

## **Amsterdam's approach to homelessness**

I think that Amsterdam's approach of homelessness does not work. One reason is that cause and effect of factors that feature in homelessness get confused. By that, I believe that what is often seen as a cause is often a result, for example a result of the failing approach. Another reason is that the efforts are largely cosmetic in my view and don't necessarily do much to alleviate the suffering of homeless people, let alone remedy and prevent homelessness.

I suspect that there often is a subconscious assumption that there are so many things "wrong" with homeless people that their homelessness is basically a given. I feel that homelessness is often being supported, rather than homeless people. People end up exhausted and devalued, and are left without hope.

Particularly also the current measures being taken at Amsterdam's Central Station are very concerning, in my view. They also impact travellers and NS staff negatively.

The huge impact of sleep deprivation - a fixed component of homelessness - appears to get completely overlooked. First, people will start functioning at the level of being drunk, but sleep deprivation also often causes sour moods (depression), hallucinations and psychosis. These are the result of homelessness, not the cause. Therein lies an important key to dealing with homelessness.

## **Amsterdam's mayor Femke Halsema (i.e., you)**

I just read that you have very recently said you want to reexamine Amsterdam's homelessness policy: <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/waarom-krijgen-buiten-slapende-daklozen-nog-steeds-boetes-halsema-wil-beleid-tegen-licht-houden-daklozen-beschermen-en-overlast-tegengaan~b6af637f/>

However, you appear to have said more or less the same in 2012:

<https://www.at5.nl/nieuws/206600/halsema-vindt-beboeten-van-slapende-daklozen-beschamend>

I conclude that little or nothing has changed and I wonder how committed you really are. Your comments reflect conservative right-wing politics, not at traditional views from the left. You are still with GroenLinks, however.

## **Time for positive change**

I have several ideas for how we could accomplish a turnaround in this area. Some of these also convey the human right to housing; as I am sure you know, the United Nations believe that the Netherlands is not doing too well in this area.

- I propose capsule housing as a way to help prevent homelessness and remedy existing homelessness by bringing people's expenses down. This might be done by using empty office buildings ([https://openresearch.amsterdam/image/2024/10/28/monitor\\_kantoren\\_1\\_januari\\_2024.pdf](https://openresearch.amsterdam/image/2024/10/28/monitor_kantoren_1_januari_2024.pdf)). The conversion of empty office buildings into traditional housing is expensive and often stalls for that reason. By contrast, converting existing buildings for capsule housing might not only cost a lot less, the capsules should and would be removable, conferring a great deal of flexibility.

- The official day and night shelters are pitiful and limited and largely cosmetic. Access is very limited, in every conceivable way. It also forces people who are already exhausted to traipse all over Amsterdam.
- There should be small-scale facilities all over town where people can keep a few belongings. This could be with host families (for example their bicycle storage "box") or with public libraries, but other solutions are possible. I myself have been homeless for nearly five months, mostly in Amsterdam, and I get so exhausted dragging all my stuff with me wherever I go, even if it is just for a snack from the supermarket. It would be so lovely if I could just leave my suitcases somewhere for an afternoon and know that they will still be there when I get back.
- There need to be far more stable (!) and easily accessible (!) sleeping places all over town. This would need to be managed well, in terms of cleaning and maintenance; letting specific homeless people look after these solutions might work really well. Toronto has a project with transportable tiny homes (<https://tinytinyhomes.ca/contact-us/> and <https://www.gofundme.com/f/tiny-tiny-homes-affordable-housing-solutions>). Personally, I do not see them as a breakthrough, but the project does raise awareness for the issue and gets people involved. Portsmouth and London in the UK have converted buses into flexible shelters and that could be a good solution for Amsterdam. I would also like to see capsules installed at or near Central Station to ensure that people get enough sleep (to tackle problematic behaviours) and stay warm. Homeless people could be issued with an electronic pass for free access to 75% of these capsules; the remaining 25% could be accessed at a fee of EUR 10, 12.50 or 15. This way, you avoid competition with hostels, and on the other hand, when the 75% are occupied people who are desperate for a good night's sleep won't mind paying a small fee and won't feel the lack of capacity as acutely. Of course, the main problem behind homelessness is lack of cash, but if you take a look on for example Reddit, you will see that financially more fortunate Amsterdammers can be quite willing to pay 30 euros or more just so that some stranger does not have to sleep in the streets. What I like about the idea of a project at Central Station is the educational factor. The stigma needs to be addressed and the extreme hardship needs to be explained along with how this affects homeless people why they are not always at their best behaviour and why this calls for compassion rather than rejection and condemnation.
- The approach taken at Jan van Galenstraat 323b is dehumanizing and should be thoroughly overhauled. People should not be treated as if they are potentially dangerous terrorists; that's downright offensive. (I refer you to what I wrote above.) Also, promises should always be laid down in writing to avoid that despicable games get played with homeless people; this erodes trust in democracy and can make people very angry. Also, you get a better response from people if you treat them with normal human respect and dignity than when you treat them like potentially dangerous trash.

Best regards,

Angelina Souren  
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