Myth #5: To be Considered Truly “Homeless,” You Must Live on the Streets

That age-old image of cardboard box communities may serve as most people’s concept of homelessness, but it reaches far beyond that. Homelessness – according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – is defined as “an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation.” An individual may be considered to be homeless if that person is “doubled up,” a term that refers to a situation where individuals are unable to maintain their housing situation and are forced to stay with a series of friends and/or extended family members. Many of the families at [Rainbow Village](#) were once living out of friends or family member’s homes, staying in hotel or sleeping in their cars.

Myth #6: The Number of Homeless People is Dropping

While it’s true that since 2007, homelessness has declined overall by 14% nationally, there was a nearly 1% spike increase in the number of homeless individuals between 2016 and 2017. And of that increase, there was also a rise in the number of unsheltered homeless people to the tune of 9.4%, unaccompanied children and young adults at 14.3 percent and individuals experiencing chronic homelessness at 12.2 percent. Homelessness appears to be more acute in states where housing is more expensive. Washington D.C., Hawaii, New York and California have the highest percentages of homeless per capita. This data shows us that there is still so much work to be done, the stats for Georgia shows that what organizations like [Rainbow Village](#) are doing is working. Georgia reported the largest decrease during that time period with 2,735 fewer people experiencing homelessness. Join Rainbow Village in our fight to break the cycles of homelessness, poverty and domestic violence here in Georgia. [Donate](#) or [Register as a Volunteer](#) today!

Sources: <https://monarchhousing.org/2018/07/29/homeless-myths/>
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