

## **Living Homeless: The Interactions between Homeless Individuals and the Communities in which They Reside**

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This study sought to assess the public's knowledge and views of homelessness in Valparaiso to see if there was a correlation between how the homeless individuals feel they are treated and how the community views and treats them. It was hypothesized that there would be a negatively correlated relationship between how the individuals feel they are treated by the community and how the community views them. Previous studies have uncovered a negative relationship between community members and homeless individuals because of homeless individuals using the all-night bus system due to a dissatisfaction with homeless shelter service; the community views these individuals as taking advantage of the system. The struggle that community members feel regarding how to treat homeless individuals, often using discrimination, is stressed. The sample for this study included Valparaiso University students, community churchgoers, and general community members. All were given a survey to outline personal views on homelessness as well as being asked how they feel they were treated. This was the first study of this kind in the Valparaiso area. The data will be useful in guiding the community on how to have successful interactions between the subsystem of homeless individuals and the system of the community at large.

### *Information about the Authors:*

Rachel Okerstrom and Lena Walsh are juniors working toward their Bachelor Degree in Social Work. Due to the nature of the profession, both want to explore a vulnerable population and look at social implications on said population. They both have previous experience working with homeless individuals in their hometowns with a rotating homeless shelter in DuPage County outside of Chicago and Families Moving Forward in Minneapolis, MN. Their similar experiences and backgrounds have guided them to now hold a common passion for working with this population. They feel that this population is often forgotten, and they want to use this project to give the homeless a voice. The delicate relationship between homeless individuals and the community in which they live is one that is not often discussed, and Rachel and Lena wanted to take the time to explore it in Valparaiso.

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