

## AoW 1.19.10

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading on the page.
3. Write a one-page reflection in your WN

### **Advocates: Don't Give Directly to Homeless**

Attempts to help actually can hinder efforts to offer long-term aid, they say

Source: Will Higgins/*Indianapolis Star*/ January 7, 2010

They're kind. They're industrious. They're generous.

Across Indianapolis, roughly three dozen groups of good Samaritans bring food and clothing and other amenities to the city's neediest, the hardcore homeless who live on the streets even in the bitterest cold.

And now, with freezing temperatures and up to 5 inches of snow in the forecast, advocates for the homeless have a request for these good Samaritans: Stop.

Stop showing up at homeless camps and dropping off mattresses. Stop handing out blankets and candles and tents.

Most importantly, stop giving directly to the homeless. It might seem like the right thing to do, the advocates say, but it actually can hamper their efforts to get the chronically homeless off the streets and into shelters.

The more bearable the streets, the advocates say, the less likely the homeless will seek shelter and counseling and, in the end, a better life. Think of it as tough love.

"It's nice to give poor people meals and fellowship," said Michael Hurst, program director for the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention, "but if you want to get them off the street and into services, for addiction, for mental health, that'll best happen with professional service providers."

It's not that Hurst and others don't appreciate the compassion or want to snuff out generosity. They just would prefer that donations be made instead to the professionals who help the homeless.

Just Tuesday, a fire spread through a homeless camp under a railroad bridge on Indianapolis' Southeastside. A candle caught fire in a tent -- both gifts from amateur helpers.

"We would never give a homeless person a candle or a tent," said Stacey Nugent, an outreach worker with the Homeless Initiative Program.

Indianapolis is home to an estimated 200 so-called chronically homeless people. Shelter-resistant, often mentally ill and with drug or alcohol problems, they sleep outdoors even on the coldest nights, often huddled in camps under bridges.

Such camps are increasingly well-furnished, with residents in trucks and vans dropping off supplies several times a week: firewood, granola bars, plastic bottles of shampoo and mattresses. In October, a truck pulled up to a railroad underpass on Pine Street and dropped off 10 mattresses, said Chad Jones, who sleeps on one of them.

"I'm a bipolar schizophrenic," said Jones, 35, "and I'm not going to a shelter. This here's not too bad."

A half-dozen Bibles were visible among the detritus under the Pine overpass and one on Davidson Street.

"Sometimes the people want to pray with us, and that's OK," said Darwin Turner, 44, who lives under the Davidson bridge.

The action has been particularly fast and furious in recent weeks, as the season of giving coincided with plunging temperatures.

"You should have seen it at Christmas," Turner said. Cars and trucks bearing hats, gloves, groceries, even hot meals "was lined up all along here," he said. "It was neat, like a street party."

Turner had no idea who the people were.

Earlier, another group of friendlies came with large plastic sheets, which they strung up under the beams of the bridge to keep out the wind and form makeshift rooms. Turner has stayed in one since early December.

With such a supply line, "you don't need to go in" to a shelter, he said, "unless you're a greedy person."

Denise Williams, 45, who lives in a nearby tent with her husband, Juan, 55, mentioned to one of the helpers a few weeks ago that she could use some long johns. Within a week, she had a pair. She is thankful for the gift and said that such kindnesses "keep people from stealing stuff."

Neil Donovan, a former outreach worker and now executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition for the Homeless, said what's happening in Indianapolis -- bands of helpers reaching out directly to the homeless -- is happening across the country, and not just recently.

"There's a need for the community to know how to respond," he said. "People say to me, 'We've got blankets. What should we do?' I say, 'Drop them at shelters. You need to trust the shelters.'"

"It's not appropriate to all of a sudden be a de facto street outreach worker. Street outreach work takes a lot of education and training. It's not all common sense and intuition."

Possible reflection questions for your WN:

Do you agree with the argument that people should stop helping the homeless? Why?

Why not?

What are some of the problems that lead to homelessness?

As a society, how should we handle the homeless situation?

Discuss an interaction you have had with a homeless person.