Notable ways Northampton is helping its homeless population

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As the bitter frost of the winter snow continues to batter the homes of Smith students who anxiously await a snow day and the frigid winds make one trip to the campus center feel like a journey, one can only imagine the difficulty that the unhoused population of Northampton must endure at this time. The United States experienced a record number of homelessness according to the 2024 Annual Homelessness Report made by Congress. About 771,480 people in total have suffered through homelessness in 2024. This means that one and a half people every minute found themselves unhoused. According to this report, Massachusetts has contributed heavily to this number as they have the fifth-biggest unhoused population in the country. Knowing these facts begs the question–what is Northampton doing to aid their homeless population? Although Northampton’s homeless population is sizable, there have been many initiatives to do their part to decrease the nation’s seemingly insurmountable number.

Affordable housing programs are a huge step Northampton is using to mitigate this issue. Though Northampton’s harsh winter is beating fiercely, programs such as Servicenet, Highland Valley Elder Services, and A Positive Place provide housing to support people from all over the Western Massachusetts area. These efforts are made through options such as leasing houses, providing rental assistance, subsidized homes, and even home sharing.

Housing First is another initiative meant to aid the Western Massachusetts population by allowing people to gain permanent housing without requirements. This allows individuals to gain shelter from the outdoors as quickly as possible. After giving support through permanent housing, the agencies involved in this program also provide employment assistance, mental health aid, and support for addictions.

According to the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance which spearheaded this initiative, “The Housing First approach centers around providing permanent housing as the solution to homelessness and the foundation for people experiencing homelessness to pursue their goals. Guided by the belief that everyone can achieve stability in permanent housing directly from homelessness, Housing First’s framework prioritizes providing a place to live as quickly as possible.”

Emergency Housing Vouchers, created through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, have housed almost 70000 individuals and are a source readily used by the city of Northampton. These vouchers assist the homeless population, those fleeing domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault by providing instant housing assistance through subsidizing rent.

Mental health care and addiction support are also used by many nonprofit organizations such as Servicenet to support the homeless population of Northampton and decrease the nation’s total number of homeless individuals. Though not the case for all, many people find themselves with housing insecurity while also struggling with mental health or addictions. According to Servicenet, they provide “essential services to people living with mental health challenges, developmental delay or disability, brain injury, homelessness, substance use issues, and other challenges. Because everybody needs help sometimes.”

Northampton is one of countless towns with many resources available to attempt to minimize the huge national total. Though so many resources are available in Northampton, many of which are nationally backed, one might wonder why there was such a large number of people in the U.S. who suffered through homelessness. Well, the resources available often can’t keep up with the nation’s needs. For example, while there are affordable housing programs available, housing prices have risen on a national level and they continue to rise quickly. The programs available can be helpful but are not a permanent solution.

To permanently minimize the level of homelessness in Northampton and the country, permanent changes need to be made to make housing more accessible. “In the richest country on the planet, it is simply unacceptable for anyone to experience homelessness.” -Jim McGovern, Massachusetts Congressman.

Sources: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf https://www.cooleydickinson.org/about-us/commitment-to-community/community-partners/ https://highlandvalley.org/services/benefits-support-program/