

Rhube Gould testimony

Experiencing homelessness is obviously very difficult - it's draining and confusing and makes people lose faith in humanity. There are so many hoops to jump through just to have shelter, I'd like to assume everyone is in agreement: access to shelter is a basic human right. I'm left wondering why we, as a species, have made something so basic so complicated.

It's painful to consider summarizing my experience in a short segment. I think it's important to help people understand that the homeless find themselves in dangerous or difficult situations all the time, many of these dangers are things people are experiencing for their first time. I'll just rattle off several examples I've dealt with personally: getting caught up in fights that break out seemingly from nowhere, not having access to medicine when I was sick, sleeping outside in illegal areas when I had no other options, being told a shelter is at capacity and I won't get a bed, organizations losing my housing paperwork or just generally not being communicative, not having anything to eat for dinner, losing friendships and not knowing how I could be better. People yelled rude expletives at me, threw trash at me from their car, told me to 'just get a job' when I wake up every morning cold, wet, and dirty, and told me I can't have a beer with me at the shelter after I spent all week dealing with the world hating me just for existing.

The stigma is all around us and it's not going anywhere. So I wonder how we can initiate change. I'd like to mention an organization that has been extremely supportive. Pathways Vermont Community Center is doing many things right and I'd love to see others emulate them. I never felt like I was homeless when I was in pathways, I felt like I was home. The staff are supportive when a community member is having a bad day, and provide a safe space to feel whatever I was feeling at the time. They build trust with the community and allow friends of the space to store food and cook in their kitchen. And it's just a comfortable place to be, it just feels like a home rather than a shelter or shelf. This isn't everything Pathways offers but it was what meant the most to me.

The other shout-out I'd like to mention is the non-profit Food Not Cops. FNC is an invaluable resource not just for food security, but also community. There is no stigma at FNC, if someone wants a drink, or a smoke, they will help the individual meet their needs.

I've been asked to say what would have been more helpful to me while facing homelessness and that's just such a big question. It's bigger than all of us. What would have been more helpful? Why, having access to shelter of course. Why do we make access to safe shelter so hard? Haven't we been building shelter since the beginning? If you ask my opinion I'd say we should tear down the barriers we've created for people to meet their basic needs. I think it would be helpful if wealthy individuals stopped profiting off of real estate. I'm young, I'm still in my twenties. When I was a teenager living with my father in a two bedroom rent was \$800 a month. A two bedroom today is easily \$3000 a month. Why do you think there's a housing crisis right now?