

Casper Wyoming: Suffering From the Homeless Population

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The concrete is cold and hard underneath her as she tries to sleep for the night, shivering and wishing she could be inside a warm building in a soft, cozy bed. Meet Kandice. Kandice is a confident and joyful person who wants to use her purpose in life to become a wildland firefighter. She sounds as though she has her life on a sure path to a stable future, but she once wasn't as fortunate. Kandice, at one point, was living on the streets with only her childhood trauma in her suitcase. As a young girl, she endured physical abuse from her stepfather and mental trauma from her mother. Kandice's mother would force her to eat out of dog food bowls in her bedroom. The lasting effects of those events burdened her well into her adult life. She once had low self-esteem, leading her into deep cycles of substance abuse, dysfunctional relationships, and continually fluctuating employment. All these events in her life left her homeless and alone, unsure of her next move. She was lucky enough to stumble upon the Wyoming Rescue Mission in Casper, Wyoming, where the faculty-guided her to the next stage in her life. Yet the sad fact is that not everyone in Casper is fortunate enough to find the help they need to get back on their feet and become productive members of society. Therefore, Casper should implement more homeless shelters address the issue at hand (BDI, 2022).

Many people are stuck with the problems of substance abuse and mental trauma, just as Kandice once was. These two issues are the leading causes of homelessness (Wolfson), in addition to many suffering from broken hearts and homes (Haderlie, 2023b). There are programs in place in the city of Casper that are here to help people in need of services. Unfortunately, homeless people who are coming out of these programs still have a high likelihood of relapsing into their old habits of drugs and abuse (Haderlie, 2023a), or they may come out of the rehabilitation "only to be left without a clear plan post-release" (Dyer & Hirst, 2023). The less fortunate percentage of the rehabilitated homeless population that is forced back to the streets is

left to find places to stay, such as shelter provided by bridges, abandoned buildings, and vacant houses, and if they are lucky enough, they may be able to find a bed in one of the few homeless shelters (Cook, 2023).

The large question at hand is: how are the large number of homeless people making their way to Central Wyoming? The mayor of Casper, Bruce Knell, told the *Wyoming Truth* that the influx of homeless people is due to people coming from out of town and out of the state of Wyoming seeking help at the local homeless shelter but not conforming to the rules of the shelter (Haderlie, 2023b). The city receives homeless people in busloads from cities like Denver, and towns southeast of Casper that do not have the resources to handle the issue of homelessness. The homeless representation within the last six months has been on a worrisome upward trend, landing at an eight percent higher homeless rate than the previous five-year average (Dyer & Hirst, 2023).

The causes of homelessness within Casper are vast and must be addressed before they get more out of hand than they already are. The effects that homelessness and the people are putting on the city are outrageous, and the needs of the community are not being addressed to provide the feelings of safety and comfort that the families of Casper should feel as they walk the streets of downtown. If more homeless shelters were put in place with more space, the number of homeless people on the streets would decrease drastically and we would have more success stories just like Kandice's. Homeless shelters are a great source to have in communities if they are used correctly to benefit the city. Unfortunately, the possibility of another shelter seems far out of reach due to the funds needed to provide a great opportunity. Until then the Casper City Council will look for other solutions to aid in this issue. Ultimately every person, no matter who

they are or where they come from, should have a roof over their head and a bed to sleep in at night.

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