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# LIFE IN AMERICA

## Homeless Encampment Edition



### DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

The lockdown of 2021 created an upheaval in many lives. Everyone had to shelter in place for a year. This created many issues in our daily routine. My wife and I got to know each other well as we worked from home. We each got a monthly paycheck, even though my work was in slow motion because it was public sector work.

The public sector does not move quickly as consensus is necessary to move forward, and many people in public sector management do not want to work very hard. Karen is a Director of International Programs at Temple Law School, and the VISA application process was halted. I watched her shift gears a couple of times, and it brought some context to how quickly things change with the virus information and safety procedures.

Since we both had incomes and although she worked much harder than me, we still had a check coming in every month. I negotiated with PECO, Verizon, and other companies about the Steelworks development in downtown Phoenixville. None of those offices were opened, and I became acquainted with

Netflix while she kept repeating, 'I wish these immigration people would make up their minds about these visas.'

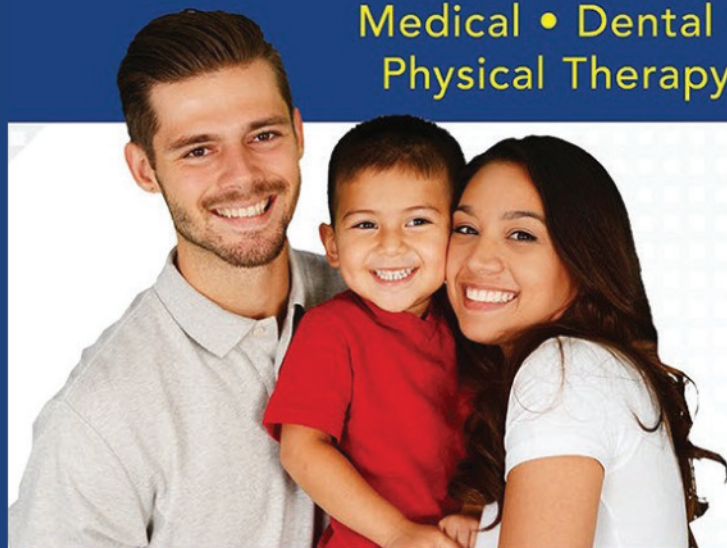
Many people had their income interrupted, and a rent moratorium was called an eviction moratorium. People were not paying rent and struggling to put food on the table. These were people with hourly jobs and minimal security to start. People were made to choose if they would pay rent or eat.

The problem then morphed into two issues. The landlord could not perform upkeep or make payments on their mortgage, but the renters were building up debt, and when the moratorium was lifted, many people could not pay back the amount owed to the landlord.

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## DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

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I was wondering how this would impact people experiencing homelessness. I am sure there was a surge of people residing in tents when people started to get evicted again. To inventory something like this isn't easy because, at that point, these folks were not participating in the rental market.

I remember being in Portland during the lockdown and encountering people who lost housing. In most cases, they were trying to ride out the lockdown and wait for things to open up in the labor market when demands for goods and services increased. One lady, in particular, stands out as a bright woman with a "ride this thing out" attitude as she huddled in a vacant storefront outcome.

Many tents were on the streets of Portland, but most were younger protestors. There was a generous mix of people with mental health issues, and I had unpleasant interactions a few times, but it was the exception, not the rule.

A few weeks ago, I went down to my old target area, Kensington Avenue in Philadelphia, from Front Street to Lehigh. The SEPTA workers were out collecting trash, and the street was spotless. The Catholic Church stepped up around the Lehigh area, and their properties looked good.

I went up to Kensington and Allegheny (K & A), and it was an entirely different story. It was an open-air drug market. A home encampment was the side product of the market. I did not see anyone resembling a family looking to save enough for an apartment. Almost everyone was either in a daze or looking to be in a daze.

Many storefronts were vacant, and it did not look like a place where the locals hung out. It is an area where dysfunction is the rule. People looked like zombies and only cared about their heads as their bodies deteriorated. I saw people wanting to help, but for the most part, they were more enabling than helping them.

It is not a good idea to cluster these folks. It is necessary to break up that encampment because it is not a real encampment of people who have lost their homes. It is a clustering of drug addicts. It appears that they have found a way to justify their presence by being homeless when they have abandoned all to catch a buzz.

I saw people who needed a good medical check-up, not something administered quickly to keep them alive. I have to disagree with some of those providing services to these individuals. They are not acting in the best interests of the individuals but instead in the interests of a collective drug ingestion area. Someone benefits from selling drugs, but that is not the concern of those working within the area. They were too busy trying to keep people alive.

The dynamic of the situation is all wrong. People living in the area are never sure what one of these folks blasted on drugs will do to those around them. Shootings, robberies, and assaults abound; although I did not see many microaggressions, most of the aggressive behavior was industrial strength.

It is time that we recognize some of these encampments for what they are and stop trying to be politically correct about it.

*Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at [barrycassidy@comcast.net](mailto:barrycassidy@comcast.net).*



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