

Tanya, the Honest Face of Poverty and Immigration

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Cracks. Look around you, in pavements, and in walls- there are cracks. All around us there are cracks; homeless people are like these cracks. We are not blind to see them but we choose to ignore them. We step around the cracks and soon enough there are too many cracks and we can't fix them all. Some people try to repair the cracks but to fix the cracks more help is needed. I never thought much about homelessness and immigration before my visit to the Ozanam centre but it has now left an everlasting impression on me. My personal experience with an elderly woman named Tanya opened my eyes to the truth about immigration in connection to poverty. I began to imagine what it must be like for her and others who had no place to call home and how she must have felt, helpless. A number of homeless people in Scotland are immigrants, they have come to live here in hope for a better life but their dreams do not come true, instead they live on the streets. I was going to see for myself the true extent of poverty and homelessness by helping those in need.

Scared. I watched out of the window as the sky shed a thousand tears, just waiting until I came face to face with what I deemed frightening. As the bus drove past the centre I saw what looked like a never ending line of woman and children hand in hand and like a dagger feelings pushed through me. Children? I did not think about the children in need. As the centre door opened I braced myself for what was to come, I stepped into the centre doubting myself, wondering if I could really do this. My eyes searched around the waiting room, looking at the empty chairs and wondering how all of the women would fit in this tiny room. The white paint was chipping off the walls and the coarse blue carpet looked worse for wear. I began trudging through the centre until I entered a narrow, dimly light hallway that had six small changing stalls that contained a chair and a curtain for privacy. On the walls there were posters that had unfamiliar words translated into English; to the left were two rooms. Clothes sprung from every corner, a rainbow of colours and sizes, all different and unique. Before I knew it, the centre door opened and I heard the stomping of many feet, the wailing of children and the conversing of foreign languages and then I was thrown in the deep end.

Shocked. "Six to come in!" a volunteer shouted. Then almost as quickly as she said it, six women appeared, a knot of fear formed in my stomach. Before me sat an elderly lady, her name was Tanya. She had coffee-coloured skin, her face was creased with experience and she held a look of knowledge. Her back was hunched as if she carried the weight of the world upon her shoulders, her hair was white and thin as thread. Her eyes looked tired, sad and faded as if she witnessed too much pain but yet she still smiled, even though it was clear to see that she had experienced much hardship throughout her life. She was wearing a worn out t-shirt, a dull threadbare skirt which seemed uncomfortable and she wore over used sandals. I was stunned; her clothing was not appropriate for the winter months, she would be freezing. Suddenly a spine-chilling feeling overcame me; this woman had barely anything, nothing to keep her warm at night and only sandals to protect her from the cold, while many of us are very materialistic as we have countless pairs of shoes. Should Tanya have not received help because she was immigrant? No, she deserves help just as much as you and I would. By meeting Tanya it led me to think differently about immigration and homelessness, I know now that anyone, of any age, any nationality can become homeless and has made me more thankful.

Determined. I searched through the mountain of donated clothes; I was determined to help Tanya. I was on a mission; I found a warm wool jacket, long trousers, thermal socks, a jumper and underwear. I made my way back to Tanya, as I handed her the clothes her eyes shone with happiness, she looked as if I had given her the sun. As she held up the clothes her eyes started to water, she looked to me and said in a very strong accent "Thank you! Thank you! God bless you" I was taken back, as she closed the curtain and revealed herself in her new clothes, she radiated glee, she came over to me and embraced me in a hug. As I watched Tanya leave I saw Tanya's daughter, who was also homeless look at her mother as if she was her guardian angel and watched as they exchanged a warm, emotional hug. I realised that we take for granted the possessions we have; I was astounded that Tanya was so thankful for the clothes she received. I have discovered that although Tanya had been through a lot, she had people who loved her and who supported each other, it has taught me to treasure my family, just like Tanya does. From my experience at the Ozanam centre and meeting Tanya, I have become more thankful for the items I have.

Empathy. My visit to the Ozanam centre encouraged me to help others more and I have continued to help out at the centre. It gave me a fresh perspective; I have learned through my own personal experience that poverty is a real issue. Through Tanya I have learned to appreciate the items I have and to take more care of them. This experience has taught me not be judgemental of people due to their personal circumstances. We need to remember that they have a family that they need to support, children they need to feed and clothe and parents like Tanya who have nothing and are overjoyed by just a little kindness. Just think of this and the next time you walk past a homeless person on the street don't ignore them, show them a little kindness. Don't step around the crack.