



the **DIGNITY PROJECT**



"Canada Speaks"

Exposing Persistent Myths About the
150,000 Canadians Living on the Streets

May 2011

overview

Canadians have spoken and they have something to say about homelessness in Canada.

A survey from Angus Reid Forum of more than 1,000 Canadians was conducted to determine public perceptions about individuals experiencing homelessness. The report, “Canada Speaks”, provides a unique look into how Canadians feel about the more than 150,000 homeless living on the streets in cities across the country. The report is a part of The Salvation Army’s ongoing **Dignity Project** – a national effort to educate and engage Canadians about the reality of poverty in the 21st century.

Findings from the report revealed that Canadians are divided on their opinions of individuals experiencing homelessness. Many are sympathetic; believing that homeless people deserve dignity and that housing is a fundamental right for all Canadians. A significant minority, however, take a less charitable view, believing that homeless people are always to blame for their situation and that a good work ethic is all you need to get off the streets. This is contrary to The Salvation Army’s experience in serving homeless populations for more than a century.

Our findings also revealed that a surprising number of Canadians have had first-hand experience being homeless – nearly one-quarter of Canadians have received assistance from a food bank or charitable group while seven percent reported that they have had to sleep on the street or in a shelter due to lack of housing at some point in their lives.

Additional key findings include:

- **Approximately 40 percent** of Canadians believe that most homeless people **want to live on the street** and in shelters.
- **Almost 30 percent** of Canadians believe that a **good work ethic** is all you need to escape homelessness.
- **Nearly one-fifth** of Canadians believe that individuals experiencing homelessness are **always to blame** for the situation they are in.
- **43 percent of Canadians never give money** to a homeless person on the street.
- **More than 60 percent** believe that money given to a homeless person is likely to go to **drugs or alcohol**.
- **40 percent** believe that most homeless people are **mentally ill**.
- **More than one-third of Canadians** are scared of homeless people.

Also:

- **Nearly** all of the respondents believe that individuals experiencing homelessness **deserve a sense of dignity**.
- **93 percent** agree that **no one** in Canada should be homeless.
- **86 percent** of Canadians believe that **housing is a fundamental right** for all Canadians.
- **More than 80 percent** believe that being homeless **robs you of dignity**.
- **75 percent** of Canadians acknowledge that once you become homeless it is exceptionally difficult to get into housing.

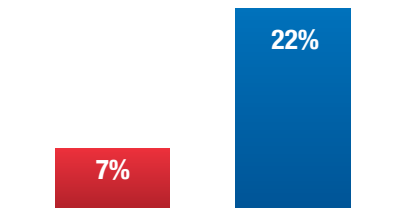
The Salvation Army is highlighting the issue of homelessness this month as part of its annual May Red Shield Campaign. Money raised through the campaign will directly support those living in poverty today through social services like emergency shelter care, substance abuse counselling and employment training. Each year, The Salvation Army serves more than 1.6 million people in more than 400 communities across the country. With your help, we can work towards a Canada without homelessness.

True or False: *Very few Canadians have ever faced homelessness or hunger first-hand.*

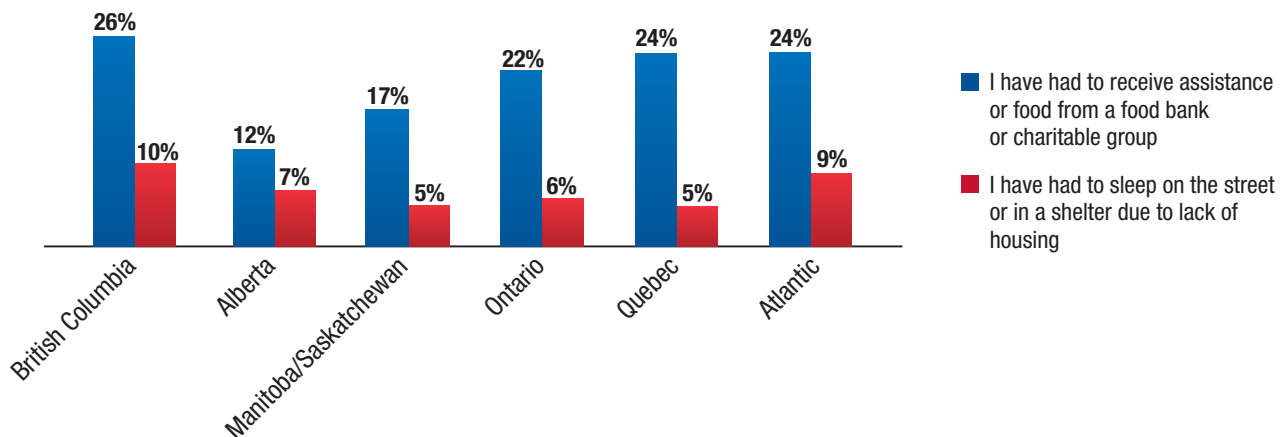
False! A surprising number of Canadians have faced hunger and homelessness in their lifetime.

According to our polling results, **seven percent of Canadians** have had to turn to a shelter or sleep on the street due to a **loss of housing** and **almost a quarter have required assistance** from a food bank or charitable group. That works out to nearly 2.5 million Canadians who have been homeless and nearly 7.5 million Canadians who have visited a food bank.

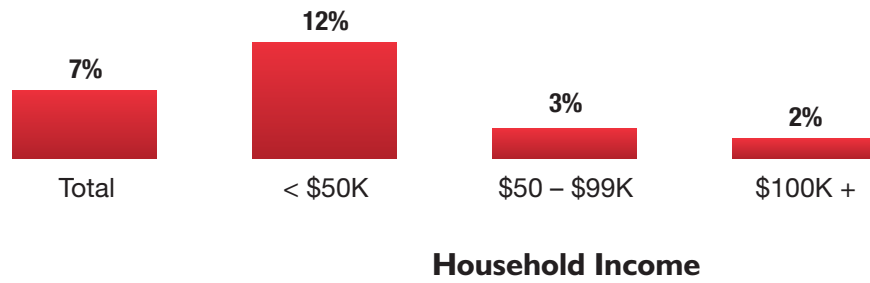
Look around you right now. Can you pick out 15 people? According to our polling results, **one out of those 15 people has had to sleep on the street or in a shelter due to a loss of housing**. Now cut that group down to four. Approximately **one out of those four people** has received assistance or food from a food bank or charitable group.



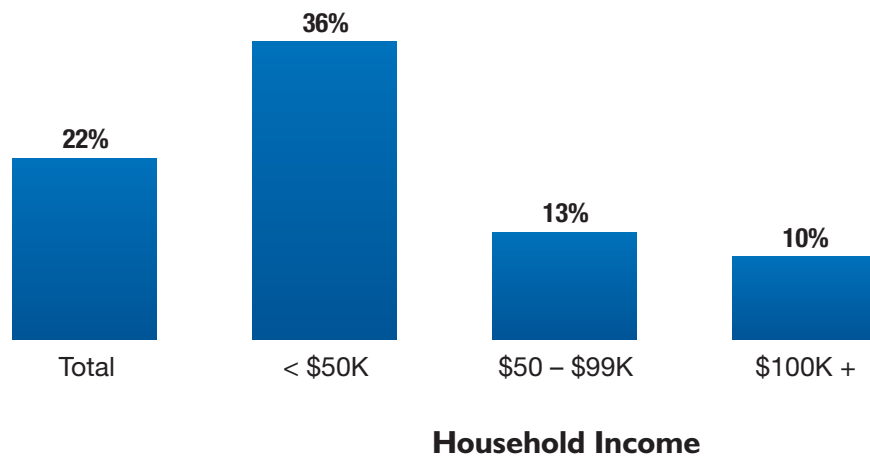
Regionally, **British Columbia** and the **Atlantic** provinces led respondents who reported these experiences in their lifetime. **Alberta** and **Manitoba** reported below average rates of utilizing the social service system.



In response to questions pertaining to personal experience **sleeping on the street or in a shelter** due to a loss of housing, we broke down the **current income of those respondents**. Not surprisingly, there is a direct correlation in household income to the likelihood of having these experiences.



Similarly, we broke down the results of those that answered yes when asked if they had ever received **food or assistance** from a food bank or charitable group. Amazingly, **nearly 40 percent** of those **making less than \$50,000** in household income each year have received help from charitable organizations in the past.



According to Statistics Canada, the average family of four, with two working parents, has an annual income of \$84,800. To qualify as impoverished, a family's **total income needs to be \$34,289**, less than half of this average. In a rural area, the **poverty level is \$22,783**. Often, The Salvation Army serves clients whose annual income is actually slightly higher than these cut-off rates, demonstrating that even these poverty levels may be slightly unrealistic.



True or False: *Canadians are unlikely to give money to a homeless person on the street.*

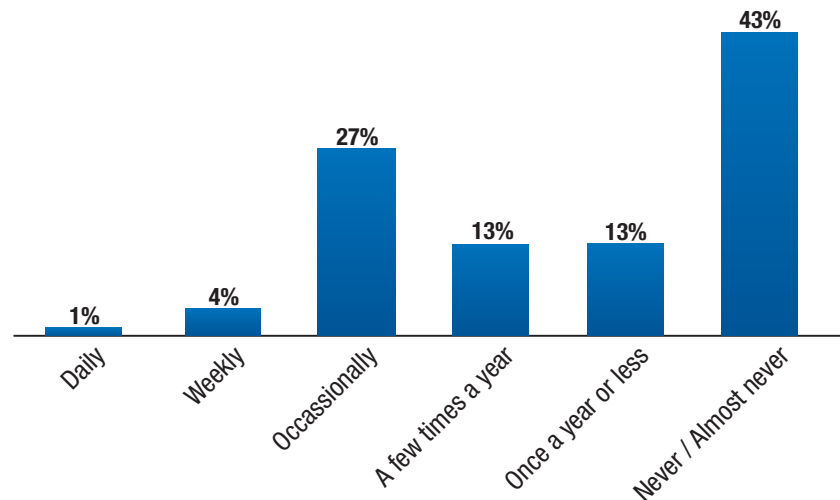
True! In fact, a plurality, nearly half of all respondents never donate to people living on the street.

People choose to give – or not to give – for a variety of reasons.

They are **more likely to give** if they have a sympathetic view of individuals experiencing homelessness and believe that being homeless robs you of dignity, that most homeless people are mentally ill or that the government has a responsibility to find solutions to assist homeless people.

Those that decide **not to give** tend to believe that money given to a person on the street will go to alcohol or drugs and that there is really nothing that can be done to help the homeless.

Regardless of your position concerning on-the-street solicitation, many social service organizations, like The Salvation Army, provide direct care and support to those in need, including emergency shelter care, substance abuse counselling and employment training.



More likely to give if you believe...

"I think the government has a responsibility to find solutions to help homeless people get off the streets and out of shelters."

"Being homeless robs you of dignity."

"I believe that homeless people deserve a sense of dignity."

"Most homeless people are mentally ill."

Less likely to give if you believe...

"When I see homeless people, I am always a little worried they might harass or rob me."

"I think money given to a homeless person is likely to go to drugs or alcohol."

"There is really nothing much I can do to help homeless people."

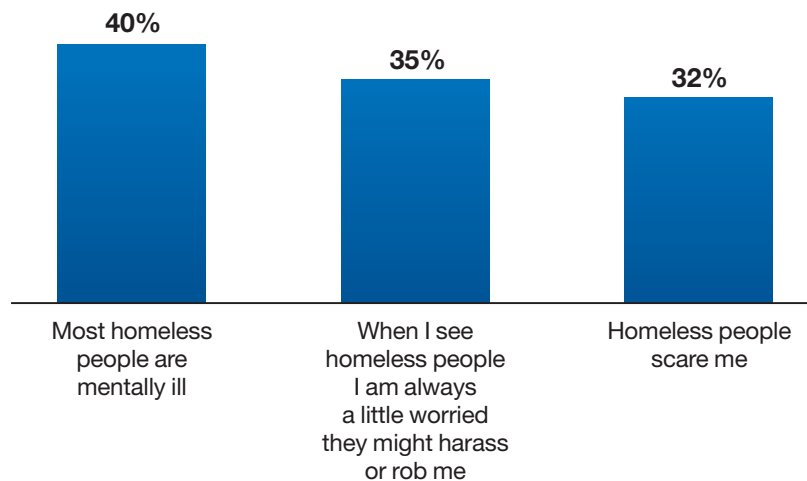


True or False: *Individuals experiencing homelessness should be feared.*

False! People experiencing homelessness come from a variety of backgrounds and personal situations.

Many homeless people are just like you and me. In fact, a 2009 survey of residents at Salvation Army shelters revealed that **nearly one-quarter** of the shelter population have jobs – but are still **unable to make ends meet**.

According to that same study, roughly one-third of individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with mental illness. This is a significant number and reflective of the varied needs of that community. However, this should not lead to the overriding fear of the homeless that many feel.



- **40 percent** of Canadians believe most individuals experiencing homelessness are **mentally ill**.
- **One-third** believe that when they see a homeless person they are always a little worried they might be **harassed or robbed**.
- **More than 30 percent** say that homeless people **scare them**.

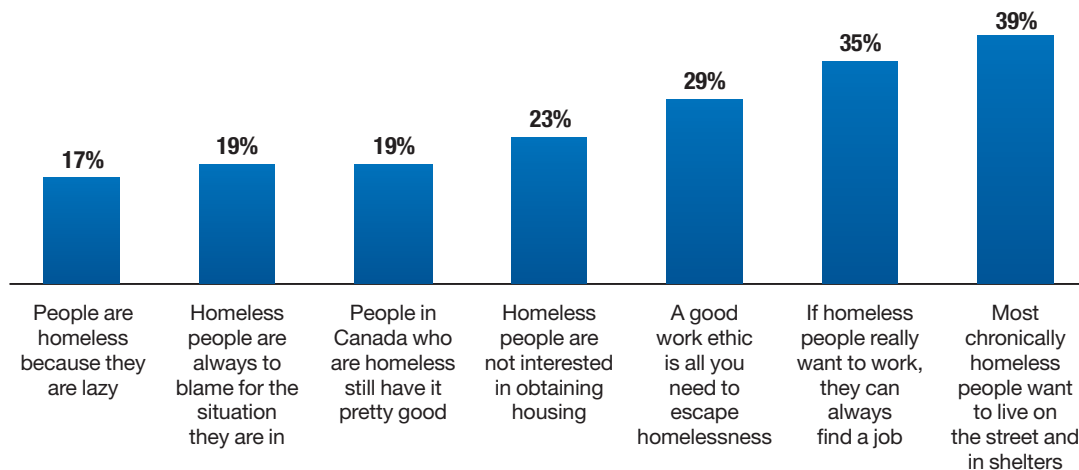
Mental illness and homelessness is similar to the chicken and the egg dilemma – which came first? Is someone homeless because they are mentally ill, or are they struggling with mental illness because they are homeless?

In our more than 125-year experience working directly with millions of homeless men and women, The Salvation Army has found the homeless population to be no more dangerous or “scary” than any other population of people. The Salvation Army’s goal is to give each person the dignity that comes from making a contribution to society and being self-sufficient to the extent that they are able. In many of our programs nationwide, we provide a holistic approach to service – including mental health, life skills and employment services.

True or False: *Most chronically homeless people want to live on the street and in shelters.*

False! Homeless by choice? Not a chance.

A 2009 study of men at Salvation Army shelters nationwide revealed that 90 percent would prefer to live in permanent housing, and 51 percent of those individuals reported making attempts to find permanent housing.



Our report findings showed that a significant minority of Canadians believe that people who are homeless are always responsible for their current situation and they want to live on the street and in shelters:

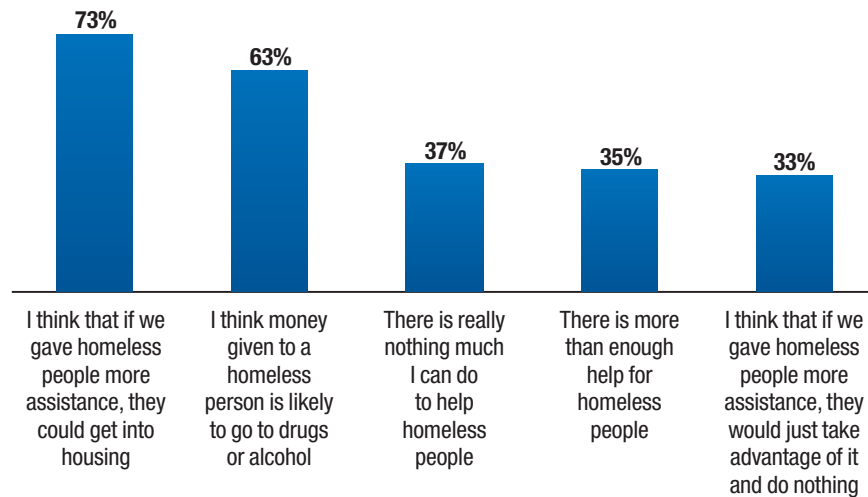
- **Approximately 40 percent** of Canadians believe that homeless people **want to live on the street** and in shelters.
- **35 percent of Canadians** believe that if homeless people really want to work, **they can always find a job**.
- **Almost a quarter** of Canadians believe that homeless people are **not interested in obtaining housing**.
- **19 percent** believe that individuals in Canada who are experiencing homelessness **still have it pretty good**.
- **Nearly one-fifth** of Canadians believe that homeless people are **always to blame** for the situation they are in.
- **17 percent** of Canadians think people are homeless because they are **lazy**.

Undoubtedly, poor decision making can lead to problems down the road. However, bad choices are not always the root cause of homelessness. A still struggling economy, high unemployment rate and other significant barriers can also contribute to a life of poverty, making it hard to escape the trap that is homelessness.

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True or False: *I can do something to help the homeless.*

True! There is a lot that can be done to assist Canada's homeless population.



- **Almost three-fourths** of Canadians believe that if we gave homeless people **more assistance**, they could get into housing.
- **Over 60 percent** believe that if they gave money to a homeless person, it is likely to go to drugs or alcohol.
- **37 percent** believe that there is really **nothing I can do to help** homeless people.
- **More than one-third** of Canadians believe that there is **more than enough help** for homeless people.
- **A third of respondents** believe that if we gave homeless people more assistance, they would **just take advantage of it** and do nothing.

Without question, Canadians have mixed feelings when it comes to giving assistance to individuals experiencing homelessness.

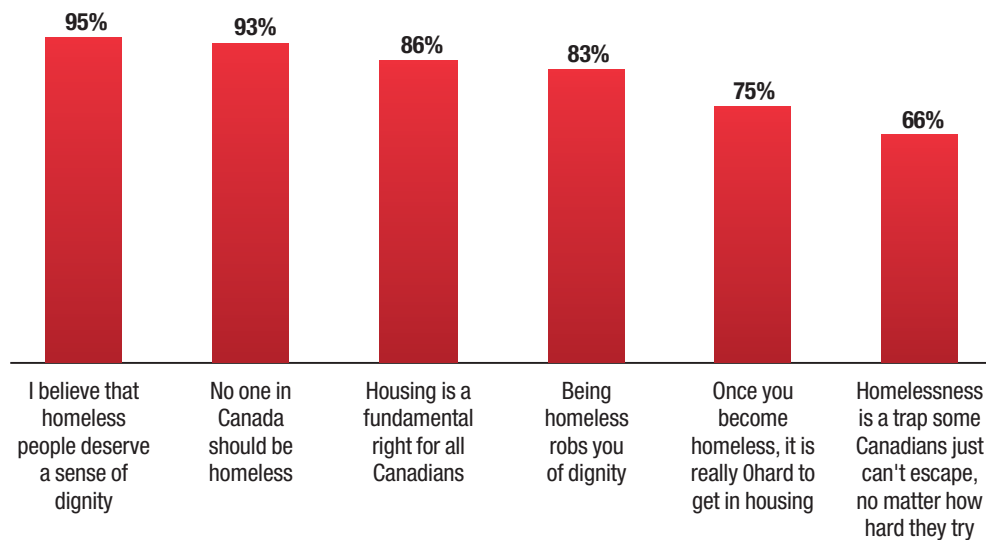
Fully one-third think that any additional assistance would be taken advantage of and close to 40 percent feel that there is nothing they can do to help. The truth is, Canada's homeless could use all the help that they can get, and that help can start with you.

There are hundreds of human service organizations across the country, including The Salvation Army, that are always looking for volunteers and donations to assist Canada's most vulnerable. **With your support**, the necessities of life needed for basic human dignity are in reach for those that need it.

conclusion

Fact: Homeless people deserve dignity.

Rich or poor, old or young, homeless or not, everyone deserves dignity.



- **Nearly 100 percent** of Canadians believe that homeless people **deserve a sense of dignity**.
- **93 percent** believe that **no one** in Canada should be homeless.
- **86 percent** of Canadians believe that housing is a **fundamental right** for all Canadians.
- **More than 80 percent** believe that being homeless **robs you of dignity**.

The vast majority of Canadians agree with The Salvation Army's beliefs that nobody in Canada should be homeless and **housing is a fundamental right** for all Canadians. This is encouraging.

Now, it's time to come together, and address some of the myths that still surround the more than 150,000 of our fellow citizens who don't have a home and determine a solution to this persistent societal problem.

Many Canadians don't know where they will sleep tonight, or where they will get their next meal. The Salvation Army envisions a Canada without homelessness.

survey methodology

This study was conducted online with a sample of 1,009 Canadians drawn from the Angus Reid Forum, a panel of 100,000+ Canadians who have agreed to participate in research. This panel is balanced to be representative of the Canadian population.

The survey was conducted on Monday, April 18, 2011, in both English and French. The data was weighed by age, gender, region, language and past federal vote, to ensure final representativeness. With a sample of this size, the data can be considered accurate approximately +/- 3.1 percent, nineteen times out of twenty.

The Salvation Army's annual May Red Shield campaign aims to address the dehumanizing scourge of poverty and injustice across Canada. Last year, \$2.7 million was raised to help The Salvation Army feed, clothe, shelter and otherwise care for more than 1.6 million Canadians. This year, the campaign goal is \$3 million. We hope that Canadians across the country will dig deep and donate to this worthy cause that will help to restore hope and dignity for all.

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SalvationArmy.ca/dignity



The Salvation Army is an international Christian organization that began its work in Canada in 1882 and has grown to become the largest non-governmental direct provider of social services in the country. The Salvation Army gives hope and support to vulnerable people today and everyday in 400 communities across Canada and more than 120 countries around the world.

The Salvation Army offers practical assistance for children and families, often tending to the basic necessities of life, providing shelter for homeless people and rehabilitation for people who have lost control of their lives to an addiction. When you give to The Salvation Army, you are investing in the future of marginalized and overlooked people in your community.