

# HOMELESSNESS problem needs a solution

**A** man fell asleep Tuesday in an Olathe city park. A concerned resident thought the man might have died because he didn't move or respond when the resident checked on him. The resident called police, who checked on the man, and after learning he was all right, they left the man lying there.

The resident thought police should have done more. The man, who appeared to be homeless, could have needed help. Also, it is a residential park where children play.

The situation generates many debatable questions about public safety and the welfare of the homeless. One obvious question is why Johnson County, with all its affluence, does not have a homeless shelter for single people?

The police had only a few options Tuesday: leave the man lying in the field, make him move on or cart him off to jail although he violated no laws. It's not illegal to fall asleep in a park during open hours, so police officers couldn't take him to jail. He had no warrants for his arrest; he wasn't drunk or on drugs. Olathe has the only homeless shelter in the county. The Salvation Army runs the Johnson County Family Lodge. The name explains the problem — family. The shelter does a wonderful job helping families get back on their feet. But if someone is single and homeless in the county, there are no options, except for parks, bridges and the county jail.

For county residents to think there is no need for a shelter is to be blind to a growing problem. As Johnson County's residential and business growth increases, so does the silent and sometimes unseen population of the homeless. With affluence comes poverty; the two go hand in hand. And thus it's up to this community, not government, to resolve the issue. Government should follow the wishes of the people.

Some think a shelter or system of shelters in the county would attract more homeless. Another common myth is crime would increase with a shelter. Crime already is taking place in the county, and it's highly unlikely the homeless play a large part.

What residents may find is the homeless already are here. A shelter would make it more obvious. It would bring them out of the shadows and make them visible.

The other question is which city would take on such a task? Homeless shelters fail to fit with cities' image campaigns, especially in attracting new businesses to an area.

But maybe a shelter is what a community needs. It would be nice to see Leawood humbled by the establishment of a shelter in that city. The homeless are there as they are in Olathe.

Maybe the county's image ought to be of great affluence but also of compassion.

We don't support homelessness as a lifestyle, but we're aware of the facts. And to turn a blind eye to the situation does nothing to resolve the issue, which will remain with this county for years to come.

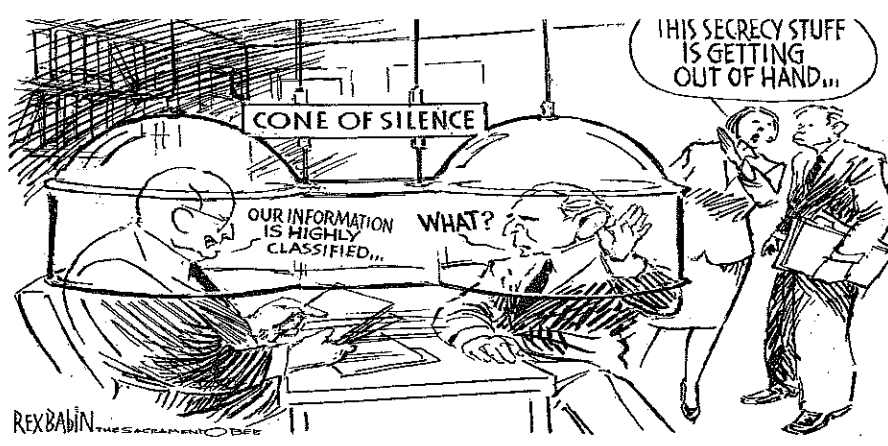
So the community has choices to make. Keep the status quo: There will be a few times when residents are confronted by homeless people in parks and other areas, but things will remain the same as they are now.

Make new laws: Cities like Olathe strengthen ordinances to prevent the homeless from sleeping or setting up residence in public places. And a law forcing homeless people into shelters would violate those people's rights and most likely be unconstitutional.

Establish an improved system to help the homeless: The community, private business and the government work together in providing shelter, counseling and programs to help those living in extreme poverty.

Extreme? There's nothing more extreme than being homeless in the United States. There are nonprofit programs in the county trying to help, but they lack the resources to accommodate the growing number of people in need.

The county needs to wake up to the reality that homelessness and poverty have become a growing part of this area. To ignore it is not only wrong, but will create a situation that will be much worse in the future if something is not done now to help the situation.



## Charity at a distance

**I** believe in charity. I believe helping those who truly cannot help themselves benefits everyone involved, donor and recipient.

I do not, however, believe in legally mandated charity, and for many reasons.

For one thing, it's too easy. Ideally, real charity should involve face-to-face contact between donor and recipient. Each person involved in the transaction should be able to get a good look at the other — to see the need and compassion and to see the effect the exchange has on the other. Alternatively, a private and volunteer organization whose judgment and screening process we trust can distribute our donations to good effect.

But when our donations are wrested from us by law and redistributed without our input, it becomes way too easy to believe we've done our share with no cost to us except money.

My main objection to coerced charity, however, is that when I choose to (or am forced to) donate money, food or clothing to someone in need, I have the right,

even the responsibility, to check whether the recipient is a scam artist. I want to have a say in who receives my charitable donations. I want to be able to question the people who are divvying up the money I give. I want to find out what the criteria are for receiving help. I want to be sure the recipients of my dollars are, first of all, making the best use of their own resources before they ask for mine. I want to know if they're working and need some help only at the end of the month or are refusing to work. Or maybe unable to work. I want to be able to withhold my contributions from any agency that seems careless or overly lax in doling out my gifts, and give it instead to another group whose policies I agree with.

Do I have the right to that information? Darn tootin' I do.

I know someone who is really struggling right now. There is illness in her family, minimal support from other family members, not enough money, confrontations with insurance providers, more than one job (which leaves even less time for the other obligations),

and her own health is not the best.

I mentioned to a mutual friend that maybe some of us could help her out. There are a number of things we could do, but money seems to be the overwhelming need, and many of the other problems could be eased with a little more cash.

The mutual friend spent several minutes telling me why that wouldn't be a good idea. She had a lot of information that I didn't know about — wasted opportunities, unnecessary alienation of other family members, wasted resources, lack of understanding of basic information about social services, and a host of other stories that made it pretty clear the person I wanted to help had brought a lot of her troubles on herself. It was new information for me, and my mind's (and heart's) jury is still out on the subject.

And that brings us to what I found so astonishing about the conversation I had with the mutual friend: The person who chose not to help a close acquaintance because she knew the person in need was not making good deci-

sions and could therefore do more to help herself is this same person who predictably and consistently advocates legislation to raise taxes to increase social programs to funnel money to virtually anyone who asks for help.

And I'm pretty sure our needy friend would qualify for those same social programs if she applied.

My liberal friend is willing to pay higher taxes to fund government programs that take away from her the right to direct her charitable contributions, yet she insists on exercising that right when presented with the opportunity to help someone close.

I, on the other hand, am willing to help a friend who would probably not be entitled to help from the more stringent private charitable organizations I advocate.

Does all this mean anything?

Honestly, I don't know.  
— Sharon DuBois is the president of Senior Ease, [www.seniorease.com](http://www.seniorease.com), as well as the editor of *KsSmallBiz.com*. Comments and responses may be e-mailed to [editor@ksmallbiz.com](mailto:editor@ksmallbiz.com).

## Readers, not sources, should come first

**I** was a terrible investigative reporter. I hated those "source" things that seemed to be such big menu items in the daily journalism diet.

You know about "sources," don't you, the people who provide information in exchange for anonymity? Sometimes it's cops, sometimes prosecutors, sometimes politicians, but always people who won't say what they are saying in the full light of day.

I'm not saying I never used them. I was just not very comfortable with it. It can be a good thing or an immensely sleazy process, and used in politics the way old Romans used poison, to wound or kill from a distance.

It also can plant thoughts of big scoop prizes in your head, which is not good for journalism.

acters were trying to spread a story that Ambassador Joseph Wilson's wife was actually a spook and why that might be happening.

No more Capitol Hill lunches for me. No more winks. No more complicated "double-deep background" agreements that only journalists understand. I would have outed the agent and the sources at the same time.

A fine thing. The feds wouldn't even have to squeeze me. It would all be there on paper.

I am not an instrument of policy, which is what can happen when reporters depend on "sources."

Former New York Times reporter Judith Miller marched all the way into the desert with her sources, helped shovel grist for the mills of war, then saw it all become dust.

She bet on her sources and

istration incompetence.

Perhaps out there, I might have noticed that the developing account of what was happening in Iraq as told in Washington was not the same account being relayed at the funerals of soldiers.

I had an experience that informed my feelings about sources.

Somehow, a chunk of the Patty Hearst kidnapping story ended up years ago right where I was working in central Pennsylvania. I had to chase a report about an "impending indictment."

If you want to get in the way of an impending indictment, just leak that it's on its way.

In that era, prosecutors would sometimes postpone indictments if word slipped out to the media.

That way, the reporter would look like he or she had made a big mistake, the U.S. attorney's reputation

coming, scrambling for some way to respond.

It could work to the advantage of attorneys of unindicted co-conspirators, who could be ratted out in any deal that followed an indictment.

It could help cops who still were looking for evidence.

The array of interested parties in the process of leaking, then, becomes endless.

Their motives become endless too.

We are in business, in part, to inform our readers, watchers, listeners, our customers.

I never figured out who actually leaked the "impending indictment" story in the Hearst case. But I assembled enough of a cast of characters to recognize there were just too many possibilities.

Don't be distracted by the Libby conviction. When you are looking at