

4-15-2014

Understanding Homelessness

Yusra Jabeen

Southern Methodist University, yusrajabeen@yahoo.com

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Recommended Citation

Jabeen, Yusra, "Understanding Homelessness" (2014). *Collection of Engaged Learning*. 89.
https://scholar.smu.edu/upjournal_research/89

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FACE OF HOMELESSNESS IN DALLAS, TEXAS

MAY 2013 – APRIL 2014

YUSRA JABEEN

**“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well,
if one has not dined well.”**

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

ROBERT HART (MENTOR AND PHOTOJOURNALIST)

HUMAN RIGHT PROGRAM

ENGAGED LEARNING

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

DALLAS, TEXAS

ABSTRACT

“Face of homelessness in Dallas” is a creative, research-based project. Its findings are based on one-on-one interviews with homeless people and people working with them. I worked frequently with The Stewpot in Dallas, TX on this project. The Stewpot is an organization focused on issues of homelessness and has been in existence since 1975.

I took portraits of homeless people and chose the stories that touched me the most for this publication. Some of their names have been changed upon request of my subjects. I also made a video for The Stewpot organization, which is expanding its operations to tackle the problem of homelessness more efficiently. This project made me realize the complexity of the problem of homelessness, that the homeless population are not what others call “lazy,” but in fact need money but they do need a second chance.

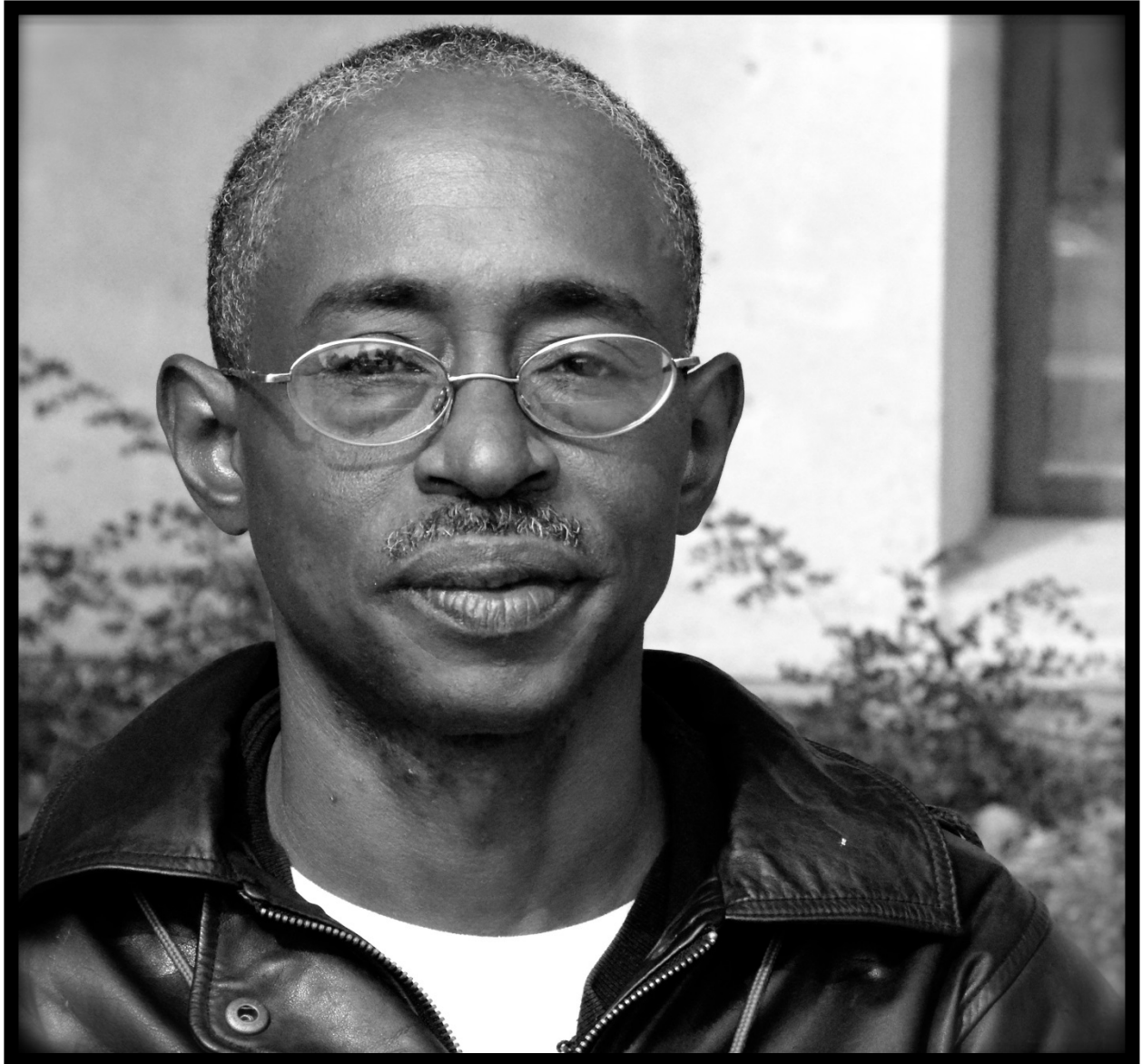
INTRODUCTION

The mission of this project was twofold: to put a face on the complex problem of homelessness and to understand why there are so many human beings living on the street. I asked myself, what's stopping them from getting a permanent residence and how is there any way to resolve this problem. My goal was to talk to as many people as possible that are associated with the problem of homelessness in one way or another, so that I can understand this issue from all view points as possible.

For this project I used a Nikon D- 7100 DSLR and learned about photography such as lights, camera angles and positioning my subject. I also made a video for the organization I worked with for this project using software Final Cut Pro X. [It is linked here.](#)

For my project, I talked to many homeless people and people who work with the homeless population. I also worked closely with an organization called The Stewpot, which has been working for this marginalized population since 1975. Through my project I realized many aspects of homelessness and realized how complex the problem really is.

On the next pages you will meet six individuals who helped me put a face on the homeless population in Dallas, TX. From my conversations with them, I learned a little about their lives. I appreciate them being willing to be part of my Engaged Learning project. Let me introduce Mr. Smith, George, John, Charles, Arispe and Mr. Boyd.



MR. SMITH

Photograph by Yusra Jabeen, 2014

MR. SMITH

I met Mr. Smith who told me briefly about his past. He told me he is a United States veteran and has been applying for jobs everyday but hasn't been able to find one so far. Smith thinks he doesn't get qualify for jobs because of his past, which includes him spending 15 years in jail. He said he is truly repentant about what happened but would like to have a second chance at life. He is now working at Stewpot as a vendor for the newspaper *Street Zine*. Homeless people buy the newspaper from Stewpot and sell it at a small profit. They keep the portion of the money they make by selling the newspaper.

I met Smith often and he always had a smile on his face, saying he is happy and his homelessness will end one day.

From Smith's story I learned that homeless people are looking for a second chance and not necessarily a handout. If they do not get a job because they have a past record, then how will they ever be able to get off the street?



GEORGE

Photograph by Yusra Jabeen, 2014

GEORGE

It was then George's turn. He was also a convicted felon and did not want to reveal why he was convicted. He said he has been homeless because of his economic situation. All that he earns is spent in paying bills for his family who lives in an apartment. But he had to move out. He could not afford to pay his share of the rent. And he figured monthly bills would be less with one less person for whom to care.

His story taught me that some people are homeless simply because they cannot afford themselves, not because they are lazy. It made me realize that when someone has more than one mouth to feed, she herself or he himself might be the person who has to do the sacrificing. Like I said, the issue of homelessness is complex.



JOHN

Photograph by Yusra Jabeen, 2014

JOHN

I then met John. His story was heartbreaking as he has a mental condition that causes many complications. It is very difficult for him to tell what is real and what is not, including who is a friend and who is an enemy. He is confused about his geographical position. He did not want me to reveal what conditions he was suffering from but said that he experienced mental stress.

John told me he could remember that he has been working with Stewpot for about a year but could not remember where he was before that. He mentioned about some family living somewhere in Texas, but couldn't exactly recall where. John was lost. And to make things worse, he was living on streets.

John's story taught me about the different mental stresses that the homeless experience. And it made me realize that if one is not mentally sound, how he or she can function and contribute as a healthy person to society. I realized that there is a need for mental health services for people and the taboo that you have to be completely "crazy" to be under the care of a mental health professional needs to be done away with. It is causing a lot of harm to people who really can use some help, and there shouldn't be shame attached to it.



ARISPE

Photograph by Yusra Jabeen, 2014

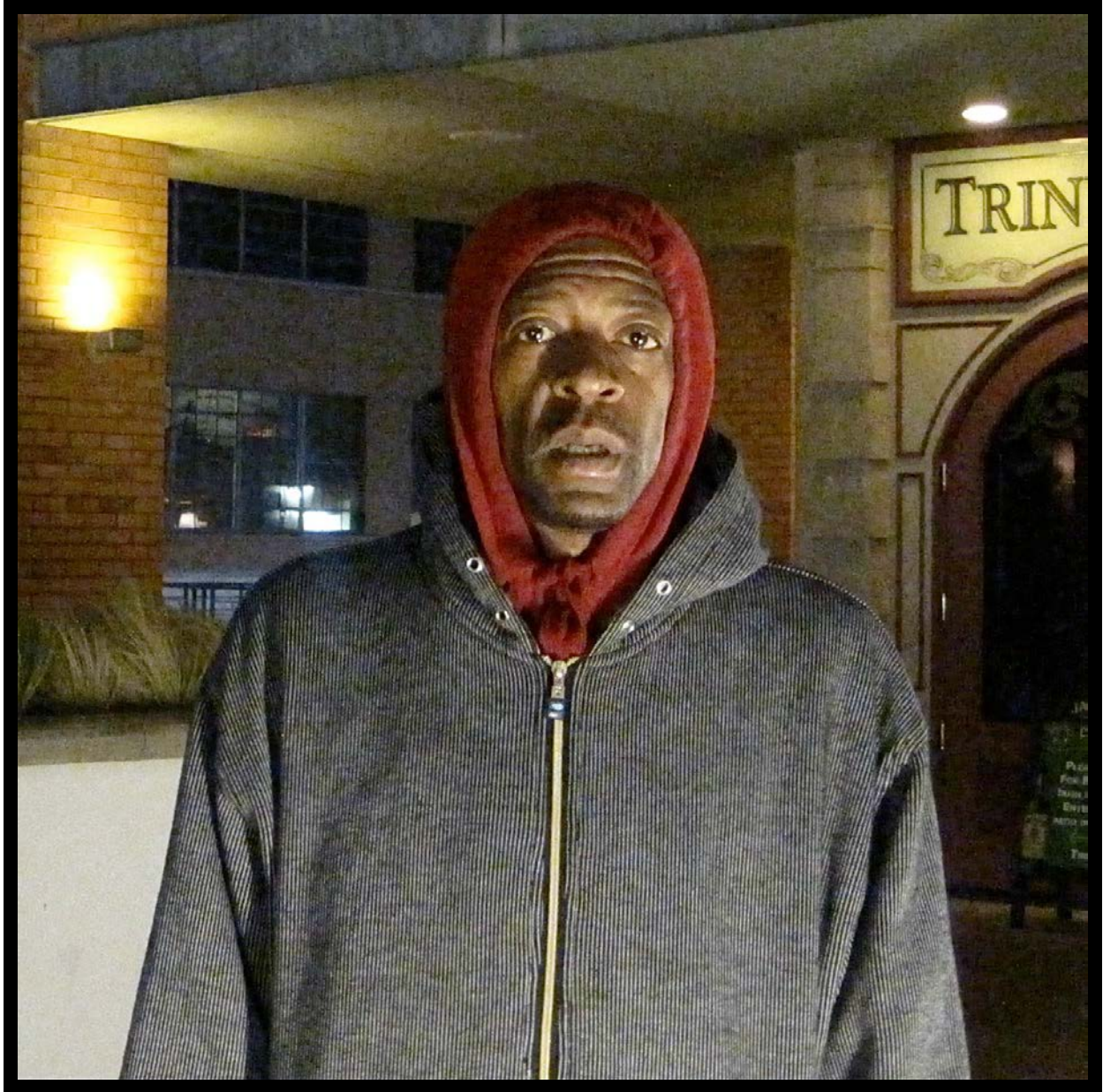


CHARLES

Photograph by Yusa Jabeen, 2014

ARISPE AND CHARLES

Arispe (previous page) and Charles (above) had similar struggles. They told me they are struggling to make it out of homelessness by saving up to find a job. They do not have a car so going to a job interview becomes a hassle. Sometimes they have to miss meals that are served at the homeless shelters so they remain hungry. They cannot afford going to the doctor either. So right now they are focusing on what they can do, and that is art. They hope to make it as a self-made artists.



MR. BOYD

Photograph by Yusra Jabeen

MR. BOYD

Marcel Boyd, 41, said he has been homeless for a year and complained that all the homeless shelters were overcrowded. For that reason, he hadn't showered in four days. He said he just had \$4 in with him and he needed \$31 more to secure his place in the homeless shelter.

I could feel Boyd's struggle. If one cannot afford some basic needs and take care of them, how can he or she be expected to find a job and keep it?

CONCLUSION

This project helped me understand what homeless people are experiencing day in and day out. I hardly found anyone who was just being lazy and wanted a handout. The ones that I met wanted a chance to prove themselves, and were trying to do that every day. Through The Stewpot, they were actively working on making resumes and perfecting interviewing skills, and all the while dealing with all the drama that life was throwing at them.

In particular, I saw in my subjects for this Engaged Learning project a hope to make it, if for the only way out it is to go through.