GRM Poverty Reduction White Paper #4 November 2018

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| See the source image | Abstract  The issues of Poverty to include hunger, education, family, racial inequality, social inequality, disability and other issues all tie in with the issues of poverty. This month we look at disability and its role in creating poverty. |

Facts

SSI annual payment $6,048 yearly Poverty is $10,830 yearly

**More than 40 percent of homeless in USA population are people with disabilities. HUD 2008**

Resources and amounts of income are not there to survive. SSI and SSDI cannot keep the disabled from being homeless.

One reason for the high number of homeless people with disabilities may be that people in this population are more likely to be living in poverty than those without disabilities.

One in 4 Americans lives with disability, ranging from difficulty walking or climbing stairs and learning problems. The percentage of adults with disabilities is on the rise as poverty grows more common for these men and women.

Women, American Indians, minorities low income people and those living in the South have high rates of disability.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper, there does seem to be a racism connection to being diagnosed with a disability

Mobility problems are the most common disability, affecting 1 in 2 Americans. Cognition issues affect 1 in 10 Americans.

Difficulty with mobility is 5 times more common for adults ages 45 to 64 living under the poverty level than those with living with incomes at twice the poverty level.

42.8 percent of sheltered, homeless adults experienced disability. Disability, particularly mental health disability, can make it difficult to work enough to afford adequate housing. The number of persons with disability who are homeless is higher than the number of people who are living in poverty – something that tells everyone that people with disabilities are having a difficult time finding a place to live, or a landlord who is willing to rent to them.

15.6% of Oklahomans – almost one in six - have disabilities.  
• Year 2010 population in nursing homes: 21,678  
• 189,396 Oklahomans (all ages) have hearing difficulties.  
• 128,037 Oklahomans (all ages) have vision difficulties.  
• 208,732 Oklahomans (age 5 and up) have cognitive difficulties.  
• 322,083 Oklahomans (age 5 and up) have ambulatory difficulties.  
• 104,672 Oklahomans (age 5 and up) have self-care difficulties.  
• 190,438 Oklahomans (age 18+) have independent living difficulties.  
• 320,510 work-age Oklahomans (18-64) have disabilities.  
• In 2015, 24.5% of Oklahomans age 16 and over with disabilities were employed, compared to 66.9% of persons without disabilities.  
• In 2015, 72.9% of Oklahomans age 16 and over with disabilities were not in the labor force, compared to 29.5% of those without disabilities.  
• 230,237 or 41.3% of Oklahomans age 65 and over have disabilities, not counting persons living in nursing homes or other institutions.  
• Oklahomans with disabilities are poor at a higher rate than Oklahomans without disabilities. In 2015, 20.8% of persons with disabilities age 16 and over had incomes below the federal poverty level, compared to 12.7% of people without disabilities. More persons with disabilities also lived in near poverty. Altogether, 34.7% of Oklahomans with disabilities age 16 and over had incomes below 150% of poverty, compared to 21.6% of people without disabilities.

Consider

How does having a disability impact those that are living in poverty? How does a disability impact their employment options, their family lives and does it keep them in poverty?

What can we learn from those who have disabilities?

There can be no question that having a disability can make some ordinary tasks more difficult. However, from interviews with many men and women who have been diagnosed with having a disability (mental, social or physical) it appears that the label of disabled or handicapped has an even more detrimental impact on men and women then the actual disability. Because of the label many focus on the impairment and its perceived limitations. What would happen if, instead, we focused on what CAN the person do?

Beyond that, what can those of our population that do not struggle with a disability learn from those that do have a disability?

One woman in a wheel chair was a great counselor because she would always be eye to eye with her clients. In a physical sense she never looked down on anyone and so she would visit with anyone she was always sitting and looked into their eyes. That is a great lesson of communication.

1. John 5:7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Another woman who struggles with a hearing impairment unintentionally taught the GRM staff to slow down and explain policies and learn a bit of patience. It made the GRM staff better.

A man with difficulty controlling our anger gave us great practice in our de-escalation skills.

There are many lessons to learn from those that have disabilities and if we will take the time to ask the question, “What can I learn from this person that will make me better?” We can more quickly become the better version of ourselves.

It is not simply employment that helps to create difficulties that often lead to poverty.

For many, healthy people, without any limiting disabilities life can be difficult to manage. However with healthy relationships and family contacts often these obstacles can be overcome. However, for many in poverty these relationships are limited in how much they can help.

Regardless of what that disability might be, these neighbors must become resourceful in how they adjust and adapt in their home, work and play environments. Too often a mindset comes where they can simply wait on resources to appear. Helping them build mutually beneficial relationships can be a major element in helping men and women to live a more productive and fulfilling life.

To help with resourcefulness we recommend training for employers. These men and women with disabilities can be an incredible asset to any work environment but you will need to be creative in how you get them there.

**“How can we help this person be as self sufficient as possible”**

Our target must become a “How can we help this person be as self sufficient as possible” mindset. Look for resources to offer employment counseling. While there is often very specific types of training for a job, rarely, is there training on how to work. Such basic things like when at work you are generally to be clean, polite to customers and you are not allowed to text can be part of a powerful time of training. Those experiencing poverty often do not have a good sense of time and poor boundaries with needy family members. This will often make them late. A bit of patient training could be all that it will take to help these men and women to experience freedom.

Many low income apartments have been constructed with the wheel chair ramps and other amenities that someone in a wheel chair might need. (Not true in all situations.) However, other disabilities are often not addressed in these designs. The visually impaired might need some Braille signs or a mental illness might require a specific level of quietness or other accommodations to be made. These are not always easy to determine for landlords so training for those that are planning on accepting government based subsidies should be required to learn more about how to better serve this population.

While most stores are designed to help customers with disabilities the route to the store is often hazardous for those coming from low income neighborhoods. The lives of many of our friends living in poverty are made more difficult because of a lack of adequate sidewalks with wheel chair access. Going from home to the store can be difficult. Most of those that are not living with any sort of disability may not even notice the difficulties.

But some of the simple task that most take for granted often rob those with disabilities of joy and hope. It is hope that changes and impacts lives. If hope is lost then the will to work and be a productive citizen is often the next step. We must help people find hope.

Getting them out of disability? – cutting check down if you work, punish you for working so people will not work if they stay in poverty. This is helping?

Solutions

* Training for supervisors on how they can work with those with assorted disabilities.
* Create a list of jobs that people with assorted disabilities can do.
* Treat those with disabilities as if they can do something and have value.
* Job training program Example (Thrift or retail store) this program does not need to be run by official non-profit.
* One month working in the back room (Stocking, receiving, etc)
* One month working in the front (sales, checker, etc)
* One month working administrative
* Then evaluate, where do their skills work best? What sorts of training would help them to work toward promotion.

Bottom Line

In order to help men and women with disabilities to adapt and overcome we must change how we think about disabilities. The original ADA laws were designed to help men and women with disabilities get a job and be self sufficient. Many of the current programs seemed designed to discourage work. This must change. These men and women have great value and must be encouraged to be a responsible citizen,

We start with what is there dream life look like. Those with disabilities dream like anybody else but we often dismiss them focused on what the person with a disability cannot do. Have them imagine a total life of fulfillment. Look at what a complete life looks like physically, mentally, spiritually and socially and help them tell a story of what that dream looks like.

Step 2 discuss with them some small steps that they can take to move toward that dream. How might they adapt and overcome any limitations that their disability might present.

Step 3 help them take that first step but make sure that they are the ones taking that step.

Step 4 If they quit trying step back and wait for them to make the steps they need to take to experience a new and improved life.

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