

November 2002

*In order to understand and explain the misconceptions about homelessness and poverty that is associated with it, Sam implemented a project during which he traveled to the downtown of Kalamazoo, a small town in Michigan, late one winter night to speak with homeless people and pay a visit to the Kalamazoo Homeless shelter. This is a journal account of that project.*

*Sam Sedaei – How Homeless People Live*

*My experience started at around 10:00pm when Joel and I ventured out to Bronson park in search of homeless people. Initially, I thought I would find people sleeping on chairs and other dark corners of the park. We were planning on talking to them to see what kind of people they were. We were dressed like homeless people and I was particularly enjoying holding Joel's pipe as we walked.*

*When we arrived at the park, we noticed that there weren't any people occupying the benches at the time. While we were searching, we ran into a Kalamazoo police officer who told us that camping in the parks were illegal. He then led us to the homeless shelter. We found the shelter at around 11:15pm. We were greeted at the door by an older man. He led us to his office, and as we walked toward the office, we walk through the hallways, which were lined with men along the sides of the walls on small mattresses, and each had a small blanket. Both the old man and another employee were actually part of the program (meaning they were homeless as well) and on the way toward full recovering.*

*At first, the two employees were puzzled as to why I would want to do such a project. But they soon opened up to conversation when they learned about the sincerity of our purpose. They were quick to clear up stereotypes about homeless people. Alan (one of the men) said that many of them had great lives before they became homeless. They lost their possessions and families due to unfortunate situations. And even though there are some men there who are there because they don't want to comply with the system or go to jail, most are trying to get back on their feet.*

*I asked where the money to run the shelter and feed the homeless comes from and they said that none if it was government money. All of Gospel Mission Homeless Shelter's funding comes from churches and mostly private donations. They told us that the population of homeless women and children specifically are increasing. They also explained that they offer counseling in order to guide the people there toward responsibility. The two employees were very friendly with us and invited us to go back to visit anytime.*

*This project was very interesting for me, and the most important reason is that at first, I believed in many stereotypes surrounding the issue of homelessness. Over just a couple of hours, most of the things I believed in changed. There are almost three million people in the United States – men, women and children – who have nothing to call their own. I just learned that a big portion of the homeless population consists of the people who were once living normal lives – like you and me – and they lost everything they owned due to an unfortunate situation. And many shelters have rules and only the ones in Washington, New York and Philadelphia allow everyone inside. The ones in other cities do not provide space for people who appear to be drunk, hallucinating, or high on drugs. It's really something that we could think about like what we can do to help them.*