

IS THERE HOPE FOR THE HOMELESS?

Recently, we saw Michael McDonald perform at The Genesee Theatre in Waukegan, Illinois. You know his songs, "Minute by Minute" and "What a Fool Believes," just to name a few.

Waukegan is an old industrial city on the lake that has seen better days. However, it has a fabulous theater for entertainment and affordable housing for folks in one of the most affluent counties in the country.

As we approached the theater, we were surprised by the number of homeless people on the sidewalk. We were frightened, too. There's an increased level of mental illness and substance abuse among the homeless – who knows what their intentions are?

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:

- 36% of sheltered homeless have a severe mental illness and 34% have chronic substance abuse issues.

Too many people are affected by homelessness. Their plight also impacts cities trying to survive. People tend to avoid restaurants, theaters and shops if there are disheveled individuals begging for money or looking to trade food stamps for alcohol. It's a sensitive subject but the truth is, it makes people uncomfortable.

Churches and private charities provide shelter at night but in Waukegan, the homeless have to be out of the churches from 7 am until 7 pm. Where do they go during the day? Shelters treat a symptom, but they don't address the cause or provide a long-term solution.



"Over half a million individuals are homeless on any given night. That's nearly the population of Milwaukee."

So what is the answer? I don't know for sure.

We would like to hear your thoughts.



Liz Uihlein
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