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actually walking time bombs. There are people who are homeless who have AIDS, who cannot come in to any shelter. And I would put it to you: I have seen patients who have had AIDS who had to go to shelters, where you could sleep there all night, and they didn't dare tell the people they had AIDS. And they had to walk the streets during the day. I know of a patient who had no place to go, no food, no shelter—he purposely walked out in the middle of the street, in order to get hit by a car, so that he could have a reason to be admitted to the hospital.

Dr. King's dream was for all

In this country today, we are looking the other way. And I'm sure Martin cries, and the Lord Jesus—or whoever you believe is the Supreme Being—cries to see people looking the other way. Not all people: There's a young man who is trying very hard to feed the hungry; there's another person who has worked with the homeless. There are still people trying, people out there in the bushes still drumming up and still hoping that this country will come to the full realization of the dream of Martin.

Last week, I saw on TV a young man—and I felt so sorry for him, because he didn't realize what a predicament he was in, and what he was saying—it was a picture taken of the Ku Klux Klan march last year against Martin Luther King's birthday. And he had on his chest a T-shirt with a picture of Martin Luther King with a circle around it; he had a bullet hole in his head. And it said, "We killed Martin's dream, and I'm glad." And the reason it went through me, is that I said, "This man doesn't realize that Martin's dream was for all people, even him. And when he killed Martin's dream, he killed his own dream, because Martin loved him just as well as everybody else."

Juliet Grant

Intolerable plight of America's homeless

I'm very pleased to be here as we celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King. I've had the privilege and sometimes the un-privilege of working in shelters in the City of Elizabeth, New Jersey and in New York City.

Who is a homeless person?

I want to start by giving you a brief definition of a homeless person: *single man, single woman, single parent with children, family, mother, father, and children, adolescents, young adults, children, small siblings, children put into foster care*, quite often because the family is homeless, *runaway adolescents, displaced homemakers*.

Additional reasons for homelessness are: *incarceration in jail, hospitalization for a long period, AIDS victims, TB and other diseases, loss of a job, non-payment of rent, eviction from your apartment, property foreclosure, farm foreclosure* like the gentleman who spoke to us earlier [George Gentry]. One of the things that happens quite often, especially with property foreclosure, is that by the time the average citizen finds out that there are places that they could go for counseling it's probably too late and they're in the street, or they had too much pride, and just couldn't tell people how bad it was.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, fighting, all these contribute to homelessness. *Difference in life-styles, overcrowded facility*. A lot of people have five, six, seven, eight, and ten people in an apartment. The landlord is squawking because he didn't rent the apartment to you with this large amount of people, and therefore he will evict you. *A fire victim*, one of the most devastating things that can happen to anybody in their life. *Release from a mental institution*—a lot of people are just released from mental institutions with nowhere to go, the family network has fallen apart, the family that they did have, has moved and therefore they're supposed to be tracked through the mental health systems, and they fell through the crack of the mental health systems.

A day's life in a shelter

As I worked in New York City in one of the largest shelters, a 200-bed facility for women, let me tell you what I feel a day is in a New York shelter.

The first thing in the morning the women are awakened for breakfast. That's about 6:30. They're supposed to take their shower, get ready to come down for breakfast. The second thing is to clean up their space. They don't have a room, they have a cot. And some of the shelter people will make an example by saying, "Oh, these people don't care. All they need is three meals and a cot." The cot is so small, it's just a little bit bigger than this podium, and if you are kind of plump like me, you'd have a problem staying in this bed.

Lunch is one of the most important meals during the day. Clients sit in the TV room and watch TV all day, just wasting away. In the afternoon they check in. The next thing is supper. Late in the evenings or early nighttime people are constantly coming by, looking for a bed. Supper is served around 5:30. Once again the TV is turned on, while people watch, and one of the most sad things is that the most important and most eventful time of the day is meals, TV, and going to bed. 10:00 p.m. is bedcheck. If you're not in the house by 10:30 or quarter to 11, you might lose your bed.

The most important event of the day is daily distribution of [subway] tokens. I used to give out 150 to 200, \$200 worth of tokens per day. A lot of people don't even realize that a lot of homeless people go out and work every day. But they make such low salaries, that they can't afford to rent an apartment in New York. Menu is breakfast, lunch, supper. Homeless clients must live for the next meal.

There are programs on TV, but a lack of educational programs, lack of training to reenter the world of work.

One of the most devastating things is when a person first comes to a shelter, the first night. It's my opinion that these are some of the things they experience when they walk through the door. First is loneliness, feeling deserted, afraid, fear of the unknown, afraid to sleep at night, tired from lack of sleep.

Each homeless woman can only bring two bags of clothing to the average shelter. Now most people carry around everything they own, in these two bags. But quite often there's more bags. When someone loses his or her bed in a shelter, their clothing is placed in a large storage room. After approximately anywhere from seven to ten days, most clothing is thrown into the garbage. If something should happen to that client, the client has to go to the hospital, for example, and if the social worker in the hospital doesn't call the shelter and tell them that this person lost their bed because they were in the hospital, then that person will probably lose their clothing because it will be stored away and at the end of those ten days, because they constantly have to replace and make room for additional clothing for new clients, that person's clothes are thrown away. Therefore, homeless families, homeless single men, single women, can never accumulate anything. All homeless clients are advised not to have large amounts of clothing.

Some of the most important documents that a person could need, perish; and a person could need to have these

documents, to cash a check, to identify themselves, etc. A lot of times people will lose their birth certificate, family albums, marriage license, baptism papers, driver's license, all kinds of ID, and Social Security cards. Mothers lose their children's school documents, report cards, medical cards, and high school diplomas, and so forth.

Most homeless shelters will tell a person not to bring money into the shelter because they could get robbed by fellow homeless people. Additionally, New York's shelter would hold a homeless client's money in a safe deposit box, to be given back upon termination of the shelter stay.

All shelters require residents to adhere to a bedtime curfew. Most shelters require that a homeless person must be in the shelter at or before 10 p.m. Some vary. In New Jersey it was 9 o'clock. If a client should arrive after 10, and had not made a telephone call alerting the house manager to hold the bed because that person is working, or that person might have gone to visit a relative, or the person might have missed a subway, or missed a bus, or possibly might be ill, waiting somewhere in an emergency room, with emphasis on Bellevue Hospital in New York, or just out, doing whatever they felt like doing, if they don't call and reserve that bed, when they do check into the shelter, they have lost that bed.

Most family shelters have a limit on the amount of days that a family can stay in a shelter. In most cases referrals are made by social service agencies; in New York it's the HRA, Human Resources Agencies, and in New Jersey it's other additional community resources. A lot of these resources and agencies will pay for a client's stay in a shelter. Especially Salvation Army, Goodwill Mission, Human Resource Agencies, private agencies, and different church associations will give money, and some churches in New Jersey have opened up their churches for homeless people to stay in.

The length of a stay at a shelter varies from state to state, and in some different counties, such as Essex County and Union County in New Jersey. Termination of a client from a New York shelter can only be done by three different ways: 1) if the person does not adhere to the curfew; 2) if a client is disruptive and starts a fire, they could be "Code 3" as it's called. The New York system has everything computerized and it is managed through the HRA administrative office. A house manager or an aide can all HRA and say, Mrs. Jones just started a fire at the 51st Street shelter, and therefore you have the right to put that person out; 3) if a person is caught using drugs—you will not very often catch anyone using drugs, so therefore very few people get put out of shelters for that—threatening management, or fighting with another shelter person.

No affordable housing

The average welfare grant for a single man or a single woman who has no children and who is on Public Assistance in Essex County, is anywhere from \$140 a month to \$160 a month for the disabled. The average Aid to Families with

Dependent Children (AFDC) grant to a single parent, with a child, is about \$335 per month. The average apartment rental in the city that I come from which is Newark and the East Orange areas, is \$650 per month for five rooms, up to \$750. The average room, one single room, with limited cooking, and then sometimes no cooking at all, and shared bathrooms, shared cooking, is \$90-100 a week. The average rental for four rooms runs from \$550 to \$650 per month. Please tell me how could a welfare recipient pay this kind of rent? It is humanly impossible. Therefore, we have a whole group of homeless people. With the AFDC grant from welfare, how can a single family pay rent, pay for utilities?

In a lot of apartments now the landlords have gotten very sophisticated: They don't supply heat, they put in separate units, and each tenant is required to pay for their own heat. They have to pay for heat, gas, and electric, buy food, some clothing for children. Welfare grants do not pay marketable rents in 1990 and in the future.

Homeless clients in New Jersey in the city that I worked in, Elizabeth, were unable to have a bank account. If a woman lived in a shelter and she was going out to work, it was more feasible for her to put some money in the bank and try to make arrangements to save a little bit of money and get an apartment. Well, when she went to the bank and applied for a bank account, she told them that she was living in a shelter and she didn't have an adequate address, they would not allow her to get a bank account.

It is expensive to be homeless. For example, parents in New Jersey, with emphasis on Newark, they've just passed a new policy where a mother will have to pay for her food while she's in the shelter. The system automatically makes this person continue to be in the system, because how can you live in a shelter and try to save some money so you can get out of this situation, and now you're told that you must buy your food, you've got to buy clothing for your children, and you've got to exist on a daily basis?

At a lot of the shelters, the women have to leave early in the morning, and they're supposed to be going out looking for apartments. They have to pay for their own transportation. If they're taking three or four children with them, the children get hungry during the day, and they're going to have to feed them, and if they can afford to, they might have to pay someone to watch the children a couple of hours while they go look for an apartment.

After they get out and look for the apartment, in most cases, it is an endless Catch-22 situation. They're ripped off by the real estate agent. The real estate agent will tell them to come out to the office, they think they have an apartment. When they get there they're told that they have to put a deposit down, and that their name will be put in a pool and that their name will be listed for six months up to a year. In most cases they never get the apartment. They spend what money they have looking for affordable apartments and rooms to live in. They have a lack of transportation and lack

of child-care, and, in most cases, feel like the system has just abandoned them, and they have to have someone to be an advocate to speak for people who are living in a shelter.

Could you become homeless?

In the shelter that I worked in, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, let me give you just one classic example. I was the director of the Salvation Army for Homeless in Elizabeth, and it was a 24-bed unit. It was quite small. In those 24 beds—it was a one-family home—we had single men, single women, and families. This was one of the nicer shelters, because the women did have one room and they had four bunk beds in there, and a family could live in there fairly decently. However, during the winter months, when it was extremely cold, people would come in off the street after I had filled up the 24 beds. Men would come in and I would say to them, there aren't any more beds, but if you don't mind sitting up in the kitchen, or sitting up in a chair in the living room, I'll be happy to accommodate you for the night, and they were very grateful and thanked me. But the system found out that I was doing this, and a news reporter came to the shelter and pretended to be a homeless person. I think I told him the same thing and it appeared on TV and I could have gotten in a lot of trouble, but luckily enough the Salvation Army was very concerned and they thought it was nice that I was decent enough to let them sit in the chair.

But eventually I had to stop this kind of operation. Therefore, when people came to the door and the beds were all full, it was first come, first served, I would have to say, "I'm sorry, there are no more beds," and they would have to leave. This is so devastating to a homeless person. It's also devastating to the person that is working with them.

We have an ongoing lack of affordable housing in our county and all across the country. Homelessness can come after separation of a parent, death of a family member, mother, father, grandfather, and other relatives, who are acting as a child caretaker. Within the low income families, most working people don't even realize how devastating it is to be homeless. It is my opinion that if you're in a low economic level, and you're living in an inner city such as Newark, East Orange, Jersey City, and Elizabeth, every working person who does not have stocks and bonds and a huge bank account to fall back on, is just two paychecks away from being homeless. And if you don't believe this, if you become homeless in the next month or two, and you find out that the little money that you have saved in the bank will have to take care of you. Or if you get laid off and you find out that you don't have your health benefits, you don't have other things, and you have a crisis in your home, where you have to go to the doctor, or someone in your family is sick, and you utilize all the money that you've saved in a small bank account, you eventually will become homeless.

Homelessness is one of the things that doesn't discriminate. There are white people that are homeless, there are

black people that are homeless, there are hispanics that are homeless. I have run into some people who have been important people in their life, and now they're homeless. The system has just beaten them down.

Additionally, if a person does not have community resources, and a good family network, and friends who can provide temporary shelter to assist you in your crisis, believe me, you will be homeless.

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The homeless system is so demoralizing to anyone who is in dire need of shelter. Emergency shelter means just what it says: emergency, temporary shelter. It does not mean long-term. "If we can provide a bed for you tonight. . ." that's what's mostly said.

One of the major catastrophes in our country is the ongoing lack of affordable housing and newly renovated apartment buildings, with limited subsidy or rental assistance. Rental assistance certificates are given out in the inner city for people who cannot pay the market rent, the market rent being most of the rents that I mentioned earlier. Within the last couple of years, those kind of rental subsidy assistance certificates are running out far and wide. In order for a family to survive with the rental market the way it is now, the average working family needs a little boost with some subsidy.

The stigma

There is so much stigma about being homeless, as it relates to why people are without a home. We need to educate our citizens and make them more sensitive to the plight of the homeless population: sleeping in the hallway, sleeping in the train station, making a paper cardboard home, sleeping in the subway, sleeping all over Washington, all over any other city that you can find in this country, sitting in the

libraries all day long, pretending that they're reading books, leaving the library, walking the street, some people can't sleep, some people won't sleep, walk the streets two or three nights before sleeping. Just recently, a friend of mine went to get some money out of the bank at one of the MAC stations, and there were two homeless people in the MAC area that had gotten in, I don't know how they got in, but they were there. Walking the streets at night is dangerous, staying in the shadows of the dark, deserted abandoned buildings, and there is a lack of adequate health care.

One of the things that happened in both of the shelters that I worked in, was that people did not have adequate health care. Most of the clients went to Bellevue Hospital. When I worked in Elizabeth, most of the clients went to Elizabeth General, and when they went out to go to the hospital, clients were saying, well you'll see her tomorrow 'cause she'll be there for days. Now in New York I understand that there is a project that one of the entertainers has where he takes around a van to different shelters where families are and provides health care for small children. I was very happy when I saw that on TV.

There's unusual lack of concern about you and your family when you are homeless, including a lack of followup for children in school. A single mother is so stressed at having an ongoing, daily problem, of coping with the shelter system, until she forgets or neglects to take the child to a school which is near the shelter that she has just transferred to. I wonder who cares about little Sara, not going to school. Also who cares about little Sara being so embarrassed that she doesn't want anyone to know she lives in a shelter. Therefore, she will encourage her mother not to send her to school. When Sara is officially transferred into a new school system, she cries because she refuses to allow anyone to know where she lives. Every day she walks five or six blocks in a different way to confuse any one of her friends who might know she is living in a shelter. If someone asks her where she lives, she will deliberately give them the wrong address.

Children are ashamed of living in a shelter, being homeless, etc. Children should not be subjected to shelters, which make them feel like third- or fourth-class citizens.

Dr. Martin Luther King fought for the poor, for equality for all men and women, for the right to housing and dignity for all people. In order to avoid being homeless, most people will have to share apartments, and young married couples will have to continue staying at home with their parents. It is indeed a sad state that I am telling you today about the homeless in our country. I feel very committed to this topic, and I feel that we all have to get out and organize and go to our legislators and demand that we do something about market rent, and demand we do something about the kind of living that welfare recipients are experiencing. In this year 1990, I think that no one can sit by idly, while our young people and our young parents are being subjected to homelessness in America.