

From the keyboard of Joe Gardner.

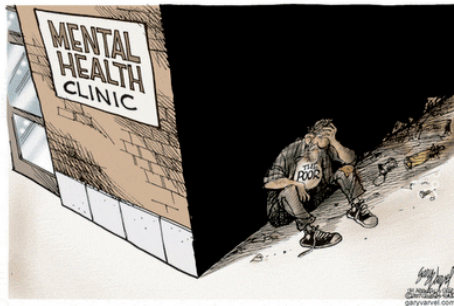
November 5, 2018

Homelessness is a mere symptom of other problems. Generally, 1/3 are mentally ill, 1/3 are addicted to drugs or alcohol or suffer from mental illness and use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. A smaller percentage are people who experience misfortune due to a lack of literacy or loss of a job, eviction or fleeing circumstances such as domestic violence. The latter people in the spectrum generally don't remain homeless for long. They move in with others and get back on their feet.



If you talk to those on the street, they might tell you they like the lifestyle and freedom. My experience is there is always some underlying root cause that put them on the street. More accurately, they avoid the structured shelter environment because it conflicts with their ability to feed their addictions. It is almost always one of the outlined issues of addiction or mental illness.

Just about every city in California has some degree of homelessness in their community. Other cities have more of a problem due to poor public policy that includes the lack of enforcement of long-established laws against trespassing, camping and public health violations.



Another reason is lack of resources for mental treatment. There are not enough long-term care beds for the mentally ill. Our emergency rooms become the band-aid treatment centers for homeless people with acute mental illness and drug overdoses. Some psychotropic medications that could help someone with mental illness costs hundreds of dollars and are not covered by insurance.

We are a compassionate society. We make well-intended efforts and policies. Politicians, government officials and social service organizations try to "help" the homeless but end up attracting more homeless people from other areas to their communities. Word gets out about freebies, handouts, lax enforcement and social accommodation. That's why 1/3 of the nation's poor live in our state. "No strings attached" entitlement policies attract the poor for free cash stipends and food vouchers. Once local governments and compassionate but misguided people lay out the welcome mat, the residual problem of visible homelessness grows.

Here's an example and quote from one of my fellow peace officers named Jacob; "Bumped into a meth addicted schizophrenic homeless guy last night. He said he recently came from Texas where he was getting \$755 a month in Social Security Disability Income and now he's getting \$1200 a month in California. He has no intention of being housed. He has bonus money to buy more meth and live a meager existence. Meth is probably cheaper here too. The word is out across the nation. Come to California where the drug laws are weakened and the money flows." There is a critical need for welfare or entitlement reform in California.

vote4joegardner.com
joegardner73@gmail.com

From the keyboard of Joe Gardner.



A key reason we have this state-wide problem of homelessness is because of the collapsing of the criminal justice system brought on by a progressive legislature, social justice advocates and an acquiescent governor that have pushed forward prison realignment (AB109) Proposition 47 and now Proposition 57. Now with the passage of AB 1810, Mental Health Diversion and SB 10, Bail "Reform" Act Tens of thousands that should still be in prison have now become "free-range" probationers. The result is criminal recidivism. Moving many felony crimes to misdemeanor

status has made it nearly impossible to prosecute anyone. Add in overcrowding in our jail system and arrested "misdemeanor" offenders are merely given citations and reluctantly set free by law enforcement to commit more crimes to support their drug habits or sometimes violently act out their untreated mental illness on the innocent public. Peace officers have little incentive to arrest and do hours of paperwork just to see the arrestee walk out of the jail with a ticket that will turn into a warrant because the offender is not responsible enough to appear in court.



Courts used to be the last chance for intervention. It can force the prosecuted to alcohol and drug rehabilitation. The courts can impose mental health treatment and monitored probation to set people on the path of sobriety, stability, and wellness. Court actions instill an individual sense of personal responsibility and accountability. The courts can't do any of that if the arrested never make it to the court room.

Unfortunately, local cities can do little to fix the issues of homelessness except be earnest advocates for change either at the ballot box or bending the ear of an elected state official. The responsibility and solutions rest solely at the feet of State government. Many of those elected public servants have been architects of social experiments at the expense of the safety and fiscal well-being of the average California citizen. We are seeing the tainted fruits of their bad policy decisions.



Bottom line:

- Stop attracting the drug and alcohol addicted, mentally ill homeless to our state. Implement welfare reform that includes limiting cash stipends unless they are tied to enrollment and completion of treatment programs, attach one to three-year sunset clauses on individual payouts to homeless recipients.
- Stop providing services to non-residents. Recipients must prove residency for one year. Encourage non-residents to return to their home jurisdiction.
- Reform the criminal justice system to include enforcement of drug laws as they were before AB109, Prop 47, Prop 57 and AB 1810 so those arrested can be compelled, through the courts to accept treatment. Restore funding to court-mandated rehabilitation centers and programs.
- Assure all women and children become the priority for expedited transition to supportive housing. They are the most vulnerable.

From the keyboard of Joe Gardner.

- Repurpose closed military bases and other closed facilities to create treatment and rehabilitation communities. Partner with private-sector businesses and trade organizations to bring those facilities up to building codes while teaching and training the homeless to build and maintain their own temporary homes and communities.

It is beyond the time to address this complex issue. We have been on a reckless path and have wasted billions to solve this problem. We must prove we are truly compassionate and treat the underlying issues that put people into the state of homelessness. We must strive to restore dignity and responsibility to those who languish on the streets.



Joe Gardner,
Retired Santa Monica Police Sergeant.
Commissioner
Los Angeles County Probation Commission.

About the author: Joe is a 27-year retired veteran of the Santa Monica Police Department. He is an expert on the issues of homelessness and Community Oriented Policing programs and tactics. He has been a street-level peace officer. Joe also implemented and supervised a specialized unit dedicated to solving neighborhood issues caused by homelessness. Joe

speaks on the topic to community groups business owners to help mitigate the impact of homelessness. Joe serves as presiding Commissioner of the Los Angeles County Probation Commission.