

We see them on street corners all over town: homeless, hungry people with signs asking for help.

Do you give them money? Or like a young friend of mine, a pair of new socks? Do you ever ask yourself whether they're really in need or is this their job? Do there seem to be a lot more of them in winter than in summer? Phoenix certainly has more homeless people in winter, when weather further north gets inconducive to standing on street corners or sleeping outdoors.

Phoenix has many options for the homeless, from shelters for men and women down near the capitol to the family shelters at UMOM to apartments at Vista Colina to staying in churches through the program called Family Promise. And those are just a few. So why do people still live in our parks? Why do they sleep in doorways?

If they are newly homeless, they may not know what help is available.

They may be too embarrassed to ask for help.

They may have pets they refuse to give up, as many (but not all) programs insist.

They may be mentally ill.

They may believe that their homelessness is temporary, just a few days, and therefore they don't need help.

They may be afraid of the other residents at a shelter.

They may be undocumented and believe going to a shelter will lead to deportation.

They may have lived on the streets long enough to be comfortable with it.

They may not realize that some of these programs do more than give them a bed for the night.

The program which Shadow Rock knows best, Family Promise, works with families to get them back on their own. This includes help finding a job, financial counseling, help obtaining health care, food and clothing, a home for their pets, and other social services. The idea is to provide a safety net, a breathing space, as they move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. It is a very holistic approach to the problem of homelessness.