Homelessness Essay, Research Paper

Homelessness is the condition of People who lack regular legal access to adequatehousing. (Wright, par. 1) Homelessness has been recognized as a significant socialproblem in the United States since the early 1980 s, when a rapid increase in thenumber of homeless people was caused be a weak economy and cuts in federal aidfor housing and income assistance. (Wright, par. 1) Other periods of increasedhomelessness also have occurred many times in history, including during thecolonial era. Most other industrialized societies also have experienced increases inhomeless populations in recent decades. (Wright, par. 1) The number of homeless people in the United States has been disputed.Advocates for the homeless claim there are several million homeless people;however, recent studies suggest that the homeless number from 600,000 to 700,000.(Wright, par. 2) Exact numbers are impossible because researchers definehomelessness in different ways and because they come and go as often as theyplease. The number of homeless people in any given year can be estimated to bethree to five times that of the previous year. (Wright, par. 2) There are numerous causes of homelessness here in the United States. In aninterview with a group of homeless people two out of five said they had it made.They claimed to be doctors gone bankrupt due to job loss. They had bills piling upand could not find work anywhere. They were forced out of their homes and out intothe streets. (Interview) One of them claimed to be a lawyer that said to have lost hisbusiness, then his shirt due to wrongful law practices and had nowhere to go oranyone to turn to. The other two were women. Both dropped out of high school, gotinvolved with drugs and alcohol, were disowned and kicked out by their families andfound homes somewhere else then their habits started up again and they were kickedout an additional time. Now they are homeless. These ladies still have an addictionand have been seeking help. (Interview) Some of these stories may have been madeup and some may not have been. I just thought it was a quoinceidence that I run intotwo doctors and a lawer. But that is the story they gave me. I tried to get some names but they didn t seem to want to give me anyinformation. Some go by their real name and some hide their real name. Itwas hard telling how old the men were. I would guess between thirty-five andfourty-five. We all have different opinions of the homless. [Even with the stories we veheard growing up, Homeless people are lazy or Homeless people are no good .]We have to realize that these people are still people. People like us that are muchworse off. The whole time I spent with them I noticed that they were happy in aworld of their own. They were happy to have each other to talk to and to be with. Itwas good to see them in such high spirits even after all the pain and suffering they vebeen through and having to live day to day wondering what s going to happen orwhere they ll find food. It makes me count my blessings, thank God and realize howgood our lives are. Stories have been told by homeless people that they came from a higheducated society or once wealthy background. Some stories are true. These peoplelack jobs because of cut backs, refusing to relocate with a business, physical ormental disabilities or drug or alcohol abuse. It is like a domino effect where theyloose their job, loose their house, their car, and maybe have no family to turn to so

they turn to the streets. Other reasons relate to people with a disability when theperson cannot work he or she is forced to live on the street when they have nowhereto turn. In some cases the cause of homelessness is drug or alcohol abuse where in thisinstance the person loses his or her job due to the problem. If he or she has a family,the family goes through tough times dealing with the problem, he or she refusingcounseling which leads to family breakup, which leads to the street. If they do nothave family or someone to seek shelter from and cannot afford to live in a home oftheir own, they are forced to choose the only available option, the streets. Down town Winston-Salem is the good Samaritan inn. At the Inn, homelesspeople are guaranteed a good, hot meal. Having had experience working there, Ifound it easy to talk to anyone and get the answers I needed. I talked to DaveReinhardt one of the previous volunteers. He was the one in charge of making surethe food was there, keeping people in line and taking care of the sleeping area.Although he no longer works at the Good Samaritan Inn, he had a few answers forme. He stated that he has seen plenty of children with their homeless parents diggingthrough dumpsters. He has devoted a large amount of time and money to helping thehomeless. Dave stated that he has more fun working for the homeless than he wouldin his free time which of course the Inn takes up a large amount of his time as it is.(Interview) Many causes have been advanced to explain the dramatic increase in thenumber of homeless people in the 1980 s and 1990 s. The total poverty rateincreased during this period, and was especially true in the inner city areas wheremost homeless people live. (Wright, par. 5) Increasing rents, destruction of traditional low-income housing, and the cuts infederal housing programs threaten affordable housing with virtual extinction.Affordability is the critical housing problem for people with low incomes. The LowIncome Housing Information Service estimates that there are twice as manylow-income families searching for housing as there are units available. During the1970 s, about one-half of the nation s total stock of single room occupancy units(SRO S) was destroyed, leaving many former occupants on the streets or in shelters.Many of these homeless people are waiting on subsidized Section 8 housing lists. Await on this list can be up to six years. And of these people only 30% eligible forhousing assistance actually receive it. (NLCHP) The homeless population is diverse: 25-40% work 37% are families with children 25% are children 25-30% are mentally disabled 30% are veterans 40% are drug or alcohol dependent (NLCHP) To end homelessness, new policies must be implemented to address itsfundamental causes: Lack of Affordable Housing , Lagging Incomes, And SlashedServices and Government Assistance. These all need to be applied and worked on inorder for us to act on a plan that would end homelessness. Five homeless people from Winston-Salem, NC. Personal Interview. 21 Oct. 1997 Microsoft Encarta Multimedia Encyclopedia. James D. Wright, Homelessness.CD-ROM. Microsoft Multimedia, 1997. Nichelason, Margery G. Homeless or Hopeless? Learner Publications. 1994. NLCPH. Homelessness and Poverty in America. National Law Center onHomelessness and Poverty. 1995. America Online. Online. 4 Nov. 1998. Reinhardt, David. Personal Interview. 7 Nov. 1998 Rossi, Peter H. Down and Out in America. University of Massachusetts. 1989