A Number Everyone Should Know
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700,000 to 2 million people are homeless in the US
36% of that is families with children
150,000 to 200,000 people experience chronic homelessness in the US

Source: The National Alliance to End Homelessness, www.endhomelessness.org
Almanac of Policy Issues, www.policyalmanac.org

First of all this number is important because it is sobering to most of us who have a warm and secure place to sleep at night to realize that there are so many people in the United States, the wealthiest country in the world, who find their home on the streets. So, to start it is an eye-opener. Then once one digs a little deeper they realize that it has added importance to the social structure of our society. One example of this is that it portrays the differential between classes. At one end of the spectrum there are the billionaires, athletes, media stars, Bill Gates and at the other end there are the homeless. Though out history we have strived to shorten the gap between the rich and the poor, but by looking at this number we see that the gap is as wide as ever.

Also by looking at the number of chronic homelessness in the United State one can see the representation of the inability to move up the social ladder. People who suffer from chronic homelessness have been homeless for a year or more or have been homeless 3 or more times in that past 4 years. This extended homelessness suggests a lack of mobility between social classes, meaning people are remaining homeless. Victims are unable to find or hold jobs long enough to make money, buy a home, move out of the gutter and up in class. If chronic homeless people are unable to get jobs one must look at the opportunities they have to gain the needed credentials in order to find work.
When looking at this number though, one must account for some cautions and concerns. One is that though this number can look awful and be disheartening compared to living in a third world country or other places in the world, being homeless in the United States is not as bad. There are starving people across the world and if there is one thing that we know, Americans are not starving. Also across the US there are many shelters and organizations that cater to helping the homeless, either giving them a warm meal or a place to sleep. Unfortunately, these are not permanent treatments, but rather quick fixes and many times people are kicked back out on the street.

As for the opportunities that are available for homeless people, yes they may be hindered when it comes to education or just luck, but at the same time some people are unwilling to seek help and overcome the situation due to sheer laziness. On the same note it must be recognized that many times mental illness is a key determinate to chronic homelessness. Finally we must take into account that the number itself is difficult to determine. Much of the time, because the homeless have no address, people are hard to find and document. This can leave people out of the percentage. So when looking at this number remember, that like most significant numbers it is hard to be exact.