Hidden Heroes
HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA

Guerrero~Garcia~Ehlers
Class of 2015
Megan O'Dowd: We Are All Impacted
By: Andrew Defante

Megan O'Dowd is currently the Housing Program Analyst for the County of San Diego and a chair member for the community service group, the San Diego Uptown Rosary. She works with a team to develop numerous programs to aid the homeless throughout the county. I got into contact with Ms. O'Dowd by my teacher, Ms. Angie Guerrero. O'Dowd came to our class at High Tech High Chula Vista on Wednesday, November 13, 2013 to speak to us about the various projects her group at the County of SD is working on, and to give us more insight about the homeless population in San Diego. After she spoke to the entire class, I sat down with her in the teacher’s office, with the goal of digging deeper into her knowledge and experiences with the homeless. She had vast knowledge of the issue and how it affects us in different ways.

O'Dowd stressed the importance of knowledge in order to create change toward the issue. She is very optimistic about putting an end to this problem in San Diego, partly due to the fact that we are working on the homelessness project. O'Dowd was impressed by the fact that we all were working together and had such a firm foundation of knowledge of the topic, and said that our project has the potential to touch people and raise public awareness.

AD: I just wanted to start this off by asking you if there is a specific defining moment that really defines who you are, and what you stand for today, like any specific experience?

MO: That’s a great question. I think two things. My father passed away when I was very young, and then I grew up playing sports. So, I think both of those left a passion for caring in a sense of having value in the world in a way. So yeah, obviously losing my dad was a big deal. He was very caring and compassionate, so I think I got that from him.

AD: So growing up, is this what you envisioned you’d be doing?

MO: I did. I definitely did. I definitely thought I’d be in a helping type field, and I feel very fortunate that that’s what I do, and I do truly feel that I make an impact, and that’s a big deal.

AD: So in your presentation, you talked about how you grew up in New York, how is the homelessness different over there than over here [San Diego]?

MO: Yeah, I feel like San Diego surprisingly has a worse homeless population. I think San Diego’s [population] is much more in your face than it is back east, although you wouldn’t think that. I feel that it is a much more vulnerable group here in my perspective.

AD: Why do you think they’re so vulnerable? In your presentation, you talked about the different types of homeless people, and how the chronic type embodies the image of the homeless people. Why do you think that is?

MO: I think it’s because you see them. You definitely see them. You may see the same person on a regular basis. And usually, they’re there a lot longer. They seem a lot more disconnected and threatening.

AD: Threatening in what way?

MO: I think that they… It’s kind of that thought of “I wonder how that happened to that person” and many people conclude that obviously something negative happened.

AD: I understand that you work for the County of San Diego, how is that different than volunteering at a non-profit organization?

MO: That’s another good question. Non-profit, I feel like I did a lot more direct service, like day-to-day helping with homeless. But in my job now, I do much more bigger picture help. This meaning, legislation, local policy, strategic planning, much bigger picture impact. Both feel very impactful, but this feels more sustaining.

AD: So you feel that working with the county is more sustaining, versus doing a day-to-day thing?

MO: Yeah, day to day help and assistance. It was like helping somebody, supporting them in their chores, or help them by providing them childcare. Now my projects are more bigger picture, longer-term housing models and strategies.

AD: So you mentioned a lot of projects in your presentation. Out of those projects, such as the RCCC, VASH, Section 8., which one strikes you the most?

MO: I think VASH. Like in the video [showed during her presentation to the class], it provides the veterans a housing sub-city with case management services. They’ve also reduced requirements that the traditional requirements Section 8 vouchers have. It’s very specialized, and well thought out, and brings together a lot of public and private organizations to impact veteran homelessness.

AD: Yeah, these projects seem well thought out, so what goes through the process of developing these projects?

MO: Yeah, it’s a big deal. A lot of it is a gap analysis, so looking at what the gap is, even looking at what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and resources are available. And then you have to align it with the skills and capacity that an organization has, and then what your mission is, what you want to accomplish.

AD: So was it a big jump going from the city to the county [position]?

MO: I did different things with the city. I worked more with those who had Section 8 vouchers, to help them become self-sufficient. So it was different, because I was working with people who had that first layer of foundation of housing. Now it’s really working with the population that has no housing, no support. So, in my old job, I could really talk about impacting youth and going to college, long term employment, improving people’s credit, and those types of pieces. Now its on the street, chronic, getting them into housing, getting them these basic needs versus being actually able to develop layers on top of that housing.

AD: About the housing, can you tell me about the difference between the traditional and permanent housing programs?

MO: To make it basic, transitional housing is two years. That is the most you can stay in that type of housing. It can be communal housing and shared housing. Permanent housing means they have their own unit that has no end date. So it’s true housing. Two years can sound like a long time, but it really isn’t.
AD: So how do you determine who gets what type of housing?
MO: Unfortunately, we have way too much transitional housing. So a lot of times, the wrong people are getting put into transitional housing. But transitional housing is usually for people that have short-term issues that they can bounce back from.
AD: What are some of these issues?
MO: So for example, someone that is in an alcohol treatment program. Or somebody that is fleeing a domestic violence situation. So they just need a little bit of time to really be safe, get their lives together, and then be able to move back into a more permanent situation. Permanent housing is really appropriate for everybody. Section 8 is considered permanent. It’s having affordable housing, having housing that you can afford.
AD: You talked about the transitional housing being something for someone going through a temporary situation, how do you deal with that? Like you said, domestic violence, how does that process work?
MO: It will be varied on the program. Usually, if you are a domestic violence-housing provider, you often cannot house anybody that has the conviction of a domestic violence. So a lot of times, there is a mandatory arrest in San Diego. So if it’s a man and a woman fighting, and the man has a scratch on his face, and the woman doesn’t, they may arrest her (woman) as perpetrator. But this doesn’t mean that that is exactly what happened. But if it does, and she gets arrested, she is not ineligible for domestic violence programs.
AD: Oh I see. So I understand that you work for the county, and know that there were probably a lot of people that you’ve met and worked with, are there any really influential people that really changed you?
MO: At the county specifically?
AD: Well, on your path to where you are today. In general.
MO: Hmm... That’s a great question. Definitely my dad. That influenced who I am. I would probably say some of my clients that I had when I worked in drug service. When I was in a graduate program, I did my thesis on how homeless creates social networks on the streets. There was a gentleman that I interviewed whose name was Lonnie. He was a homeless veteran. He came back from Vietnam and couldn’t function. He was out on the streets and had mental health issues, but was a fantastic and great person but ended up passing away. He didn’t deserve any of that.
AD: That’s pretty cool. So you helped him out and what not?
MO: He was great; yeah he actually came to my college graduation. He was awesome.
AD: And he just passed?
MO: Yeah. Actually what happened was he had Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. He had cancer, which was from the war. He finally ended up getting a payout from the VA [Veterans Affairs], it was years, and he hadn’t been compensated at all or got any benefits for his service. When he did, he bought a trailer. He always said that he couldn’t wait to have TV and sit in a recliner, which is what he ended up getting. But he ended up passing, and it was more of the end of the road for him at that point.
AD: Yeah, so I understand that there are a lot of veterans, homeless people in general, do you ever feel overwhelmed? What goes through your mind when you see these people?
MO: That’s a really good question. I would imagine that I would be kind of over it. But to tell you the truth, I’m not. When I see it, it definitely touches me. It’s sad actually, especially those that are chronic. Even in my own community, I live in Normal Heights, there is a sub city of homeless in my community, and I talk to them. I definitely don’t feel disconnected from them. I definitely feel compassionate. A lot of times, even during my thesis, they said people don’t even look at us; they look through us and don’t talk to us. I purposely make eye contact and say hi. If they have some interest, I will give them resources, community resources.
AD: You said that you’re sad when you see them, but how do you feel when you are helping them and developing these programs?
MO: Yeah, I definitely feel a sort of return. I feel that the programs are impactful, and needed, and key. I grew up with limited resources, so I know and believe that we are making a long-term impact on the families. If not on the parents, then on the kids.
AD: That’s good. So, working where you work, what kind of impact do you think you guys have on this issue of homelessness?
MO: You know, I feel the strength in the fact that we have a lot of data, and that I can see the return. We house 300 veterans through this VASH program, and provide 1700 vouchers for low-income people. We have some really specific programs for veterans and foster youth. I feel that we make very strategic and well thought out decisions at the country on behalf of the programs that we do, and we’re not going to do something non-impactful and not efficient or cost effective.
AD: So you are working with a team, not individually?
MO: Yeah, overall, in my day-to-day work, I work very much in the community but with a few others in my own department.
AD: Oh ok, so can you take me through a normal day for you?
MO: Ok, so for example today, I had a couple hour community meetings with the Continuum of Care, I had a one on one meeting with whom I report to about longer term planning for the longer term housing for the Continuum of Care and staffing, and then after this, I will go back to the office and monitor some contracts for some of our housing programs. Then tomorrow, I have a few inter-departmental meetings related to some of our rental assistance programs. I do some contract monitoring, and soon I will be applying for the NOFA, the 15 million dollars that we apply for through the Continuum of Care. So I’m still working on some of that. It really varies.
AD: Do you do a lot of school visits too?
MO: No, actually I do not.
AD: So this is kind of a unique experience for you then huh?
MO: Yeah it really is. I enjoy this a lot. I do a few visits here and there, but not too many.
AD: I think you are pretty familiar with the project we are doing in class, so what kind of impact do you think we have?
MO: I think you guys have major influence. Even if one student takes this issue and shares, it’s big. It’s multifold. To be honest, that’s why my rotary supported this project. Its something that’s really key and critical. Its getting people really engaged in issues that are important and relevant in the community.
Eric Lovett: A Listening Ear for Young Street Angels
By: Britney Aceron

I was fortunate enough to schedule a phone interview with Eric Lovett, a member of a local homeless organization called Urban Street Angels. We started our interview with warm salutations. The tone of his voice gave me the sense that he was definitely enthused about discussing the issue of homelessness in America and how to end it, which made me even more eager to begin the interview.

Although I didn’t have the opportunity to interview Mr. Lovett in person, my advisory recently joined their organizations in feeding the homeless in OB for Community Service Day. There, we were introduced to Mr. Lovett. He is the Executive Director of Urban Street Angels, a nonprofit that works with homeless young people. His passion for helping and selfless attitude is what influenced him to work with homeless people.

BA: So I recently came with your organization to help feed the homeless in OB and we briefly talked about what you do, can you recap and tell me a little bit more about what your organization does and what you do specifically?
EL: Well, our demographic organization reaches out to homeless people, 18-29 years old and we basically provide help with no strings attached. We provide food and certain items of clothing. We are a volunteer based outreach and we hit the streets 4-6 times a month. There are an estimated of 6,000 homeless young people on the streets here in San Diego and in addition to meals and clothes, we provide resources on shelter, services, medical care, and job opportunities.

BA: Yeah, I'm really glad I had the opportunity to join you guys. It was such a life changing experience. Since you do this more often, what do you enjoy most about this job?
EL: My favorite part of my job... I feel like I'm making a difference, that has to be probably the biggest thing. I mean everything about my job is great and everything involved in it, so there's not just one specific thing I do.
BA: Yeah. I'm sure just like any job, there are some challenges. What are some of the challenges you face in working with homeless people?
EL: Oh absolutely, there are a lot of people who don't want to be helped and until somebody's ready to be helped, you really can't help them. We measure our success not on our failures, not on the ones we can't help but on the ones we do.
BA: What are one of your most memorable moments working with Urban Street Angels?
EL: It has to be one of my most recent memories because, when we see someone who's gone all the way through the program, so we've actually found them on the street, actually helped them get clothes, food, we actually got them a place to live, and we got them a job, and then they got their own place to live. Just this past month we completed helping a young lady who is 22 years old. So whenever that happens and you can see what you're doing is really making a difference that's when I most proud.
BA: You said you help them get jobs, what are the types of jobs you help them find?
EL: We have certain organizations that are willing to help us take on individuals and bring them up through our organization and give them a chance. So this one girls job was like a bar or restaurant so she's a server. It's really all what they want. We help people get into construction and things like that or internships. It really just depends on the person and what their passions are. We don't just get somebody a job to get them a job. We try to put them with their passion so they will be able to succeed in it, you know?
BA: Yeah definitely. So it seems like you've had a lot of experience with many different young homeless people, how long has your organization been running and do you think it's possible to end homelessness?
He said if this is happening who was the initial start of this organization. He actually killed him and the guy was actually murdered in the back seat of a car. There was this man named Chance who needed and the trust they needed, that anything in return with the hope that they needed without getting returned or having anything basically the story goes, therefore they've gotten to that place. I do think that it can be cured, really do. I think homelessness itself can't be cured without our selfishness being cured first. But you know, I agree with that. How can people like myself help end homelessness? I think the first way is to be aware of what's happening. You know, be aware of what's out there. Secondly, to do your part. Do your part in making a difference and that is like what you did, going out and giving a meal or a sandwich to somebody else and thinking about what it did to you. If we all start getting that mentality of helping those who need help, I think it will help us all. Actually, I think that brings up what I said in your last question, it'll help get people off the streets. 

**BA:** Yeah. So what inspired you to be apart of this movement in helping people get off the streets?

**EL:** Probably, just being tired of just focusing on myself. I wanted to do something that focused on other people and that's what got me into what I was doing and also seeing the needs of young people out there that needed help. You know, so many young people out there on the streets, they don't have hope and I think someone loving them right where they are with no strings attached and not wanting anything in return with the hope that they needed and the trust that they needed, that among anything basically the story goes, there was this man named Chance who was actually murdered in the back seat of a car in Portland, Oregon. He didn't have the money to make it. The guy that picked him up actually killed him and the guy who was the initial start of this organization knew chance and was his friend and he said if this is happening to people like Chance, it's happening to a lot more people and I don't want this to happen so that's kinda what started it all. **BA:** Oh wow, so from meeting so many young people and focusing on getting them back on their feet, do you feel like you build a relationship with them? **EL:** Absolutely. You have to. Especially young people, they don't trust a lot of people so you have to build that relationship, it makes a big difference.

**BA:** So this will be my last question. **EL:** Oh good that wasn't that bad haha. **BA:** Haha, yes you've helped me a lot so thank you! Okay, so I know you've gained a lot of knowledge by now about homelessness, I was wondering if you had any finals things you'd like people to know about either your organization or homelessness in general.

**EL:** I think we've covered most of it. But you know, I think it's important to know that 70 percent of American's are three paychecks away from being homeless. I think that is something people should know because once people bring it down to where they are as a person you know, they will realize that, "Hey that could be me." So I think that that's a good thing to put out there.

**BA:** Wow that's is a big percentage of our country, what do you think is the main cause of people becoming homeless? **EL:** The number one contributor to homelessness in our demographic is abuse. They've been abused by somebody and they're running from them. And sometimes you find them going back because they get into place where they can't and a lot of them are being abused by the foster care so they end up going back. The good thing about what has just happened in this state is about four weeks ago they passed that if you are under 18 and you're homeless or you're running and you go to a shelter they don't have to report you because usually they get reported to the state and they will return you to your situation. So that could be foster care or something that was very unhealthy for them. Now we don't have to report them or return them and its been a huge, huge difference because they would get returned to the place they were abused at because they were reported. So now people have a chance to actually come to us and get the help they need without getting returned or having that fear of being returned, you know?

I asked April about what she did to get where she is today. She told me about how she has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a masters in Public Administration from San Diego State University. April has also worked as a public administrator, detox counselor, social services, mental health, addiction recovery, community outreach, and much more. Now she is working with Ms. O'Dowd in the County of San Diego to work with different parts of the government and organizations with the Homeless Initiatives Support project.

April always had a calling to do something for the community. “I always try to strive to do more and greater things, I followed my gut and I am now here.” Some of the many organizations that April works on a daily bases are Veterans Village, San Diego Rescue Mission, Section 8, St. Vincent De Paul and many more. “We work with many different people to help with the overall picture.” With all these organizations I asked about how one could help be a part in helping the
homeless population. She replied saying, “There are many opportunities to help the homeless in San Diego. Many non-profits in the area are always looking for volunteers. My best recommendation would be to research an organization you feel compassionate about and explore their website for volunteer contact information.”

Some of the different things April works with daily are attending meetings, housing supporting care and help community members brainstorm ideas for possible solutions. “It’s a 8 to 5 job with a lot of research, meetings, and speaking with managers.” I asked her about some things that she’s learned about homelessness while on the job. “The biggest lesson I have learned is seeing that there is no ‘one’ simple solution for ending homelessness. In light of the diverse needs of the homeless community, there are many hardworking, dedicated people spending countless hours brainstorming ways to effectively serve and outreach to the homeless.”

A question that’s hard to answer about homelessness is “How do we end it?” “What could we do to help?” April has many ideas that contribute to this question and is very inspirational to hear. “Ultimately I would like to believe if everyone did one thing to support a homeless person, together the community could solve homelessness. Ending homelessness is a community wide collaborative effort and the more people who understand what causes homelessness and where resources can be found, the more people available to assist the homeless population. There are so many caring and dedicated people working towards this common goal for it not to be successful. One thing to remember is that with any large change, progress is slow and always evolving. It takes time to see how the building blocks of today will come together in the future.”

Molly Downs: Making the Difference
By: Remi Kim

I had the opportunity to speak to Molly Downs, who is the director of the Nueva Vida Haven Emergency Center in San Diego. Due to her busy working schedule, the interview was conducted over the phone. As I sat in an empty office waiting for Ms. Downs to pick up the phone, I was nervous. But as soon as we began to speak to each other, I instantly loosened up. Her voice was very warm and inviting, and I felt completely comfortable with speaking to her.

Molly Downs has been working with the homeless population for 13 years, and plans on continuing her work with the Nueva Vida Haven in the future. She is an extremely inspirational woman who has helped countless families by organizing a place for them to stay. Toward the end of the interview, I knew what her perspective on homelessness in San Diego is, and felt inspired to make a change.

RK: What college did you go to, and what did you major in to get started into the homeless scene?
MD: I went to Point Loma Nazarene, and I majored in social work because they have a social work program. Part of this is that you have to have an internship, and so I did my internship with the Rescue Mission. That’s how I kind of got started to working with them.

RK: And did you know that you wanted to go into helping the homeless when you were in college?
MD: Not really. I knew I wanted to do some kind of social work. I actually met my boss somewhere not work related, and she said she needed an intern. I’ve always been interested in, should I say had a heart for the homeless people, but didn’t really know that that was what I wanted to do until she offered me an internship. So yes, and no.

RK: Who inspired you to work at the Nueva Vida Haven?
MD: My boss. Her name is Sherry. She is the Vice President here, and she looks over all of our programs here. So, we have a men’s center, women’s center, children’s center, the Nueva Vida Haven, which is our overnight shelter. She’s the one that brought me in and taught me everything, so she would definitely be that person.

RK: We [the team at High Tech High] actually visited the Nueva Vida Haven a few days ago, and it was really interesting to see some of the people, and meet the person who gave us a tour of the place.
MD: Oh good, that’s great. Cool!

RK: So Juliette [the tour guide] was telling us some stories about people who lived there. Is there a specific person that you remember?
MD: Gosh, there’s been a lot of them. I know that there’s a family that came in. I think there were two kids, and they’ve been sleeping in their car. When they walked in, the kids had slept in their car for so long that they just could not believe that they had a mattress that they could sleep on, and actually spread out, lay down, and go to sleep. So it’s neat that we are able to provide something like that especially if they’ve been sleeping in their car, and don’t have a bed, or a shower. Also my staff that works here right now. She actually came through the Nueva Vida, and that’s how I met her. Her and her son were staying at the Nueva Vida Haven and they went into the long term program and she came back and now she works for me. So I have two staff that used to be in the Nueva Vida, and they got through the program and now they work here. They help the ladies a lot more because they have been in their shoes. It’s helpful for me because there’s proof that this program does work, there is hope. Sometimes you see a lot of the same people that aren’t able to get out of homelessness, but it’s helpful to remember them [former members of the Nueva Vida] and know they did it.

RK: I know that you’re really busy working at the Nueva Vida, so what does an average day look like for you?
MD: For me, I don't have a lot of contact with the clients right now. I do a lot of administrative stuff. For example, I do statistics, and I work off of a lot of other agencies to try to get our clients somewhere more permanent to stay. Also, agencies who have people that need to come into our program, or need shelter. So, I see if we can get people into the Nueva Vida shelter. If someone comes in and is in need of emergency help, I go and help them, but that doesn't happen everyday. I don't do a ton that's really exciting. It's more my night staff that does dinner, breakfast, showers, put the rooms in place, and that's a little more exciting. I do a lot of the administrative work.

RK: I was interested in how clients go from the overnight stay to the year long program. How do you choose the families, or the people who get into the year long program?

MD: They have to submit an application, and then they are put on a waiting list. So, it's only if they're interested in going into the program. Then, they'll wait and stay at the Nueva Haven, we call it NVH, until there is a bed open for them upstairs. But, one thing is that the year long program only takes children up to age 12, and some of our overnight shelter family members have children up to 16, and so some of our families don't qualify for the upstairs program. Then, we have to send them to other shelters for permanent housing.

RK: And do you know how many people, approximately, that you have to turn away each night?

MD: For the most part, we don't have to turn people away. Recently, we've had so many families. I've never seen this many kids and families needing overnight shelter, that last week we had to turn away 3 people. But, for the most part, we get everyone in.

RK: And also, going back to your field, how many years have you worked at the Nueva Vida Haven?

MD: I've been there for 10 years. I've been working with homeless families since 2000, so 13 years. I worked at the Rescue Mission, and then I went to another shelter, and then I came back to the Rescue Mission. But, it's always been with homeless families.

RK: What is the most challenging thing to you as a person who is trying to combat homelessness?

MD: I think it's the kids, and watching the kids have to live in a shelter. You know, live on the streets. They are from good moms, sometimes they will make it work. But, it's just sad to see kids in that situation.

RK: Yes, I completely agree. I don't know what I would do if I saw so many people on the streets like that.

MD: Yeah, you know, we are doing what we can, but it's hard to send them out at the end of the day.

RK: I know for the overnight stay, they're supposed to leave at a certain time, so do you know what they do during the time before they are allowed back in?

MD: Well for single women, people who don't have kids, there is a day center called Rachel's. And they can go to Rachel's all day and stay there to get lunch. If any of the kids are school aged, all of those kids if they're in kindergarten or if they can get into preschool, have to be in school. The hard part are moms who have babies and toddlers aged four and under because there's no place really for them to go. So, a lot of times they just end up walking around or going to Balboa Park. We're trying to actually start a preschool here so those kids can stay here during the day and we're working on that right now. But, unfortunately if they have babies or toddlers, there's no where for them to go.

RK: Yeah, Juliette was telling us how you guys are trying to get a school started for kids under four.

MD: Yeah, we're hoping this will be open by March, if everything goes right. So I think that will be huge. The moms can also go to school and get a job and not have to worry about their kids that they have to take everywhere around with them, so they can be more successful.

RK: Our project goal is to continually ask ourselves if we think it's possible to end homelessness and what we can do. Do you have any suggestions on what we, as high schoolers, can do to end homelessness?

MD: I think you have to be 16 to volunteer. If people will donate that kind of stuff. It helps provide the stuff that our clients need while they're here.

RK: And, do you think it's possible to end homelessness?

MD: I don't know, I would hope so. I think that some people choose to stay on the streets, and like it there. They don't necessarily want to get off the streets. So, in that case, I don't know if we could because there are some people who want to be homeless and that's a problem. But, I do think we need a lot more shelter in order to make that happen. I think we need more long term housing. I would hope so, but there seems to be a lot [of obstacles].
The room was engulfed by silence as we found our ways to our seats. I noticed that Mikko was a little uneasy. However, once I explained the purpose of the interview -- hearing his opinion of volunteering and homelessness in America -- he began to relax and the interview went just as swiftly as I had anticipated. Mikko Osorio gave me very detailed answers of his experience at Saint Vincent de Paul with his High Tech High class and other volunteering events he had participated in.

LC: So Mikko, what was your first impression of the St. Vincent de Paul shelter?
MO: It’s unlike anything I’ve ever seen in the past while volunteering. I hadn’t really volunteered in shelters that often, so going to St. Vincent De Paul was kind of a new experience and it kind of broke my expectation of homelessness. The stereotype of seeing homeless people on the streets everyday isn’t really what it’s like at St. Vincent De Paul. One of the rooms that we walked through was the family room and it’s really eye-opening to see the people or families that have to be resilient in these times and have to battle through homelessness. It makes a difference on the lives of them and their kids and it’s something that they have to grow up with.

LC: What exactly did you do at this volunteering event?
MO: At St. Vincent De Paul, we were split up into two different groups and from there it was decided. I mean, they told us where we would go and what we’re going to do that day. So I was working in the back and we didn’t really get to interact with the people that were at the shelters. We were just there to prepare food. It kind of sucked that we didn’t get to interact with people and hear about the different stories they have gone through, but at the same time I knew that we were also making a difference; maybe not in this immediate time, but in the future we have helped prepare meals.

LC: Inspiring. How did the employees at the St. Vincent De Paul treat you?
MO: They were kind of in a rush mood, they really wanted to get the food prepared so everyone would have a meal. I realize that it’s a demanding job and it takes a lot of like patience and finesse. It’s crazy.

LC: Do you plan on volunteering in the future?
MO: I plan on volunteering in the future whether it would be with St. Vincent De Paul or the San Diego Rescue Mission, whatever it may be. I feel like volunteering is a great way to help others and in a non-selfish way, it helps you think about all the things that you can be grateful for. And you can make a difference in people’s lives.

LC: Mikko, you mentioned earlier that unfortunately, you weren’t able to work with the homeless or interact with the homeless people at the shelter. Is there any specific volunteering event that you’re interested in and if so why?
MO: Around the holiday seasons, I usually like to volunteer at different organizations to give meals to people. There’s some that I’ve done in the past; it’s like a toy drive for Christmas and those aren’t necessarily working with people for the toy drive or getting to see the people who are involved with the toy drive, but it’s still making a big difference and usually it’s around the holiday season where a lot of volunteering is needed.

LC: I know this is kind of off topic of volunteering, but what do you think is the main cause for homelessness in America?
MO: I think right now it could be the economy; there aren’t many jobs for everyone and you know, with less jobs it means that people get laid off and being laid off means that they don’t have money to tend to their families or tend to a house and food. So it’s just a struggle right now because of the economy.

LC: You mentioned preparing meals for homeless people at the St. Vincent De Paul, how did that make you feel?
MO: While volunteering, I usually get a nice, warm feeling inside and it really makes me happy. That morning, I knew that I was going to be making a difference in peoples’ lives. I may or may not know them, but it’s still a great feeling, and it’s just another reason to wake up in the morning.

LC: Do you think that more schools should take days off like this and go volunteer?
MO: I definitely think that more schools should have volunteer days. I’m really glad that we have our yearly volunteer day but I feel like it’s not enough. We can always push to make more of a difference in our community.

MO: I definitely think that more schools should have volunteer days. I’m really glad that we have our yearly volunteer day but I feel like it’s not enough. We can always push to make more of a difference in our community.

LC: I totally agree with you. I think more schools should emphasize the importance of volunteering and provide opportunities for students to volunteer so they can get inspired and hopefully, that experience would lead them to volunteer more often.

Phil Landis: Rescuing Heroes
By: Jack Hawley

The San Diego Veteran Village is a non-profit dedicated to helping veterans receive services upon return to civilian life. I reached out to Mr. Phil Landis and learned a lot about what an amazing person he is and the amazing programs offered at the Veteran’s Village. He was enlisted in the United States Army in 1965. After attending various military schools, he served in Vietnam from 1967 - 1968 as a Platoon Leader and Headquarters Company Commander with the First Battalion Thirty-Fifth Infantry. He was honorably discharged from active duty in 1969 with the rank of Captain. He is a native Californian and was formerly employed as a real estate agent. Mr. Landis became a Board member of Veterans Village of San Diego in 1996, a Vice-Chairman in 1997, a Chairman in 2001 and the Chief Executive Officer in 2007. He currently serves on the national 12-member Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans.

Despite the impressive background, Mr Landis is a very down to earth man. When I was buzzed into his office, I must admit that I was a little nervous. After all, I was going to meet the CEO of the Veterans Village and his biography was quite impressive. After meeting the humble Phil Landis, I was put at ease. He was very easy going person, and did everything he could to make me feel comfortable. Then, he taught me important
life lessons in just the 45 minutes I had to interview him. I think we should all be a bit more like Mr. Landis -- he is a great example of selflessness and kindness.

J.H. What got you interested in helping the homeless?
P.L. First off, I am a military veteran myself. I served in combat during the Vietnam War, which was long before you were born. I was a platoon leader of an infantry platoon and later, company commander of the head quarters. Think of it as the admin unit for the same platoon I was associated with; that’s really the foundation of it.

I got involved with this organization at one of our annual events, which is called Stand Down, and this was in July of 1996. This was 17 years ago. I volunteered at a clothing tent which was one of the services we provided at Stand Down. It was on a Friday and it was initially four hours, and I like to think that I never left. This gives me an opportunity to work with Veterans and give back. In 2007, I was faced with an opportunity to be CEO and lept into this position.

J.H. Did something happen while you were serving that made you want to go into this field?
P.L. Not while I was in service. It didn’t really dawn on me too much until I started to volunteer here. There was something in me that was searching for this outlet in a way to heal myself and others and so there is a grava toss that takes place and when you are confronted with it, sometimes you can be self aware enough to say, “Oh my gosh, I need more of this.” I think this lady here also agrees. She is a retired 1st Sergeant, and served a tour of combat in Iraq, and there are many others among us, fewer of my generation because we are older. However there are more and more of Claudia’s generation. We are currently preparing Claudia’s generation to be the leaders of this organization in the next ten or fifteen years. What drove me to do this comes from personal experience, and the kind of experience I am referring to is traumatic experience, which comes from warfare itself in which the face of it is obscene. We are fortunate; there are few of us that have an opportunity to spend half of our lives at Veterans Village. It’s a way to give back and give meaning and purpose and to give balance to our lives, and this gives us an opportunity to do that.

J.H. What is your greatest moment while serving?
P.L. I think my greatest moment was when I graduated officer candidate school. That was very a meaningful event that reshaped the rest of my life. It was a very exciting and meaningful event.

J.H. Did attending military schools prepare you for tasks you do now?
P.L. I think they help you with anything you do beyond that. One beautiful thing about the military that is lost by 99.6% of the population is that serving in the military does more than build character. Serving in the military can provide enormous skills, in which many are translatable. Take the word ‘leader’ and Claudia is an example of a leader. Claudia is a leader of people and her experience has enabled her to learn those skills, because there are very few leaders born with that skill. Like skateboarding -- no one is really born knowing how to be a great skateboarder. It is learned in the school that you go to, like I said I went to candidate officers school, and went to school in Monterey and learned a language, which I still don’t remember, but the military has a remarkable way of allowing people to be the very best they can be. You heard slogans like that, it’s really true. So the education I had helped. Also the on the job training helped, just being in leadership position, I enlisted in time with the military and I will always be an enlisted soldier, and then I went to officer school. So I know a little of the enlisted side and most of my time was spent being an officer. But the important part is that you are working together with others to achieve a common goal.

J.H. Do you feel being a Veteran makes you connected to other veterans you help?
P.L. I think there are some truths to that. We make a conscience effort to find people to fill our positions, and in the last four years we have made a huge effort to reach out into the community and find veterans with the potential to fill our open staff position. There is something in it. That it is a common experience. You are with men and women going through the same experience as veterans. It doesn’t have to be the same timeline, but our experiences are very similar. You know in a greater context. The day Claudia and I met, there was a connectivity. You do not have to create or reach to find, just because we have the same experience in being in the military.

J.H. Can you give me a quick history of how Veterans Village got started?
P.L. I’ll take you back to 1981. There was a small group of my generation of warriors who were struggling with their own trauma and drug addiction issues. I believe there were five, and they were in a counseling session called a rapp group, and this group was facilitated by this chaplain, by the name of Bill Muheaty, and my generation was not well received... they were ostracized. A friend of mine said that he didn’t realize that the enemy was here and not in Vietnam... and there is truth in that. So these five men wanted to do something publicly to demonstrate the lack of concern and lack of medical care that they were receiving. Nobody wanted to deal with them, and they wanted to do a combat assault, So Bill said, “Take all this negative energy and do something positive. Why don’t you go out to the bridges and parks and find your brothers who served with you? Do something to help them.” That was the original mission and that hasn’t changed; we just expanded our service.

J.H. Do you associate with other veteran villages throughout the country?
P.L. We are not too involved with national organizations. We are on a couple of national communities, so we get a national influence that way. We get to do some traveling. I am going to Chicago tomorrow. Would you want to go instead of me? But we have an opportunity for a lot of traveling on a national basis. I believe we have a lot of friends in the community along with politicians.

J.H. Would you say that you get a lot more support now than back then?
P.L. We get an enormous amount of support. I truly believe that the historians are writing about the Vietnam generation, and they are determining that our lasting legacy was moving forward the resources for this generation for the men and women who fought in the Middle East because we truly forced the nation to pay attention and force them to provide health care and counseling. Before that, there wasn’t much out there. So this generation benefits with it.

J.H. How does Veterans Village help veterans?
P.L. We house 500 veterans every night. On the west side is a long term residential program dealing with drug addiction, alcoholism, and trauma. These folks are all homeless. Eighty percent of this
population are felons. Two-thirds have a mental illness. If you are female, one hundred percent have sexual trauma issues. A lot of people still have embers and we like to blow on the embers and try to start a fire. Now on the east side, we have 140 transitional beds that is a structured environment but not a treatment facility.

Searching for a Change: Grace Fregoso
By: Seara Fernandez

It was a sunny autumn day at High Tech High Chula Vista. There was a cool breeze and I sat down with Grace Fregoso at the lunch tables. High Tech High Chula Vista is a project based school and the school is full of projects that the students have done. This project is about investigating homelessness and trying to see if there is a way to help end it. We as a class went to serve breakfast at Father Joe’s, went on tours of The San Diego Rescue Mission, and have had many guest speakers to help us better understand homelessness in our community. Since Grace and I both volunteered at a homeless shelter as part of the project, we realized that we were also part of the solution in ending homelessness. It was for this reason that I decided to interview Grace.

There was no one around at the lunch tables; it was just Grace and I sitting and it was a really good time for an interview. She is a petite girl with average length brown hair, she has braces and is very sweet. She has nine siblings and was homeschooled before coming to High Tech High Chula Vista. Grace came to our school because she wanted to try a new learning experience. She wanted to be able to learn not only academics but also knowledge she will need in the real world, and that is exactly what High Tech High is about.
IM: I started right out of college. I actually started at the [Regional Task Force] as a temporary doing a research project -- they wanted someone to come on to basically interview the different agencies and kind of understand more of their workflow, how they deal with clients, understand more of their programs like what their programs do, as well as get feedback from them on how they use service point, and service point is our HMIS. It's just a particular software we use, and since we manage that, we want to make sure our customers, or the homeless service providers, how they are reacting, basically doing site visits. So I started with that and then I kind of came up with recommendations of what needed to happen, of how to deal with technical systems, whether it was very simple or very complex technical systems, and so I basically created my own position and luckily they hired me and I am working there now.

JC: So what does your everyday look like?

IM: It is very interesting everyday. Like I said, I basically saw what was not happening at my organization and created my own job description and anytime anything wasn't getting done, I'd say put it on my plate, so I actually juggle many plates. If you look at a week I could do, I do service point trainings, so again basically system trainings for new users coming on, teaching them how to use the software; so they would track their clients in the systems, whether it's a very simple workflow, doing what's called an entry and an exit of just what are their demographics when they enter a program, what happens during their program, and basically what's the status of them when they leave. That's one part, the other parts are new programs that come on. I basically analyze what programs do and how, what the easiest, most efficient way for case workers is... I track that information on the system because line staff, they're there to help the client. That's their number one goal, and they don't really go to school to learn about systems. I didn't either, but for them having to use a computer to track things with their clients is either not first nature or just something they don't really want to think about.

I try to make it the easiest process for them so they can go on and quickly put in the information that they need. Some service providers will use the system for very basic stuff... just tracking, like I said. Basically snapshots of their clients, of their entry and their exit to get basic outcomes. Others will do more intense case notes, go by case plans and work with many other modules that you can use. It's just trying to find what's the easiest for them, what their end goal is, what they need to report to their funders, what they need to know for their internal reports to their organizational board.

Things that they can report on that's going to go and help them get more funding, because as non-profits, they need to be able to prove their outcomes and the good work that they're doing. This day and age, it's no longer a word of mouth, it's no longer a beautifully written essay; they want statistics and they want to see outcomes. So by tracking that information in the system, they can prove the work that they're doing. So those are two things, and then I work a lot in the community, getting to know the line staff, getting to know a lot of the other organizational staff, working in the community. So we have what's called a continuum of care, or a COC, and that term comes from HUD (or the US Department of Housing and Urban Development) which is where the main funding comes for homelessness, there are many other funding streams, but they've named this term to basically, how you categorize, it's a geological area. And so the San Diego County is the COC, city and the county. It's basically the geographical area, and how you become a member of the COC is through your interests in homelessness. You attend the meetings and you contribute to the cause of ending it, and collaborate and all that. So what I do is I sit on different committees. One would be, the rating and review: it's a committee that comes up with the process of how do we score different projects, and rank them in order to receive this federal funding. There are many funding streams to receive funding for homelessness, but the main one that the COC comes together for and basically collaborate, comes together as a collaboration together to apply is called COC Funding, which is pretty easy. So there is about fifty to sixty projects a year, that come together that create this application together to send to HUD and compete with, I want to say we have 600 something other COCs across the nation, and we are competing nationwide to basically bring in this money. And to just give you an estimate of the amount we are talking about, it is about $15 million that comes into the region. So I sit on this committee to come up with the most subjective, basically scoring tool for what are known as renewal projects so projects that have been continually getting money, so like how do we continue to rank them or score them, and then we also come up with what's called a new scoring, new project scoring tools so you are either a
brand new organization, or you are part of an organization, and you are coming up with a new program and you’re like hey I want to play in this pool, I want to play in this sandbox, how can I come in and get funding and you have to go through the scoring tool. Then I’m also on another committee called Plan and Planning, and currently what we are doing, one of the new regulations that have come down from the Hearth Act, which basically replaced the McKinney Vento Act, says every COC needs to come up with a coordinated assessment intake process. So meaning, if any homeless person would basically receive a standardized assessment of questions and would be referred to the best project type and it’s all coordinated, and it can be done several ways like, if you’re a city we would say, we are going to do centralized so everybody has to, if you’re homeless you know you have to go to this one place to basically do this intake and you’re going to be referred to a project. Other things, you know do a call, sorry, other COC’s do a call in. Other COC’s do what are called multi cites, depending on what region you are in you do different sites. Some do a collaboration, a combination of the three. So that’s what we are looking into because San Diego is so large. So that’s the other thing. I also work on policies and procedures for our HMIS, as well as for the COC, basically policies on how data will continue to be private, secure, shared, and how agencies have to keep up with data quality. Coming up with those procedures, and then I will, in the next couple months coming up, I will be coming up with how to operationalize those procedures and then creating even more around that. I also do what’s called the housing inventory chart or count, and then with that is the point and time count, but I do the sheltered point and time count because I work with all the agencies. Basically those are two different reports, but I combine them together at the same time. So the Housing and Inventory count is if you were a program that is homeless dedicated, I basically get your list of beds. How many beds, how many units, is it for singles, is it for families, things like that. And the reason I say homeless dedicated is because we have to exclude that, you might serve homeless individuals, but that’s now what that bed in mainly for. For example, there are some projects called, like Brother Binows is an organization. And they are mainly about addiction recovery, kind of detox beds, and there are homeless individuals that go there from time to time, but that bed is not necessarily dedicated for a homeless person so I don’t get to include them on our count. And then I do the sheltered point and time count. So the same night that we do the point and time count, I work with the agencies to say how many people were sleeping in your shelter that night, and then getting all those demographics, and making sure all the data quality is clean. Those are the main projects that I do, and then I’m the main contact for all of them to come into the RTFH, The Regional Task Force, of getting any information, if any new regulations come down or anything comes out, I kind of spread that to the agencies. So yeah.

JC: So when you went into college, did you know you wanted to work with the homeless?

IM: I ended up going to school and I did a double major; I was a business administration major and sociology, and I knew I wanted to do something where I felt like I was making a difference, but I wanted to do that but make sure it was something I am interested in. When I went into college, my senior year, well my sophomore year, I had a class called contemporary social issues and I was like, alright I want to be an urban planner but dealing with public policies. Like I want to be the one that helps change zoning and that helps bring in policies that says you know a building needs to be built this way, like affordable housing and things like that. And then by my senior year, I did a homeless seminar class and it still had to do with the housing element. I’m like okay I’m still on the right track but I want to make sure I understand both sides of the story basically, or the issue. Looking at the sociology side, which is you know, looking at the social impact and it’s more, kind of like your case manager, it’s more like, from the heart type thing, and looking at those issues. And then you have your business administration side which is all about the bottom line, and I wanted to be able to effectively come up with a really good policy or plan or solution [and] you have to understand both sides, so you appease both so that way everyone buys in.

Otherwise you can try and implement a policy or anything and if you aren’t pleasing the business, who could potentially help fund it, then they’re not going to buy in, they’re never going to fund you, they’re going to be your worst enemy, they’re always going to be at your meetings and causing havoc. As well, you have to think about the person, every human face, the dignity of the human needing clothing, shelter and food, so the sociology side and basically coming up with that. So whenever I was graduating, this job opportunity came up as basically doing a research project, and I was like alright I’m going to stay in San Diego, work with the contacts that I have here and see what happens, otherwise I was going to go back, I was from Texas originally, otherwise I was going to go back, volunteer and join the peace core. And then eventually go back to grad school, but I ended up staying here and kind of slowly, I’ve taken on more responsibility from RTFH and how I am dealing with the different agencies and things like that, so yeah.

JC: You were talking about the seminar, is the the specific moment where you decided you wanted to go into Regional Task Force?

IM: No, so one of my, I had two advisor when I was in college. I took his class, because he was the professor who also did my contemporary social issues class, and I just loved him; he was amazing. And I took this homeless seminar class with him because it was like an invite class, he was like, I really think you should take it, so I did. And I just really enjoyed the class, so I just talked to him and then he actually knew who would be my boss at the time, she’s actually no longer at the organization, but he knew that she needed somebody. He actually tried to put me in to do a data analyst position, which is working on the I.T. back in, which I had no experience in. And just got me the interview, and I guess I did something right because even though I wasn’t obviously fit for the job she liked me enough that she created this tip position that eventually turned into a full-time, but yeah. So I knew I wanted to do something with social services, you know housing, affordable housing, basically how to make it so everyone can have fair housing, to have adequate housing and this was kind of my way to get in that niche, to get my foot in the door.
Eventually down the road I want to, I'm a very big proponent on, I believe it takes a community to create the change and have sustainable change, so an organization that you might find interesting is called LISC, and they are about, they are consultants and they are very big about going into like, like downtown communities that need to be rejuvenated or be revitalized is a better word. And they'll go and they'll work with, they basically have all these community meetings and the communities are like, they pose the question, what are problems here? What are you facing? What are things that are meaningful to you? And how do you think we should change them? And then they get the community to commit to how to fix and the community does it, whether it's working with the schools, creating better parks, creating initiatives for creating local businesses, small local business, safety, things like that, because what happens eventually is this consulting firm is going to leave. And if they leave and this community hasn't taken hold of these changes then all the work that has been put into it is going to fall flat. So I am very big about, basically applied social action, so that was another class I had with my other advisor who was, it's all about working with community, having them commit to the cause, and having them come up with the ideas because if they come up with the ideas then it is more meaningful to them, and they are more I don't want to say, loyal is not the right word but they are more committed to just making sure that the change is sustainable and continues.

JC: So from your job, from like that standpoint, how do you see homelessness in San Diego? Is it a really big issue?
IM: I think it is a huge issue, I mean we have the third highest homeless rate in the nation, right behind New York and LA, and in that comparison we aren't the third most populated city, so it is kind of, very sad to know that especially when we know the COC is just one body, one group of people coming together to work on it. What I think it is really, going to take, a HUD with the Hearth Act, is saying you need to do more grassroots stuff, and you need to come together and collaborate more otherwise you won't get funding so there is that string pulling people to do this.

But I think people are finally realizing that there are a lot of people doing their own thing, kind of duplication of work, and realizing we need to just come together and make a system. Because the only way, in my opinion, to effectively end homelessness is to have a working system. Now I'm not a believer, it would be a dream, yes, that there is no longer one homeless person out there. I really think that is a dream and it can happen, however I don't think it can happen unless there is that system and to me the system to end homelessness means, more so, not that there won't ever be a homeless person because you know you always have that, you do have the small percentage of people that say I just want to be left alone on the street, but it is very small and very few so that is a stereotype that isn't true and needs to go away. However, to me, ending homelessness, at least in this point and time, means having a system that, if someone were to lose a job, kicked out of a house whatever, and they become homeless, they are rapidly rehoused, and there are ways to either keep them from being homeless, or they will only experience a short time in an emergency shelter or a hotel voucher. But that they are back in some apartment with some job and that there are these nets that catch them so they don't have to end up on the streets. That, to me, is ending homelessness, that these systems are working, because when you introduce the human aspect of it, you can have great systems, but if I'm the homeless person and I don't want to do anything, that's on me. But you need to have, you need to say the system, the structure is working. At least in my homeless seminar class, we always talk about the agent versus the structure, or a different word for it, agency versus the system is one way but there was a different word. But anyways it's basically, you know, talking about you have all these systems, like government regulations and things like that and how that can affect someone becoming homeless, but then you also have the agency person making their own personal decisions in that is two different things. It is kind of like that argument, nature versus nurture and stuff like that, you know. So I don't know, I feel like San Diego is slowly coming around to, but they are hopefully turning in the right direction of creating these systems. And like I said, we kind of have to, we are at the point where we have to or we are not going to continue to get funding. Or if we do, it is going to only be a small percent of those programs that really have amazing outcomes that continue to get funding.

JC: Are there systems, like the system you are talking about, is there anything similar to that or is it kind of just the organizations?
IM: So there are small pilots working in San Diego, an example would, be the county has what are called, county vouchers, or the cold weather shelter vouchers, so a voucher used by a family so they can go live in a hotel for an x amount of days. And one system there is they, in order to get a voucher you have to call 211 and get referred, so then you are referred to whatever agency is closest to you, or if there are kids they refer them to whatever agencies are in their school district. And then from there, in order to be eligible for the voucher you have to have a vouching plan, and then so what happens is you get a voucher for 7 days to stay in this hotel, and then once the voucher is almost over or you are done you have to come back to the case manager to review your housing case to make sure you are getting back into the apartments, because maybe you just needed a month of saving up enough money, saving up your paycheck to make a deposit, or things like that. So there are small things here and there kind of like that, or there are different groups or collaborations that are coming together to come up with different events or different ways to address the problem. But I don't think San Diego, we haven't locked down on what our system is, it's like a patched quilt, it hasn't all come together yet.

JC: When you are talking about the system, let's say I wanted to help but I didn't know what to do, what would you tell me to do?
M: Like as a you as a high school student?
JC: As me or anyone, like just a person, just a normal person.
IM: Well it kind of depends on what level of help you want to do. Agencies always need volunteers, agencies always need help with something, because they are non-profit, they are always strapped with money. So anytime you would want to help, depending on, volunteering is always a great way to definitely do that, and that would be a great way to see the impact you make shortly, just depending on what you want to do.
So my job does require me to be on the computer or on the phone, so I get very very excited when I get to do site visits or go to any meetings because I am out talking to them, giving my opinion, transfer of ideas happens. So when I get to do site visits and I actually get tours, sometimes I get tours of their programer project, love it. Love it, love it. I might not personally interact with a homeless individual that is staying there, and this is if I don't sit down and talk with them, but I see the work flow, what I refer to as the work flow. I see how the case manager interacts with that client as they walk through the door, and what happens when they stay in the program and when they leave, and I find that very interesting. As much as I love to talk to people, I also like to observe. If you ever learn sociology you’ll also learn in that part, you’ll do many observation projects. So it’s interesting to see the dynamics, of how people interact. You know if one person interacts this way, how is the other person going to interact to that, I don’t know it’s very interesting. But I love doing site visits because, like I said, it’s refreshing for me because it puts a face to these names that I see or these numbers, they’re client I.D.s in the system because you are supposed to identify the information so no one can tell. After a while you just kind of lose the human side of it and it’s great to go and see that. Or like I do, a deployment center for the side of it and it’s great to go and see that. You can always go up and say, how can I help? Whether it’s serving food in the morning, whether it is helping with data entry, whether it’s maybe doing an art class and you get to interact with. Maybe you have some talent or skill that you want to teach people, you could do that. Maybe you’re a masseuse and so you come and you do physical therapy or massages for the clients that are in the shelter. There are many different ways, and those are small tangible ones, that would be the easiest thing to do. As RTFH, we always say volunteer for the point time count because the more volunteers we get every year, the more accurate of a count we can get, ya know. We are supposed to count every almost square inch of our region, and as you know we have many different terrains from the desert to the mountains to the beach to the canyons. So trying to count everyone that we can so we can get an actual accurate number of homeless in San Diego, or serving the homeless and understanding their demographics and what they are dealing with on the streets, seeing how vulnerable they are. You’ll hear this term vulnerability or the VI, the vulnerability index, and that’s a set of questions that you ask a person on the street, and basically sees how vulnerable are they; if they continue to live on the street, seeing how vulnerable they are. You’ll also learn in that part, you’ll do many observation projects. So it’s interesting to see the dynamics, of how people interact. You know if one person interacts this way, how is the other person going to interact to that, I don’t know it’s very interesting. But I love doing site visits because, like I said, it’s refreshing for me because it puts a face to these names that I see or these numbers, they’re client I.D.s in the system because you are supposed to identify the information so no one can tell. After a while you just kind of lose the human side of it and it’s great to go and see that. Or like I do, a deployment center for the point and time count and sometimes I’ll go on survey after, or there will be a couple homeless individuals around at the site I have. Like this past year they were there, and I just went out and talked to them. They didn’t ask for anything, I didn’t offer them anything. I take that back I had some breakfast items that I had earlier that I was going to throw away so I was like hey do you want them, and they were like yeah that’d be great, and I just sat and heard their story. And half the time, the majority of the time, all they want to do is have someone to talk to and tell their story to. It’s just like you talking to your best friend every day and saying you won’t believe what happened today in class, or what happened with this other guy that I like… anything like that. They just want to talk, they want to, unfortunately some stories are a little bit more sad than others. But what I’ve noticed, they might make friends on the street, but it’s still not, they make their community because you’ll notice that they do that, and any person would when you are in any society, but I don’t know, just telling your story and saying, how are you feeling today? I’ve gotten more feedback from that saying thank you for asking. And basically it puts a face, it gives them their dignity back because a lot of times people just pass them on the street, and they feel like they have no dignity, like they are invisible, that they have no face, that they’ve lost the human dignity and I think that is the worst thing anyone can feel, you know.

JC: Is there a specific moment that you remember and you’ll never forget with someone or anywhere in your job?

IM: I think the last time I really had a, well, two weeks ago, no last friday, there was a what’s called a Project Homeless Connect and it is a one day event where a lot of service providers connect and basically create kind of a one stop shop for homeless individuals in that region to come and whether get a shower, clothes, a hot meal, get connected to mental health services, housing services, employment, education. Sometimes they’ll be able to bring in the DMV and they can get California ID cards because if you don’t have an ID card, it’s hard to get help anywhere. They can also get hooked up with public benefits. So it’s helping them, basically having it all in one place, so I did that, I did the North County one, the North County inland one last Friday, and there was a women in line to get the registration, and she was like, I just need to get to dental work here.. I was like, I’m sorry but unfortunately you do have to go through registration because we have to see everyone, register everyone who comes in, but when you’re done. Dental is right over there. And when you’re done, I’ll be happy to walk you over there, and she’s like, thank you so much. A kind smile was all she needed. And I noticed, whenever you’re walking down the street and you see a homeless individual, instead of turning your head down to not make eye contact with them, just look at them and smile and say good morning, good day, and I would say 8 times out of 10 they will smile back and say thanks, or good morning or hello, you know that too. And that’s all they want because when you turn your head down and don’t make eye contact with them, it’s giving them that feeling like they don’t have any dignity, they’re invisible, they are, you are basically lowering their, chopping at their self
Because they have no idea because they don't look that way. It's crazy. Another incident, oh and so later that day after, sorry I'm kind of all over the place, but then later that day, so that happened and I helped and I showed her where to go and helped her a little later. And later that day she came up to me and she's like, thank you so much. This event is so amazing, everyone here is so nice, but thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. And I was like, you're welcome, I mean something to me that I'm just like, oh yeah no problem, super nice, not a big deal, she is just so thankful for and it makes you look at your life and think of things you take for granted and the interactions you have with other people. And those are my favorite moments because again it helps, take the data and all the stuff that you see and put a face to it. J.C: Do you think stereotypes are a big issue that's keeping people from helping the homeless? I.M: I would say yes because those stereotypes, I have really good friends and we will get into very heated conversations about individuals and as to why they won't help them. And you know one of them, one of my friends used to work in Downtown, more in East Village, and after they did the whole, they made Petco park and basically moved the homeless out of the Gaslamp District into East Village, and residents and businesses were upset about that. And so this guy says, I'm never helping a homeless person again and I'm like why? He's like, they are all crazy, they're all dirty, they're all and you know a lot of other bad words, and I'm just like, you don't know their story. Yeah they probably have a mental illness but that's probably why, they might have a mental illness and that's why they're doing the things that they're doing, and the only way they can cope with living on the street is by drinking because they have reached that end of the line. In the string of things he's just like nope everybody just wants to live, they just want to live on the streets so I'm not going to help them. I'm like I don't, I disagree and I was like, I personally do not believe that any person in a right sane mind would say I want to live on the street. Now granted there are people who are what we call modern day gypsies, there are people who just like to travel, who maybe like to live in a tent for a while, but I do not feel that any person truly wants to live in the conditions that people live in when they live on the street. People are put in those situations for many different circumstances, and if nothing can ever happen, they might have tried and tried and tried again, and nothing happens, I think eventually you just kind of give up. Or maybe you just had that one bad day, like you've been trying for months to get a job and you are living on the streets but you can't find anything because you don't have a cell phone, you don't have an address, you don't have a shower, like what are you supposed to do and you have a little bit of money, and you're like you know what, I'm just going to go take a drink because that's the only way I can get away from the horrible world I'm living in. And that unfortunately, that might be the trigger for long term homelessness right. But I was trying to tell him, you have no idea what put them there, so how can you say that that person wants to live there. I was like, if you talk to the person that says, I choose to live on the street, I'd say ask them how long have they been homeless and ask them what happened before that. Like there are things that lead them down there. Anyway, so my point being [that] his stereotype that they want to be there, that they're all dirty crazy, and so he doesn't want to do anything to help them. Now I agree that you shouldn't necessarily give a homeless person money on the street because I do think that it is enabling thing. Instead if you want to give money, give money to programs that have really good outcomes that know what they're doing, or if you want to give them something right then and there, give them a piece of food. Like instead of giving them that money they say they are going to use for food, go by the food and give it to them. And I know some people have different opinions in that, but I come from a personal story of knowing what it's like to enable somebody and so, if you want to give them something right then and there, give them a piece of food. Like instead of giving them that money they say they are going to use for food, go by the food and give it to them. And I know some people have different opinions in that, but I come from a personal story of knowing what it's like to enable somebody and so, if you
safeguard, I have my community. I have
ear about who’s going to watch, like I
dsay they create their community, who’s
going to help protect them. And he’s like,
have you been in that shelter? It’s crazy.
There are crazier people in there than
there are out here and I’m not going to
deal with that. I’ve never. It’s never been,
I started living on the streets because I
wanted to live on the streets. Never heard
that.

Andrew Defante: An Unassuming Hero
By: Alexis Guerrero

Going into this project, Andrew
was not the person I planned to interview.
We were tasked with finding someone in
the community who works with homeless
people, and I hadn’t thought to interview
someone from class. But, Andrew-- like the
rest of us-- had visited a homeless shelter
to serve breakfast, so as a volunteer for the
homeless, he met the criteria of, “working
with the homeless.” It wasn’t until after the
interview that I realized just how much of
a community hero and advocate for the
homeless Andrew really is.

Andrew may not seem like a hero,
because when we think of heroes, we think
of superheroes with these special powers,
fly and save people from burning
buildings. The heroes like Andrew give
something even more important--their
time to people who need it. Whether it’s
serving breakfast to the homeless or build-
ing a house for someone in need, these
are the real heroes -- even if they don’t get
stories published about them in the news-
paper or recognized in a comic book. And
Andrew Defante is definitely an everyday
hero.

AG: So Andrew, what comes to your mind
when you hear the words homeless and
homelessness?
AD: Hmm… to be honest, before we start-
ed this project, I just thought of the home-
less as people standing on the side of the
street. But once we passed by in our car, I’d
forget about them. Now I know that they
are really people -- not just an image. To
answer your question, I think about what
they could have gone through, and what
patch of bad luck they went through in
order to be in the situation they’re in.
AG: Interesting. Why do you think we for-
ter that they are people sometimes?
AD: Just because we don’t know about the
issue… there’s a lack of understanding
why they are there. We get caught up in
our own lives and we forget to think about
others.
AG: What you said is true; we are so caught
up in our own lives with the internet and
television that we forget that some people
don’t have the same items and opportuni-
ties we do. What was your first experience
with the homeless?
AD: Well, I remember in eighth grade, I
volunteered at St. Vincent DePaul’s, where
we went as a class and served juice. It was
my first real encounter with the people
themselves; hearing them talk and seeing
how they acted apart from being on side of
the street.
AG: Did you talk to any [homeless people]
on your trip? If so, what was your conver-
sation like?
AD: Not as much as we did when we went
recently. But I do remember one elderly
guy who really liked the grape juice and
said that I was doing a good job.
AG: You were able to change someone’s day
just by giving him juice. Other than volun-
teeering at a homeless shelter, have you done
anything else to give help to the homeless?
AD: To be honest, not really. What I was
taught before was that some of the people
on the side of the street weren’t actually
homeless, so my family in general didn’t
help them out or anything.
AG: What would be your perspective on
those people, who pretend to be homeless,
and why do you think they do something
as horrible as that?
AD: Because they’re desperate for money.
They might not be right in the mind. They
might go under the category of being lazy,
but have potential.

Obviously they’ve figured out a system that
works for them, if they make enough mon-
ey to go out there everyday.
AG: I see. So what made you want to work
with the homeless, other than the fact that
it was for class?
AD: Just to see what they were like: how
they live, what they go through. It’s inter-
esting to see life through the eyes of some-
one different.
AG: Did you learn something about some-
one during our trip that we had to St.
Vincent’s?
AD: Yeah, that guy we were working with...
Jerry. Even though he wasn’t homeless, we
still got to find out a little about his life and
what he did. These people are genuinely
good people, and not lazy or menacing.
AG: Great answer! I couldn’t have said it
better. What is something that keeps you or
kept you motivated to help the homeless?
AD: The more knowledge we get by doing
stuff in class. You know, it’s bringing a new
perspective on things. It’s making me think
in different ways and making me feel like
something has to be done.
AG: I see. What are your thoughts on the
stereotypes of the homeless?
AD: It’s unfair, really. I mean, it might fit
some people, but it’s [overall] wrong. Just
like any other prejudice. But you know, that
stuff happens. People just have to get edu-
cated on the topic.
AG: It’s true that some people judge oth-
ers on appearances and automatically see
someone who is lazy, dirty, etcetera. You
said people just have to get educated on
the topic, so how can we, as a community,
educate those types of people?
AD: Community outreach. These
non-profits getting the word out there, and
then our project is raising awareness. It’s
like every other issue out there.
AG: There hasn’t been a story you’ve heard
of over the news or online that got you in
any way?
AD: Well, I mean I’ve really just been intro-
duced to this issue by this project.
AG: How did you feel before going in to
help those at St. Vincent’s? How did you
feel after? What were your thoughts com-
ing in?
AD: Well, since I had already helped be-
fore, I knew what to expect. It still struck
me in a way because I once again got to see
the people living there. It was different and
unique in a way.
You really feel like you're helping them, and in return you really feel like they appreciate what you're doing. It was nice.

AG: I completely agree. It felt like we were able to change their day just by doing something so small, such as pouring syrup or pouring cream of wheat. So, you said you already knew what to expect because you had already done something similar to this, but how did you feel going into the first time you had ever gone to help?

AD: I was younger and didn't know so much. All I knew was that my friend's dad was taking us to the shelter and all we had to do was follow directions. I didn't know about the impact I had or how much people appreciated what we were doing.

AG: Interesting... alright, do you think America is doing all they can do to end homelessness and why?

AD: Well, based upon what we've been reading and doing in class, there is progress. People are beginning to realize what's going on. However, I do think that there is still a long way to go. It really is tough to balance the legal and political side of things with the civil and personal and humane things.

AG: I see what you're saying. It's going to take a while, but it's not impossible. Our final question.... If you had the power to take a while, but it's not impossible. Our final question.... If you had the power to try to help everyone at once, some people aren't going to need the things others need and whatnot.

AD: I think you have to approach it with a sense of cost efficiency and an efficient way to house these people. Like Jerry said, you don't necessarily have to give out free houses and stuff. A good strategy would be to influence a few small groups and teach them how to get their lives back on track, and hopefully that carries over to others.

JH: What is something you remember vividly from the experience?

GC: What I remember vividly, has to be this man that I spoke to, this old gentleman... he reminded me of my grandpa, really. That's why I remember him. I remember he looked at me, he grabbed me. We were talking somehow about divorce and he said, "Don't you ever get divorced. It's not like Hollywood makes it. It's not... how people make it seem. It hurts and it messes with you mentally, both you and your spouse. If you really love your spouse, you will never get divorced. No matter what goes through you, you will do your hardest to do your best, to keep that relationship alive. Because the alternative will leave you broken for the rest of your life." He told me this because now he has grandkids and he is homeless and he is not living with his ex-wife. It was really sad because he reminded me of my grandpa. [The same thing happened to my grandpa]... stuff happened, life happened. But it was his decisions that made life happen like that.

JH: That must have been very powerful for you to hear. What will you carry with you from that experience?

GC: It has to be the fact that the man took his time... he took time out of his breakfast and out of his day just to tell me. [He gave me] some advice, to help me hopefully get my stuff together, as my life goes on. My greatest takeaway is one, don't get divorced, two, be careful with drinking and really just appreciate life a day at a time. Each and every day at a time.

JH: Would you recommend to anyone to volunteer in the future?

GC: Oh, man, I would recommend anyone to volunteer, really. I mean, it's humbling to volunteer; its humbling to experience what it means to serve. I think [you cannot forget to serve]. The biggest impact you can make is to help others; that's the biggest impact you can make on other people's lives. I was humbled by going and I really recommend it to anyone who wants to experience something new. You don't have to go to Disneyland, you don't have to go to Florida, you don't have to go on some cruise ship. Go to your local homeless shelter, go to your local anywhere and just volunteer, help out, give a little.

JH: Can you tell me about the homelessness project we are doing?

GC: My goodness, I think I forgot to even mention that.

The Lessons People Carry: An interview with Gerry Carrillo on Homelessness

By: Jess Harris

I did not expect to be interviewing my peer, Gerry Carrillo, on a Friday afternoon. I initially emailed someone from the out-of-school-community, but with a looming deadline, I was pushed to move on and interview someone at school. I'm glad I did, though, because Gerry is a committed and compassionate young man who cares very much about helping the homeless.

In the interview, we focused mainly on the class volunteer effort that Miss Guerrero took us on. Gerry hit mainly on the gems of the people that are in the homeless shelters. He recounted stories of an elderly gentleman as an example. Gerry brings an energy and understanding of the volunteering and compassion that greatly exceeds his years. As Gerry spoke, I was reminded that we can all be heroes--to serve. The biggest impact you can make is to help others; that's the biggest impact you can make on other people's lives. I was humbled by going and I really recommend it to anyone who wants to experience something new. You don't have to go to Disneyland, you don't have to go to Florida, you don't have to go on some cruise ship. Go to your local homeless shelter, go to your local anywhere and just volunteer, help out, give a little.

JH: What is your most recent volunteer effort?

GC: My most recent volunteer effort was actually with the class. We volunteered at St. Vincent De Paul's where they provide homes and serve food to families and homeless people. And it was pretty cool, I mean we got to meet all these people. I worked in the part where you kind of meet and greet. We served as waiters for all the homeless that showed up.

JH: What is something you remember vividly from the experience?
Well, we went [to St. Vincent’s] because we are doing a homelessness project in our class. It’s pretty much to raise awareness about homelessness. People don’t think the homeless are people. It’s just to open horizons and help brothers out.

JH: Who or what are you trying to impact?

GC: We are trying to impact our community, but we can go above and beyond and maybe get on the internet and help out anyone who wants to be helped out. We need to raise awareness; we want to impact as many people as possible.

JH: Do you have a solution for homelessness right now?

GC: Not one in my pocket, no. I guess something I ponder on is what if, since we have so many people, all these people just gave an hour of their day. [It would help] if we just get rid of the stigma of homeless people not being people. We can get rid of that idea; we clean up everyone’s opinions the best we can by raising awareness. People will be more open to hearing and listening about who and what homeless people are and what they stand for. I think that, by itself, can help solve at least the bullying part of homelessness where they feel excluded from society.

JH: How has your perspective changed since the project started?

GC: I’ve been humbled and my eyes have been opened. There is need and life isn’t just some pretty bubble that we live in. There is more to life than just you and I and school and living the life we are blessed to live in... there are people who need help. There are people who have a voice that isn’t being heard because they are being counted off as not a full citizen. They don’t really have a large voice; they are not a contributor to our society.

Nick H.: So, Sierra, what did you expect to find over at St. Vincent de Paul’s?

Sierra G.: I don’t think that I had a very solid and clear expectation before going to St. Vincent de Paul’s, but I expected it to be a little bit more unhappy or just generally unhappy because I didn’t anticipate the positivity that the people would bring into their lives.

Nick H.: Okay. Once you got over to St. Vincent de Paul’s, what did they have you do, like you job over there?

Sierra G.: So, I spent the majority of the morning working out in the dining area where the people were eating their breakfast and for most of that I tidied up a little bit, but I primarily transported their dirty dishes to the kitchen area so where they could be washed. Although, towards the end of the morning I also helped a little bit in the kitchen with the preparation for later meals.

Nick H.: Awesome. Now, how did you feel when doing your job? Like, did you feel that you were doing a good job and you felt proud to be there? What kind of things were you thinking?

Sierra G.: Well, I definitely enjoyed myself and I could see that not only what I was doing specifically, but what our pod was doing as a whole was making a difference because if we weren’t there to help them eat breakfast then who would be, but I also was struck later on that day and even if it-while I was serving or helping serve breakfast, by the level of what we were doing. I kind of- I saw that it was important, what we were doing, but I was also inspired to maybe take it a step further and think big and try to find a way to make a large impact on the homeless community. So, I think the experience was good because I made a difference then, but it inspired me to make an even bigger difference later.

Nick H.: So, what did you think about the homeless people at the shelter?

Sierra G.: I was struck by their happiness at several times that morning. Some of them would come up to me with great big smiles and look at me in the eye and say, “Thank you so much for being here!” and they all seemed so genuine and that really brightened up my morning.

Nick H.: So, how was that whole experience for you? Just, like, being there and seeing all those homeless people. All of them saying, “Thank You!” with big smiles on their faces?

Sierra G.: I thought it was a really great experience. It kind of not only made me feel good because I knew I was helping them, but I learned and saw what they were like in person. We had done a lot of research in class before hand, but getting to actually be there and do community service and help give them breakfast really showed me just how they can be.

Nick H.: Okay. How did this experience change the way you look or think about homeless people? Like, any way?
Sierra G.: Well, I had known before going to the homeless shelter that homeless people aren’t what they used to be stereotyped to be, which was just lazy bums and I knew that there are a lot of different reasons people become homeless and that often times it’s not their fault and I really enjoyed seeing that these people are very positive and are really seem to be trying to enjoy their life and live their life the way that they want to.

Nick H.: Did you have any conversations with the homeless people over at the shelter?

Sierra G.: You know, I was disappointed because I didn’t have a very in depth conversation with anyone while I was there because I was working the entire time, but I really enjoyed seeing them and watching them and having them come up to me and be so welcoming and kind and, although, I do remember at one point I did meet one lady and she was a little bit frustrated because her plate had accidentally fallen into a trash can, which is something I definitely really do-I feel like that’s something I would probably do and I really enjoyed getting to talk to her for a minute and help her kind of work out the situation.

Nick H.: What was going through your head when you saw her? Like, just having a big fit.

Sierra G.: Well, I wouldn’t say it was a big fit, but I kind of felt the way that I always do when I see someone who’s unhappy and it just made me want to help her. I mean, I didn’t really have to do anything I could’ve just let her try to get the plate out of the trash can or do whatever she wanted, but I really wanted to help her because I didn’t like seeing her unhappy.

Nick H.: What do you think about the way they ran things over at the San Diego Rescue Mission, moving on to that subject, and do you think that it’s effective that-

Sierra G.: No, I mean I was-I like the way that they’re approaching helping the homeless and I really think that the community atmosphere and the sense of happiness in both places is great.

Nick H.: Do you ever plan to volunteer at either St. Vincent de Paul’s or the San Diego Rescue Mission in your own spare time?

Sierra G.: I would love to return to both and I’d like to take my friends and family with me because I think that pretty much anybody who went to either the St Vincent de Pauls Society or the Rescue Mission would really enjoy volunteering there and be touched by the difference that is being made.

Our homelessness project aims to teach students and the community here at High Tech High Chula Vista about the issue of homelessness in our country and in our city. Through the project, we were able to volunteer at local shelters and also got the chance to interview people who do something to make a difference in the lives of homeless people—hence the title: Hidden Heroes.

I interviewed Erica Ortiz who is a junior at High Tech High Chula Vista and I got to ask her how she is involved in helping the homeless. She is a quiet young woman, with a penchant for service and compassion. She was homeschooled from kindergarten to eighth grade and then decided to come to a public school for a different type of learning. Erica pushes herself to be the best that she can be, and tries always to be selfless. It is her selflessness, coupled with her compassion for the homeless, that makes her a perfect candidate to be considered a, “hero”.

A.I: So first of all, what’s the value of doing community service to you?

E.O: The value would be learning to get out of my comfort zone so I can do a kind act for someone or something other than myself because people are always helping me out.

A.I: Nice, so what motivates you to do volunteering?

E.O: My motivation would be knowing that I’m making a positive difference or impact in the life of one person at a time.

A.I: That’s great! What places or organizations have you volunteered at?

E.O: So I’ve volunteered at the San Diego Rescue Mission a few times since I was a lot younger. It’s usually been with a group from my church or at my church itself. When I volunteer, it gives me so much to think about, you know? It’s like, it makes me put in perspective how much I really have; that’s definitely something I don’t think about everyday.

A.I: Oh so your church volunteers at the San Diego Rescue Mission?

E.O: Well it’s the church I went to when I was younger.

A.I: When your church went there, what do you guys do? How many times a year did your church go?

E.O: Um, we usually served food which was during Thanksgiving and Christmas time. So in total we probably went around five times a year if I remember right.

Erica Ortiz: Helping Out Others for a Change
By: Alyssa Isaaks

In the middle of November on a cloudy and cold day, I got the chance to interview one of my classmates about our homelessness project.
Dave Hua and a New Perspective on Homelessness
By: Joaquin Limon

David Hua is a man with a humble demeanor, but who has proven through hard work, devotion to students and his work, that he is a real hero in our learning community. David Hua is a technician at High Tech High Chula Vista, and also a part time advisor to students. He recently helped organize a community service day for his eleventh grade advisory to visit St. Vincent De Paul’s to serve dinner to the homeless. I decided to interview him in his hidden office (also known as the “Dave Cave”) at the High Tech High Chula Vista campus. His office is filled with all sorts of projectors, laptops, desktops, and electrical stuff, with a desk hunkered down in the center. We huddled together to have a nice long talk about service, the homeless and what really matters in life.

He grew up volunteering. His parents gave him a great example of giving his time to the less fortunate. He learned to always make time to help people out even, if it was just by donating a toy or a can of food. David Hua is the perfect example to follow when you look into volunteering and giving up time to help the less fortunate. This is only one of the many reasons students at HTHCV love him so much.

JL: What does the word volunteer mean to you?
DH: Volunteer to me just means, you are giving up your time for free to support a cause that usually means something to you.

JL: What does the word Homelessness mean to you?
DH: Homelessness to me means pretty much exactly what it says; someone who doesn’t have a home: whether it be a home they can go to physically like a typical home that most of us are used to with different rooms and what not. That would constitute homelessness for me.

JL: Have you volunteered with the homeless population in the past? If so what did you do?
DH: I have, a couple of times. Mostly in soup kitchens. I’ve done with our advisory we did the St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchen, so that was one instance when I worked with the homeless. One year in high school we went and we gave packaged goods, so we made Thanksgiving dinner kits, and after we would prepare them we would deliver them to different needy families.

JL: Either to the most recent one or the one that was most emotional to you, what motions exactly did the volunteering give you?
DH: I think the biggest emotion I had was compassion and understanding. There are people who are in need of food and shelter, and it just makes it a lot more real seeing them face to face and connect with them, and hear their stories of how tough it is and a lot of people are just looking for hope, and you just feel so much for their situation that you want to do as much as you can, and we are doing the smallest thing for them like delivering the meal but it just means the world to them, so its definately a point where you just really feel for them, and you are glad to help them in their quest for finding a better life. Its a great feeling and its something that I’ll always take with me.

JL: So you said you volunteered in the past. What exactly inspired you or what events you saw inspired you to start volunteering?

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DH: Homelessness to me means pretty much exactly what it says; someone who doesn’t have a home: whether it be a home they can go to physically like a typical home that most of us are used to with different rooms and what not. That would constitute homelessness for me.

JL: Have you volunteered with the homeless population in the past? If so what did you do?
DH: I have, a couple of times. Mostly in soup kitchens. I’ve done with our advisory we did the St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchen, so that was one instance when I worked with the homeless. One year in high school we went and we gave packaged goods, so we made Thanksgiving dinner kits, and after we would prepare them we would deliver them to different needy families.

JL: Either to the most recent one or the one that was most emotional to you, what motions exactly did the volunteering give you?
DH: I think the biggest emotion I had was compassion and understanding. There are people who are in need of food and shelter, and it just makes it a lot more real seeing them face to face and connect with them, and hear their stories of how tough it is and a lot of people are just looking for hope, and you just feel so much for their situation that you want to do as much as you can, and we are doing the smallest thing for them like delivering the meal but it just means the world to them, so its definately a point where you just really feel for them, and you are glad to help them in their quest for finding a better life. Its a great feeling and its something that I’ll always take with me.

JL: So you said you volunteered in the past. What exactly inspired you or what events you saw inspired you to start volunteering?
DH: There’s a lot of different reasons, but the biggest one is mainly my parents they always taught me, like growing up my parents always helped a lot of people. So even though they didn’t have the most money, they were always out volunteering, giving donations. People would always come to live at our house when they needed a place to stay. They were always helping people out, and they taught me that there is always someone who has less than you no matter how much it seems that you don’t have alot. So they just engrained that in me growing up, we always gave our toys away, any old clothes. We were constantly making sure that if there was something we weren’t using anymore, and someone else could use it we would give it away. So I think my parents just kind of trenched that in my growing up. As I got older I realized that there are different groups and organizations so we could help out.

JL: You also said that you volunteered at St. Vincent de Paul’s with your advisory (us). Would you ever do that again?

DH: Yeah, I would definitely do it again, we had a lot of fun there, and you guys definitely took something from the event. It really connects someone to somebody else when you can see them face to face, and you guys all said you would do it again…

JL: Did any homeless that you talked to leave and impact on you?

DH: You always hear a lot of different stories. Like this guys came in and was very excited he had his license, he passed his test, and he was happy about that, and he was happy he had some job prospects out there. You just get a good sense of hope from the people who are there, even though things are bad they’re gracious that they St. Vincent de Paul’s to help get food, and shelter, get them back on their feet. So it was awesome to hear the stories of people who are not on their feet get job interviews, and it was neat to see that some people there actually had a job, and they were working to get back on their feet. You just love that there is good energy vibe there, and its just cool to be a part of it to give them a little extra shine on their day by serving them meals, and help prepare, and clean the halls for them. That as definitely really cool.

JL: What was the thing that stuck you the most either about the shelter or a person, or any other volunteering that you did?

DH: I just think of all the opportunities I’ve had working in different areas with homeless people, for example I’ve been down in Mexico a couple of times to help build up communities there, its just this whole sense of gratitude, and community. The coolest thing is just people coming together, everybody this is just trying to help each other, and they realize that we live in this world together and I just think that the sense that people really do want to help others, and those that get help are really grateful about it. I just take that the world seems to be filled with people that are selfish, it gives me a lot of hope that there are good folks out there that want to help and want to do good.

JL: What was your perspective on homelessness prior to your first community service event?

DH: You always hear a lot of different opinions. Growing up I think Its changed like you’re younger and you’re innocent, and you just help people, you just want to help people, then you grow up and you learn there are bigger issues out there and it’s a more complex question of why people are homeless, theirs side where people believe that its their fault that they are there. They dont want to work or something, and there is a small group of folks out there that don’t care to work and just want to rely on getting freebies, and then I think that there are a good number of homeless folks that definitely want to get off the streets, and they just with with an unfortunate event that put them there, and I don’t think for the most part anybody ever wants to be homeless, I think everyone wants to have food, and a place to live, and then growing up I learned that there is a good amount of the homeless population that have mental disabilities. That’s something I didn’t know growing up, and in ways it sort of makes sense, but at the same time its really sad too, because those people need most help. I feel like most people who have mental disabilities look like adults, but they’re not, they don’t have the capacity to help themselves in that way. I think when people with mental disabilities are young you are a little more compassionate, because they’re kids, but growing up people aren’t as compassionate, and its kind of sad that,

that part of homelessness was knowing about that now, and it changed my perspective on how to look at homelessness as an issue, and homelessness as how it is in terms of helping people.

JL: There have been various project here in San Diego that have either give a house to a homeless or to give them a house with treatment, but there’s still that percentage some of them are addicts and peoples still don’t know if to support it or not. Are you with or against these projects?

DH: I think im for it, because I think the best way to help a person in becoming successful is access to equitable education, and if you don’t have a place to stay, and to like. For example its a family, and these kids don’t have a place to go back home that they can do their homework and focus on things and have a stable life. Its really hard for them to succeed. So, there is a house building thing down in Mexico that I have volunteered for before, and they have a really extensive process where they interview families, and they have these requirement to make sure everything checks out and this program won’t get abused basically. People will help build homes for these families that need homes so they can have a good environment for the family, the kids. So that the kids can have a safe place to go, and have a place to do their homework, and get a better education, so they can better their lives. So I think if its done well in that way, where it won’t get abused and theres a good process where they can make sure that if they provide this house they’ll make sure they have a job, they’ll put their kids in school, and devote themselves to good causes, and become better members of the population. I think that definitely is something that is worth supporting, no matter who might be a drug addict or not.

“There are people who are in need of food and shelter, and it just makes it a lot more real seeing them face to face and connect with them.”
A Community Collaboration to End Homelessness: Margarita Holguin's Story
By: Camila Lopez

Margarita Holguin is an energetic, confident woman who can always keep a conversation going. She lives in a nice, Spanish-style house in Bonita with her husband and youngest son, Jesse. Margarita also has two older children who live in their own homes with their own families.

Margarita is the director of a Chula Vista based organization that works to gather resources and services to help those in need. The Chula Vista Community Collaborative was founded in 1993 with the intentions of addressing the social and economic issues of families in the community. This responsibility of the organization is extended to helping the homeless, particularly the families. For this reason, I wanted to interview Ms. Holguin. She is definitely a hero in the community!

CL: What type of work regarding the homeless does your organization do?
MG: We facilitate a coalition which means [we are people who] serve the homeless, coming together to talk about solutions.

CL: And how did the branch of your organization come to be?
MG: Well, we have been in existence for twenty years. We are a collaborative, so it was based on the need to have someone help collaborate different efforts and work with the providers in Chula Vista. This October we celebrated twenty years.

CL: Why do you personally think that homelessness is such a huge issue?
MG: I'm more concerned with the homeless families, and I know that [there are] children who are being raised by families that don't have homes, have no stability, and therefore they can't be wealthy, healthy, or learn in schools, so we can't have our children be homeless. We need to figure out how to get them into housing so that they can have a more stable home.

CL: So your organization works on finding housing?
MG: We work on collaborating with different agencies to see who provides what services. So if we have a homeless family that comes in, we look to see who has what services available, depending on what the family needs. There isn't a [lot of] housing for homeless people -- that's why we have homeless people. There is not enough shelter for the homeless population.

CL: And what problems do you think homeless people -- especially the homeless families -- face on a daily basis?
MG: Safety, security, having proper nutrition and health issues. The family's not able to cook a meal. They obviously will stay homeless because they have no money, so they have no assets. A lot of the times they can't even go to school because they can't get there. They can't go to a doctor because they don't have any money, they don't know where they are, [nor do they have a] way to get there.

CL: I'm curious to know what your thoughts are on the public perception of the homeless. Do you think that the public is doing enough to help?
MG: I think that the public will do as much as they can, as long as it doesn't affect them. So they'll say, “Well, we need to have a shelter, but nothing near my city or where I live because I don't want to see them.” They see the homeless around and they see them as the problem and they think that everybody is homeless because they're lazy and they don't want to have a better situation, [and that's] just not true.

CL: So what do you think the average person could do to help the homeless population?
MG: I think they should get involved with an organization that helps the shelters and voice that the homeless are people and they have rights and we have to figure out better ways to help them other than just criticize them.

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IM: Where did you volunteer and what did you do?
HG: So I volunteered in a few different places but the most impactful place I’ve volunteered was down in Tijuana, Mexico. What I did was, well I’ve actually done it 3 times we go for the weekend we go build a house for a family who either doesn’t have a home their homeless or they’re couch hoppers they just stay at their other family or friends houses. We build a house from scratch we bring all the supplies and through donations from my church we pay for everything and build a house for a family who really needs it.

IM: Wow thats really interesting. What would you say motivates you the most to do this and to want to help these people?
HG: Well I think that the biggest motivation is knowing that I have the essentials like food and water and shelter, and to think about people my age and even younger especially kids who don’t have that, that kinda motivates me and that pushes me to give those resources to people who need it, and also just as far as doing it through church is like I want to love on people and let people know that there is more out there than just physical things.

IM: Alright wow, that’s very sweet of you. Alright so obviously you got this through your church and your church does these awesome volunteer opportunities. So when you were there building houses and doing your thing there. What would you say stands out to you the most was there a moment that just almost changed you, or was there someone?
HG: Yes there was someone, the last time I was there, there was a little girl named Priscilla and her mom was paralyzed because of untreated diabetes so she was in a wheelchair. So we had to build a house that was wheelchair friendly so we had to install a ramp and everything. The little girl everyday that we woke up and came at 7 in the morning she was all ready and she would run over and be like “Haley Haley!” and the whole weekend I would hang out with her and talk to her in spanish and she would always laugh at my “gringa” accent. She would correct my conjugation, so she kind of made me see that she’s thankful for anything and that I should be thankful in any circumstance and a moment that kind of changed my perspective was when we were getting ready to leave and we prayed over the house and we had like said our goodbyes and I went to go say my goodbye to her and she was crying and said “please don’t leave come visit me please!” It was so sad but at the same time I was really happy to see the connection and relationship I had made with her. And so that kind of changed my perspective on volunteering.

IM: So you would say you have gained that you’ve kind of taken a piece of that. What would you say that has done for you? Made you feel like?
HG: Well it made me feel like I can actually make a difference and that what I’m doing is helping.

IM: You feel like the little things you’re doing are actually really contributing to the big world and helping people. What is one thing people should know about volunteer work?
HG: I think one thing that people should know is that there is a lot more opportunities than you expect to have, I feel like as teenagers we feel like we’re limited in our options just because a lot of us can’t drive yet or we don’t have the means or resources to provide we can’t donate 5,000 dollars to a charity we just dont, we aren’t in that position. And so I think that people need to realize that there are a lot more opportunities than donating money just by going and helping and by giving what talents and skills you have. Thats good enough and thats what people need and its helpful.

IM: Why do you think that volunteer work is very important?
HG: Kind of like what I said before, it gives you a perspective and thankfulness in your own life. But mostly because were all human and thats part of life we all need to help each other out we all need to become a community and I think it just comes down to if you were in that position what would you want someone to do for you and so it just goes with that.

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R.C: The people. The clients. And hearing their stories.
E.O: What is the most touching story you've ever heard?
R.C: The one that Juliette told you about the lady who had been an alcoholic for nearly 50 years, that's very touching. You know, when you hear that she finally realized there was nothing more valuable in her life than a police officer's business card, that's kind of heartbreaking.
E.O: Yeah.
M.W: Definitely.
R.C: It's nice to know that were doing something that's going to help these people change their lives.
E.O: Absolutely, did you ever have person to person contact with her?
R.C: Yeah, just in passing, like today. There was a young man here, who has in the RCU unit when I first started. I watched him go from being in a wheelchair, to walking again. He shattered several of the bones in his ankle. After being here for a year, I watched him just walk away one day, rather than join the program. There is heartbreak as well as triumphs.
M.W: So, What is the main focus of your job, the most important aspect?
R.C: Direct mail. I handle the direct mail, and grants. I don't usually write them, we have a grant writer that we contract, but I help pull the pieces together. The direct mail, we raised about three million dollars of our operating budget. I also work with the agency to make sure we like the pictures and the stories that they are telling.
M.W: Is there anything that you've had to do on the job that was maybe out of your comfort zone, or something you haven't done before?
R.C: The first time I sat with a client and listened to them tell their story. That was a little uncomfortable. That, and giving a tour. That and being the one on the other side of the table and answering the questions.
M.W: Is there any other positions within the organization that seem interesting or something else you might want to try?
R.C: No, fundraising is fun, because we get to see the clients and hear all the heart-warming stories. There is not to much negative to it, and we get to interact with fun people like yourselves. You know, to actually be in program stuff and to interact with those people and hear their issues I think would be very depressing. And I am also old enough that I am looking at having less responsibilities, not more, so I don't care to climb the food chain either.
M.W: What is the importance of awareness in San Diego? Some people are aware of it but...
R.C: They don't know what to do.
M.W: Yeah, exactly.
R.C: The best thing is to remember that they are human, and to treat them that way. Look them in the eye and say hello. At the same time, realizing that 25% of them are mentally ill and you want to make sure that you're safe. There's also on our website a video called five ways to help a homeless person. There's always things that you can provide for them, you know, gift certificates to restaurants that don't serve alcohol,
E.O: With that, is there something that you've ever done that you regret? Like, thinking of them in a certain way that most people stereotype them as. Have you ever been guilty of that yourself?
R.C: Yeah, definitely. But really before I started working here. Since I started working here, my husband always tells me he is a little worried because I will stop and talk to random people. And I never hesitate to ask them what their story is or why they are on the street. Because, that's going to tell you really quickly whether or not they want to be there.
E.O: The project that were doing is about ending homelessness. Do you have any input on ways that we can help end homelessness to the fullest of our ability?
R.C: Well, there's a couple different reasons behind homelessness. One, are you familiar with connections housing, the renovation they did at the world trade center building on 6th Avenue?
E.O: No.
M.W: No.
R.C: It's called a housing first model. And after the United Way looked at those patients who have been using the E.R. the most, they targeted the next set of people. After there is top 25 that were most likely to die on the streets, they went to the next level of people, those went to the connect-

Alyssa Isaaks, the Girl Who Gives
By: Sophia Perez

Alyssa Isaaks is a student at High Tech High Chula Vista who is a competitive volleyball player and an excellent student. She has a gentle soul and a warm smile as she explains to me her experience as she volunteered at Saint Vincent de Paul’s. Being a daughter to law enforcement officers, she heard many cases dealing with the homeless. She always heard about cases involving the homeless breaking the laws, but she wanted to know what life was like for them. Needless to say, she felt happy to help the homeless and even felt completely changed after our class trip to St. Vincent’s.

When I first asked her if I could interview her, she was very willing to tell what she experienced. Like many people, the experience of actually meeting and working with the people who suffer from homelessness changed her views, and gave her more compassion.

SP: So, why did you volunteer?
AI: The reason I volunteered at the homelessness shelter is because right now, we're working on a project in my class about homelessness.
SP: Okay.

I think the best way to prevent homelessness, is to prevent child abuse and drug use.

M.W: Things that lead to homelessness...
R.C: Exactly. Most of the people that end up here, their parents were addicts, and they were homeless. It's just a vicious cycle that perpetuates itself, because they don't know any other way to live. They don't have the skills they need to get a job that pays well enough for them to be able to...
AI: And I wanted to get a different perspective of homelessness and really like get to experience and see what they did and looked like and how they acted because they are less fortunate than all of us.

SP: Okay.

AI: So they will probably have a different perspective of things.

SP: Alright. So, what struck you while you volunteered?

AI: Um, one thing that struck me while I volunteered is that when they asked for people to pray, there was this one guy that like jumped up and shouted that he wanted to and like it was surprising because, he stepped up and like he was so excited to like pray in front of like, seventy five people. So...

SP: That’s crazy.

AI: Yeah.

SP: I don’t remember ever seeing that, and I’ve been to like avenas and like did prayer groups.

AI: Yeah, he just seemed very excited and like he was holding a Bible in his hand, and then when I was working behind the food station, when he came up to me, he was like very polite and said, “God bless you and your family. Have a good day and that hope the holidays are gonna be good.”

SP: So what did you do while you volunteered?

AI: I was working behind the like the food counter and I was um putting hot dogs on a tray and then I was putting stew and then I handed it to the gentleman, and he would-most of them would say, “Thank you,” and like they were very polite and that’s pretty much all I did. But then, also the other half of my class was upstairs working on other things and there’s only on four of us from class working in the kitchen.

SP: So it was kinda like, “here you’re going to do this and here you stay”.

AI: Yeah, we had stations.

SP: What were some of the reactions the homeless had when you volunteered?

AI: Um, so the guy in charge said like right before they came to us to give us our-right before they came to us, they’re like, “Just to let you know, please give a big thank you to High tech High Chula Vista because they’re serving you today,” and then we all got a big round of applause which was really cool and then um, the reactions I guess, like they just seemed very happy that we were volunteering for them. Even though a lot of people volunteered they said that we did a really good job and they were just very happy that we were there. They were grateful that we would step up and do something that we don’t usually do.

SP: Yeah, that’s really nice. So, when was this that you volunteered?

AI: I volunteered actually I think it was in October, beginning of October when we went for community service day and I went to the San Diego Rescue Mission with my advisory because Miss Angie is my advisor, too.

SP: What did you enjoy most when you volunteered?

AI: I enjoyed seeing all the gentlemen’s happy faces because they just seemed very pleased that there is people wanting to help them because they’ve been through some times, and a lot of people do try to help them but then some people don’t care about them. I just enjoyed like helping out someone for a change instead of people always helping me.

SP: Yup. I think whenever I went to go help, that was one of the best things I enjoyed because seeing all of them happy and saying, “You know, Thank you so much.”

AI: Was like just...

SP: Yeah, it’s better to give than receive.

AI: What did you enjoy most when you volunteered?

AI: Well I had to wake up really early which I wasn’t really happy about and once I got there, I was kinda like in a position that I wanted to help out but at the same time, I just didn’t feel like motivated to cause it was my first time at a homeless shelter so I didn’t know what to expect. So, but then, as soon as like the lady, like the head lady- she like talked to us and gave us a tour I kinda felt more comfortable but I was still scared on how like the homeless were going to react because I didn’t know. Each homeless person is different.

SP: Kinda like us.

AI: Yeah, you just didn’t know what you’re going to get.

SP: Yeah, so did your points of view change afterwards?

AI: Yes it definitely did. The reason it did is because I thought homeless people were going to be like greedy and they’re going to want to take all the food they want and they weren’t going to say, “Please or thank you or have a good day” but then I thought I was just going to be like there serving food, but instead, I felt like I was really welcomed and that they really did honor my service.

Roman Marko: A Voice From Slovakia

By: Alan Verduzco

I wanted to interview Roman Marko, an exchange student here at High Tech High Chula Vista, because I wondered what he was thinking about our project, our current problem of homelessness in America and also about our school and projects in general. I was really interested on what kind of input he had for us. It is also very valuable information since it is unique and doesn’t usually come around very often. I have become relatively close friends with Roman and doing a serious interview in the office was kind of awkward and we would laugh every now and then.
He often tells me a lot about his home country and how much different it is. In the interview, I learned that Roman likes our school, and our project. It seems he thinks that this has been valuable to learn about and help others and, in the interview, Ariana shares his views on the differences between the homeless in America and the homeless in his home country of Slovakia. I learned a lot about homelessness and people's ideas about it in other countries, which sheds light on our current problems and the stereotypes we deal with here in America.

AV: What were your first thoughts about homelessness?
RM: Like my opinion? Or my first impression when I got here?
AV: Your opinion about homelessness.
RM: I didn't really. I have never really thought about this problem and I usually just saw individuals, homeless individuals in the streets asking for money and I thought everywhere it was common like there's no way really to help them. I've never been thinking about it deeply.
AV: What were your thoughts in the beginning?
RM: I just thought maybe they were people with bad luck. I don't know I've never been thinking about it.
AV: Is there homelessness in Slovakia?
RM: Yes.
AV: How different is homelessness different from here?
RM: I think it's much more different because the most of the population over there is gypsies and no one really cares about them because they usually do the bad things like they are stealing a lot and no one really wants to help them because, if they really wanted to change, they'd do it but they don't wanna they just want money and that's all.
AV: What is the background of the gypsies?
RM: The background of the gypsies are, like, it's too complicated, like, they're using the social system because, as many children they have, they are getting paid so it means like a lot of children they get a lot of money, income from the state, from the government. So they're using their children to get money so no one wants to help them.
AV: Um, when you went to the homeless shelters how did you feel like?
RM: It was something special for me because it was the first time that I saw the homeless individuals like a big group, a big family. I mean, they are people that are the same as us. They have life stories. I mean, it was something special for me because every single one of these people has one different life story which is really interesting but it's also really sad I think. And it was really interesting to talk to them about their stories and why did they end up like this.
AV: So you are saying, according to what you have said, homeless are nicer here than in Slovakia?
RM: I mean it's different. Here it's just all people who have just bad luck. They might be educated, they might have worked before, everything. They are like regular people but, in Slovakia, they are different because, gypsies they don't wanna study, they don't wanna work. They just want to use the social system to make money they just have children and get money from the state because of their children they don't want to work.
AV: So, when you were helping the homeless people, what kind of people did you encounter? Like, what were their stories?
RM: I don't exactly remember but, for example I think there was one man who had a family and wife and they got divorced and she took all of his money, so that was his story. He used to work really hard like, a normal life. That was all that happened, and it ended in a life like this.
AV: Would you think of this experience as a valuable experience?
RM: Yeah, I think it's really valuable because we can better understand the homeless population and find solutions and it is really important because everyone, like, no one deserves this life. We should try to help them because they are people just like us but they just have bad luck.
AV: So, you think your opinion on homelessness just changed dramatically?
RM: Yeah. Yeah! It really changed. It was my first time talking to homeless people and I was surprised in a good way. I was happy that this happened to me.
AV: So if you were to talk to a gypsy in Slovakia, what do you think it would be like?
RM: It would be like, uh, “is there money?” “no”.
AV: So they're just money people? That's it?
RM: Yeah because they are not good, they don't want to worry, they don't want to worry, they don't want to change like, they wanna live like right now.
AV: But, here's the thing; before you helped homeless people, you had a different view on them like if they were people who were lazy and didn't want to work. So when it comes to gypsies, don't you think there might be some story behind them or something like that?
RM: I don't think so because they have been living like that for hundreds of years. It's not like a new trend there is. They really don't want to change. People always offered them a lot of jobs, but they don't want to work, they are lazy.

Nick Hernandez: A Young Generous Student
By: Emiliano Arce

I reached out to a very well known classmate which I know he had a really good involvement and first time acquaintance with homelessness which made me more eager to hear about his experience. I was really happy to interview my classmate, Nick Hernandez, because he is Catholic and I am as well. I felt we could really relate and understand how it feels to help the most needy people in our society. We also know each other really well and I was really happy to hear his story and experiences of how he contributed to reach out to the homeless community.

More in the background of Nick Hernandez he is a person that cares of the situation currently going on. Someone who is aware of the community around him, and mostly is aware of the homeless people of San Diego. Through the interview, I learned that Nick not only loves helping others, but that after this project, he hopes to continue helping people at homeless shelters.

By: Emiliano Arce
I learned that Nick, like many other volunteers in our community, is a hero. He doesn’t just go to the shelters to do the job; he actually goes and interacts with all the homeless people because he knows that each of one of them is suffering from a situation that is not fair and he wants to help in any way he can.

EA: What did you imagine before getting there?
NH: Well first of all I didn’t imagine the homeless to be exactly happy or so excited to be there. I thought the opposite. I thought they were going to be dull and boring. Angry people who want nothing to do with anyone else, but that was not the case. Everyone there was happy to be there and they always said hi and smiled, said thank you and had very good manners. I believed too much in stereotypes and I learned never to trust any stereotypes about anyone. Especially stereotypes about the homeless people.

EA: What was your job while you were there[St. Vincent de Paul] and did you enjoy it?
NH: When we got there we all got different jobs to work on and I actually liked the job I worked on. My job was helping prepare the food, and oil the tray for the fish. It felt really good to help out. Doing something good for these people. I also saw how much they appreciated us for being there which felt pretty good.

EA: What did you learn from this day by helping homeless people?
NH: I learned so many things it completely changed my perspective on how I used to think about them and how I think about them now. I’m also really aware now how the homeless situation is in San Diego and that we need to help out and make these people feel good. I also learned that we need to be thankful for what we have. Even the smallest things just like your shoes and clothes.

EA: What type of system of work were you in; the individual or family?
NH: I was in the individual system which I really liked.

EA: Did you communicate with any homeless people?
NH: Yes there was this one homeless man. When I was taking a break I started talking to this man and he started talking about how he was trying to find work. He also mentioned that he was a literature teacher and that he was born in Bolivia. He said that he knows six languages which I found really interesting. This makes you think how bad it is when a person loses everything despite been educated but not due to them doing something bad.

EA: What was the best experiences you had?
NH: It was when I was in the kitchen preparing the food like the fish and putting away the tortillas. Even something as simple as that made me feel really as a good person and that I was doing something good for these people.

EA: What did you think of the system of the San Diego Rescue Mission?
NH: San Diego Rescue Mission really helps a lot of people out I didn’t think there was a building this big that serves homeless people. Not only did they provide them with a place to sleep there but they help out the homeless by motivating them.

EA: What was the story that made your day?
NH: I remember the lady that was giving the tour told us that every day she saw this little energetic kid that when he would leave he would say see you tomorrow. She liked the little kid very much but she didn’t like when he said that because she wanted him to leave and have a life of a normal child.

EA: How did you grow in your personal value?
NH: I realized that these homeless people are not people just out there and don’t matter. They actually matter and they do make a difference. You might not see it but they do, they’re out in the street every day risking their life just to get a little food.

EA: So this is something that was really impacted your life right.
NH: Yes. I believe everyone should really be thankful for what they have; their shoes, their clothes, their home, food, everything because the little things matter by a lot. There are many people wishing they have that for their families or for themselves. Appreciate the shoes on your feet, your clothes in your bag, the food on the table even if its just rice and beans. Appreciate everything because this people are struggling just for food.

EA: Would you go back during your own time?
NH: I do think I will go back, wait no I know I will go back because it feels so good to just help out this people by just help them eat another day, helping them have shelter another day and I really enjoyed it even maybe in the future to be part of an organization similar to this.

Homelessness Interview: Jess
Evans Harris
By: Gerry Carrillo

I had a great opportunity to sit and talk with my classmate Evan “Jess” Harris. Jess is your average teenager. He is a junior at High Tech High Chula Vista. He swims and runs competitively, works hard to get good grades, and has his mind on college and the SAT. But, what I learned through the interview, is that Jess is much more than that. He is also a caring person who wants to find ways to learn about and help homeless people.

As we walked into the cold, semi-lit room. I arranged a few chairs for us to sit in. We glanced over the questions nodded in acknowledgement of the task ahead. His feet tapped to a beat that was in his head to hear, as we situated ourselves. Jess is a wonderful friend, college, and partner and I am happy to be sharing this little snippet over the impact of the project.

GC-What is the homelessness project you and your classmates are working on?
JEH- So the homelessness project is the students being lead by Angie Guerrero where we are interviewing people who are trying to make a difference in our culture and in our society of how we perceive and how we treat homeless people. And we are trying to find a solution of that on the
local level first, and possibly expanding that. To the county, or the city, or the state. But we are going to start in our local corner in San Diego and we are going to slowly spread out.

GC- Who and what are you trying to impact?

JEH- My opinion differs from what a lot of people might think but, I think we are not trying to impact the homeless people directly. I think we are trying to impact the public. Later yes, the homeless people will feel the effects of what we are going to. If we impact the public in the correct way, we can change their perspectives of the less fortunate people without homes. And if we succeed in that, then we will effect the homeless. I think our first goal is to change the perspective of the public.

GC- Do you have a solution to homelessness right now?

JEH- I think that right now the best that we can do is stuff that is going to be like St. Vincent de Paul’s. We just need maybe a lot more of that because I think what they had there was a good society. A good thing going there. The people there were happy, were looking for jobs, they had food on their plate, clothes to wear, a bed to sleep in, and that is exactly what we want to happen with the homeless population. To give them a chance to become part of our society. And I think that that is probably our best shot. Is slowly getting them back to become contributors to this society.

GC- How has your perspective changed since the project has started?

JEH- My perspective has mainly changed about the actual people who are homeless. Now, I never thought as them all as just lazy people. I knew that they were going to have mental health problems or drug problems. But what I didn’t know was that they had deep down in them the motivation to change, to get better. That they were just waiting for the opportunity to arise to do such a thing.

Let me use an example of someone I talked about earlier as an example. I talked to a guys at St. Vincent’s and I mean he was gambling the whole time and drinking alcohol every day. Spending the money he had left over from gambling on alcohol. He didn’t eat, he didn’t have a place to sleep because... well, he was out of money. He saw that in himself. He saw where he was going. He changed. He’s sober, he’s not gambling. I believe that homeless who are in the right mind, can change their lives. They just need to try and a lot of them are trying. I heard there is a two month waiting list to get into St. Vincent de Paul’s. My perspective has mainly changed because I actually got to sit down and talk to them, when society usually permits me to separate myself from those people.

GC-What is something that you remember vividly from this experience?

JEH- I remember sitting down and talking to a man at the shelter. Now, this guy, he has been in the shelter for about a week. He seemed very nice. He had an interesting background. He was into some gambling and drug addiction in the past, which is why he was in the shelter and why he was there at that time. He said something that I am probably going to remember for a while. He looked at me right in the eye and he said, “I am truly thankful for y’all. You guys are working so much harder than any volunteers I’ve seen here have and you are a God sent gift to us all.” That was all he said. I don’t know why, but I guess it was just pretty good to hear that I was actually making a difference in someone’s life. Rather than it was just me talking to him or getting a plate for him. I mean things we take for granted be just sitting there and waiting for someone to take our food at the restaurant or bring us a drink without us asking. Yeah.

GC- What is the takeaway from that experience?

JEH- I guess I am going to become slightly more appreciative for and grateful I guess for what I have. Just everything about it actually... because something so small can impact someone so much who isn’t normally used to this. It’s just stuff that we do daily. That... they are not fortunate enough to have. We think its always going to be there for us... when it’s not.

GC- Would you recommend this kind of service and why?

JEH- I would recommend this because I believe that this experience for people who are there because they want to be there. People who want to volunteer because not for college hours, or not because they were forced to be there. I recommend this for the people who are self motivated to go because it will be a humbling experience for them. They will come to meet gems of people who are hidden in our society. That we walk by and we don’t necessarily make eye contact with or talk to because we think they are lower than that they are in a lower social level than we are and or whatnot. You know what I mean?

Deborah Krakauer: Changing One Life at a Time
By: Alicia Randolph and Paola Guerrero
Painting: Alicia Randolph and Sierra Green

My humanities class at High Tech High Chula Vista is doing a project on homelessness. Our goal is to educate the community and our school about homelessness, learn more about the issue ourselves, and what we can do to reduce it. One of the key parts of our project is finding a person to interview that has a role in the community that works with or around homeless people. I was very fortunate to interview the lovely Deborah Krakauer, who works as the volunteer coordinator and manager at the San Diego Rescue Mission.

Deborah has worked as a volunteer coordinator at various places, but started working at the Rescue Mission about two years ago. I chose to interview her because I was very amazed at the presentation and tour she gave my class of the Rescue Mission. Deborah is a very passionate and hard working woman, and that’s just the drive it takes to tackle an issue as big as homelessness. Deborah and I were unable to meet in person for the interview- due to busy schedules- so we did it over the phone.
PG: So what made you want to work here? What inspired you?
DK: No L... Probably not the... It was luck that brought me here. I was here as temporarily replacement for someone and she was away on family leave and uhh they needed someone for a couple of months and that was fine because I wanted to work with volunteers and that's what I wanted to do. And uhh it sounded like a good cause and I knew the person that had the job before me. That does not sound and then it changed into just something that was two years ago and I can't even imagine not working here now.
PG: Because it was for only a couple of months and it turned into longer.
DK: It turned into that and I sincerely hope this is where I retire from when I decide I don't want to work anymore because I can't imagine not being here.
PG: What is the best part of your job?
DK: Amm the people that want to come and help. I take calls all day long from people that want to volunteer, that want to give money, who want to see if they can run a drive you know bring them clothes bring them whatever. That just want to help in any way shape or form. So or give a tour to someone that wants to find out about it. How can that not be wonderful that's what I do and thats the good part of it. The frustrating part is not having enough to offer to people and the having to say no I don't need someone right now. Which is kind of the frustrating part like the holiday meal. Saying "I know you want to help out but we are full you can help on another day."
PG: So you get a lot of calls everyday.
DK: I do specially at this time of year because there are people that...there are either people that think of volunteering of giving back or making a difference every day or there are people that only think of it during the holidays. And I am blessed to work with people that any time call and say what can I do. But others that just say I only help one day a week or a year and if you don't need help in Thanksgiving mmm. Thats the hard part cuz we are kind of just talking to a lot of people that just want to do something just that one day. But we are here and there's homeless and homeless eat and homeless need help every day of the year.
PG: What is the most challenging part of your job?
DK: (sigh)
PG: Alot?
DK: Time, money, the having to say I don't need you, that I don't have a position for someone right now. That's the hard part. People calling in I think there is a lot of people that want to work with children.
PG: Yeah.
DK: And to realize saying we only have thirty children in the year long program not all of them need tutors. I don't need two hundred tutors. (laughed). So that thing. I think its just peoples ideas of who we are and how much help we need here but its a good problem to have. (laughed)
PG: Its better to have more volunteers than the necessary.
DK: L Than to be out. I work on committees with other people that literally always saying we need volunteers and are always going.. Who do you recruit from? How do you find people? I am saying that's not my problem people come to us. It's a cause that means so much to people that just want to make a difference.
PG: Is there any inspiring moment or like story that you?
DK: (interrupted my question and answered) Probably the success stories that I was talking about before. Just the graduates of the program that they've been thru. Where they are now of you know coming out here as staff members. Just some wonderful stories that kind of show the..
PG: The changes in their lives ?
DK: The changes the childhoods that people have had. The addictions they've overcome the violence the everything. And are now just are out there are working and are supporters of the mission. Just wonderful stories.
PG: How do you prepare yourself mentally like to hear all the stories and to see all the people?
DK: I and I would say I do not see as many as others. In some respects thats a frustration for me. I I work on the administrative law and I tell stories and I meet clients and residents here but I don't do it forty hours a week. So I think I probably have a little bit of a break from it that other people might not have. My heart goes out to uhh how someone can forty hours a week that's everything they are dealing with. I get a break from it every now and then.
PG: Amm. How long...ohh you said you've been working here for two years right?
DK: Mmm
PG: What do you think people in San Diego should know about the rescue mission?
DK: As the sign says in the ah... multi purpose room. The lives change here the differences we make. That there is a lot of long term helps the people to become productive members of society. In addition to the shelter.
PG: So everything is for good.
DK: Everything is for good and there are many ways that you can support us.
PG: What is something people in San Diego should know about homeless in general?
DK: The sheer numbers. The how many are on the streets because there is no place for them. The number of women and children that its not just men. Whatever that stereotypical you know on the sidewalk with a sign. That it's families and its people that didn't intend to be in this position. That are just fighting day by day to get out of it.
PG: Yeah because everyone just thinks its guys holding up a poster and no there is children.
DK: That's it and there were three children that were born to moms who were in are year long program last year. As earlier they were saying Dakota is either three or four months old now and two others before that. And I think the year before that there were four and how wonderful the blessing that we are here because I can't imagine giving birth and not knowing where you are going to live with a child.(laughed) So uhh fortunately we have an amazing staff an amazing group of supporters and an amazing group of volunteers that help out every day.
PG: Mmm to sum everything up what is something people can do to like help out The Rescue Mission?
DK: Ahh give money, bring in used items for our thrift stores all proceeds go to our mission, talk about it. They say we are one of the best kept secrets in town that people don't know that we are here. There are so many different programs Fathers Joes others working to solve this problem and that amm we are not here just for the holidays we are here year round. And that we will come out and talk to any group about it.(laughed)
PG: So they can do anything basically.
DK: I have kids from the troops that call and say can I run a blanket drive
end is possible

Adel Espineli- Church Without Walls and Prejudice
By: Roman Marko

Adel Espineli has been for two years volunteering for the organization Church Without Walls, which is helping the homeless population. One of the activities of this organization is serving food during the lunch time after the church service is done. The usual place for the services in San Diego is the Balboa Park.

Mr. Espineli is a hard working man, with a big family and whom personal life is everything but not boring. I chose Mr. Espineli for the interview, because I consider him a hero of this community, he decided to spend his free time and energy to help homeless population. He is not a selfish person and his acts prove that. In this interview Mr. Espineli tells us more about his volunteering job.

RM: Would you tell us something about the organization, you are volunteering for?
AE: Church Without Walls’ is part of a... the Rock Church, and it’s a outreach administration for the homeless and then it’s a part of a church I go to, which is Eastlake Church. Small room, small group of couples starting helping with Rock Church, and then we created our own group to service the people in Chula Vista, and our group is call "Gives hope" and then we rotated it with other groups on supporting the weekends on Saturdays.

RM: Please can you tell us what you do, what is your job? How do you help the homeless population?
AE: There’s two things, one is just trying to meet some of the physical needs so you’re there to volunteer to go bring water, and food, and to help set up to the logistics to setting up some food for them. Another thing apart of this ministry is to help spread the word of God, we have an awesome pastor basically from the streets, so he can relate to experiences with the homeless so he is able to give the message and my other role, or other roles for the volunteers is also to try and get to know the homeless rather than knowing them as someone you got to feed or give clothes to it’s to build relations to and to care for who they are and try to understand issues they had that brought them out to the streets and why they’re stuck there. Some of these guys have a lot of addictions, and you know you see some of them going into church and out in the park, they’re drunk or high on something so you gotta love them even if they’re addicted or they have issues and that’s what’s causing them to be there, so you got to pray for them and support them and not enable them to keep going the way they’re going.

RM: Why did you decide to help these people? Just because you want to be a better person or because you’re religious?
AE: Um, at first yeah, it was apart of our church’s organized small groups and this couples group that we have been talking about ‘what would have been good’ I think it was a few Thanksgivings and Christmases that we’d be volunteering for feeding the homeless; we’ve done that before at a shelter, and we decided ‘lets go do something more’, so we decided “Church Without Walls”. I think it was somebody’s son, I think Ed’s son volunteered first and told us about it and was excited. So at first it was, you know, ‘hey try to feel good about yourself during Christmas and Thanksgiving which is to help others’ which is great, but it evolved to more than that, not just for Christmas or Thanksgiving or just Easter, we’re trying to provide support and love every weekend, I guess.

RM: For how long have you been volunteering for this?

AE: On a regular basis, I’m not sure. Two and a half years maybe. Maybe two years. I forget when we started.

RM: How do you feel when you are helping them, and serving to them?
AE: Depends on the weekend, sometimes you feel like you are making a difference; some of the people, the regular homeless guy, they’re making progress. Sometimes it gets frustrating because there’s this guys who has made a lot of progress, and he’s been sober for weeks, but then he shows up drunk, but he’s out there, he’s out there wanting to listen to the word of God, which is you know, we’re not going to change him, he has addictions, and we just pray that God will be able to touch him and give him services and other help that will help him to get out of the streets. But sometimes it’s not all good because frustration is sometimes caring about somebody and seeing them fail. That’s just the harsh life on the street.

RM: Okay, okay so for those two years doing this job, you know the people, you know the homeless people you are helping, so we can say you are close to them, right? 
AE: I would say for my personality, I wouldn’t get close to all of them, but there would be a hand full of them that I would understand who they are, you know, how they got there, you know, how their parent situation is, their home life, school. So yeah, I would know them and call them by their first name, and understand who they are, yes.

RM: They told us, they told you their story to you, right?
AE: Yes.

RM: Can you choose the one most interesting or one that struck you most?
AE: Um, probably the best ones was the successful story of uh, his name was Joel Prythore, um, he’s from the south. He’s probably- what struck me was that he was my age. Being on the streets for a little bit; you look at him and then you look at me, he looks like ten to fifteen years older cause no care, losing some teeth, the harshness of the sun, just you know, tans and weathers your skin; it just looks rough. But he was out there, and we tried to help him, one of the things we tried to get for him was a job. So a couple of weekends, we spent some time with him filling out applications online, and he was very good about sharing Christ and believing, and was truly making effort, even though his teeth got him a job driving.
a truck delivering or selling meat. That was okay, but he wasn't making a whole bunch of money, or some days he wouldn't make any money, but at least he was out there trying, and the successful thing about that, is that everybody has been out there praying for him, and one time he was praying and he got a message from God saying you know what, you gotta go back, and I think he was from North Carolina or South Carolina, you gotta go back. It was kinda strange because he hasn't had contact with family in a while, and he was about to leave and go hitch-hiking back. But the team and the family and organization, was able to raise money, and they were able to send him back on a bus or a plane, I think it was probably a bus, but they sent him back, and later on through contact and facebook and cell-phone calls, we found out that even though he didn't have contact, one of these things, because it's only a God's thing, when he came back, nobody knew he was coming back so shortly after he came back, somebody was looking for him, and no one knows that he left or had a job for him, so it's one of those things that who could have plan this, and he was starting to thrive here, and survive on the streets and having a prayer answered and he's out there following that prayer. You know, trusting God, and it comes into fruition, and comes into reality, that it was the right thing. So that's probably the most obvious influence of, you know, what God does, that's a thing I've been trying to help these guys if he would have tried go and he could have probably hitched-hiked, that's how he got to San Diego. He was hitch-hiking in Texas and went up north to Minnesota, and then he eventually migrated his was way out here. So he was able to do that, but it was nice to have him out here and then have him try to listen to what God tells him what to do. That's what we have all been trying to do because we started out with this administry, we never had any deals with the homeless, it was us just helping out, we didn't know what we were doing, God was just calling us to be out there. In the first few weeks out there, we were just trying to share out God's word, no formal pastor, but within a month, it was probably two months, regularly, a pastor came in, riding his motorcycle and said "Hey, I heard you guys were doing this thing," and we said "Hey, do you want to preach today?"

Amaris Sanchez: A Helping Hand For Those In Need
By: Ariana Delucchi

When I was first told of Amaris Sanchez, I didn't quite know what to expect. She was referred to me by Alison Ramsay. When I pulled up to the Chula Vista Police Department, I was extremely nervous. Police departments in general make me quite nervous, but I reminded myself that I was simply there for an interview. I spent the first couple of minutes prepping for the interview, scribbling down the finalized questions since I had arrived a few minutes early. Once the clock struck 12, I called Amaris and notified her that I had arrived. She cheerily stated that she'd be right over in a couple minutes. I thanked her and went inside to wait to conduct the interview. Amaris glided into the office, and welcomed me into the passageways which eventually led to her office.

Amaris Sanchez is a part of the dedicated staff at the South Bay Community Service programs for homeless victims of domestic violence. She is usually seen either in her office, or out in the shelter working with the victims. She first became interested in working with the homeless when she was working with nonprofit organizations in college. She now thanks her family for instilling into her the belief that to see a positive change in the world, you must first create change yourself. Although she does not believe homelessness will officially end, she believes that if people take the time out of their day to just talk to the homeless, they will realize that the homeless, too, are people just like them. Perhaps slightly down on their luck, but people should still search for the humanity of others and lend a helping hand.

AD: I noticed that you are located at the Chula Vista Police Department, but you work with South Bay Community Services. Why do you work here instead of over there with them?
AS: Well, that's a great question. So, I am employed by South Bay Community Services, but um, I oversee our family violence programs which includes, um a shelter for the domestic violence victims and their children as well as homeless families. And so, um, we are stationed here, we have some staff here and the Chula Vista Police Department, and we have other staff at the National City Police Department because we work really close with the officers if there's a 911 call involving domestic violence.
AD: Do you ever go on scene with them if you receive the 911 call?
AS: Yes, so we have advocates who will go out and meet the police officers.
AD: So do you only work with South Bay Community Services, or do you work with other organizations as well?
AS: Well, I am employed by South Bay, so I only work with them.
AD: What does your average day look like, on a day to day basis?
AS: Umm, it really varies. Um, I try to split my days between my shelter and our team over here. At the shelter, we have about 17 families living there, on average between 17-20 families. So we could be talking to families about how they're doing at the program, different resources, anything they might need for healthcare or jobs, or other housing opportunities. We have a hotline that people ring into our shelter so people can call to see if there is any availability in our shelter, so we have hotlines.
AD: And how would you describe the people that you work with or that you see in those shelters?
AS: We work exclusively with families, so they would have to be a mom with kids, or a dad with kids, or a mom and a dad with kids. Every family has very different circumstances that bring them to us, really varied. I really don't know if there is just one way of describing families. I mean, we had people who have never been homeless before, and we have people people who have been homeless for 4 years.
AD: So, how do you think those people feel about being homeless since you stated that there were some people who have been homeless more than once, but that
there are also people who have never been homeless? I would imagine that they are scared out of their minds if they are home-
less for the first time in their life!
AS: Yeah, I think that folks that are may-
be first time homeless feel really over-
whelmed, they're not sure what steps they
need to take to get back on their feet. They
can be embarrassed, they can be depressed
about the situation.
AD: And what about the people who are
homeless yet again?
AS: Um, they can have some of the same
feelings, or not. There are some people
who are very comfortable working with
the systems, they're a little bit more use to
receiving public assistance, so they may be
just used to agencies for relying on help.
AD: Why do you think that they rely on
agencies for help?
AS: Uh, I think that there are a lot of dif-
ferent reasons, I think that there are some
people who come from families with
intergenerational poverty, and so it may
seem that all that they know is to receive
public entitlements such as welfare and
food stamps, and they don't have very high
expectations of themselves. And they may
not have a lot of motivation to make sig-
ificant changes to their situation.
AD: I think it's kind of strange how some-
one could get use to living in that type of
lifestyle, but I do know of some people
who prefer it that way. For example, when
I visited St. Vincent De Paul's, I spoke to
a man who preferred to be on the streets.
What do you think of the people who
prefer to be on the streets? Whether it be
because they're comfortable, or they can't be
housed, or...?
AS: Yeah, so I think some of our older
homeless folks are also some of the ones
who have significant mental health issues,
and are really difficult to house because
they don't really want to follow the rules,
and they really want to make their own
decisions about how they live their day-
to-day life, which might be to for them to
not be on medication if they're suppose to
be on medication, or to abuse substances,
so yeah there are a lot of different reasons.
You usually see them as single homeless
folks, not so much families, because fam-
ilies usually want to have somewhere for
their kids to be stable.
AD: So just to clarify, you work with the
victims of domestic abuse, not the actual
perpetrators?
AS: So our program is only for victims and
their children. There is another program at
our agency that does provide counselling
to people who have been identified by law
enforcement officers or courts to be guilty
of domestic violence. And so we do have
a program where people are mandated
by the court to participate in the 52 week
group counselling program.
AD: Wow, 52 weeks, that's a long time!
What do they do in the 52 week program,
if you happen to know?
AS: It is basically a support group, and it is
run by a therapist. And so they look at why
people choose to treat others disrespect-
fully, why are they making choices like
that to hurt other people. They talk a lot
about accountability. Like, oh she makes
me angry, so I have to hit her. And kind
of refocusing that to no one makes you
feel anything you don't have control over.
So you have control over your choices,
you have control over your language, you
have control over your own body as far as
whether you hit someone or you don't hit
someone. So that's one of the big focuses of
the program. They also talk about the ef-
fects of domestic violence on children. So
when children witness domestic violence,
abuse in their home, when they see one
person being violent with another person,
there are physiological changes that hap-
pen in a child's brain when they grow up in
that type of home.
AD: And what is the success rate of the
people who change through that 52 week
program?
AS: I believe that they have a pretty good
success rate, people can always be dis-
charged from the program if they are not
actively participating.
AD: So did you always want to be what
you are? Or did you want to have anoth-
er career, but then you decided that you
wanted to do this?
AS: I started with nonprofits in college,
and I've always wanted to do something
that has a positive impact on the commu-
nity.
AD: And why is that?
AS: It was just part of my upbringing. AD:
And how would you explain your upbring-
ing, if you don't mind me asking?
AS: I think there was always an expecta-
tion that we would contribute in a positive
way.
AD: Were you always interested in the
homeless, or did you just start when you
went to college where you realized that
you wanted to work with nonprofits that
dealt with the homeless? Did you parents
ever bring you to shelters, or tell you about
them, or...?
AS: No, I started actually working in
college for an environmental agency, an
environmental nonprofit. And then I was
offered a position that was working with
youth who lived in public housing, and
when I was working that job I really felt
a strong connection to working with the
kids and you could really see the effect on
them and how I made a difference in the
community to the people there.
AD: Why does homelessness matter to
you, and why should it matter to anyone
else then?
AS: Homelessness I think is a very in-
teresting issue, there isn't really an easy
answer to fixing it, and there is not one
easy answer to explain it. So I like trying
to figure that out. And I think that peo-
ple should care about it because it really
comes down to how we as a society think
that others should be treated.
AD: Why do you think that people have a
negative view towards the homeless? For
example, we do some people just look at
the homeless in disgust and tell them to
get a job or things of the sort?
AS: I think that it's scary for some people
to see another person at the absolute rock
bottom of society. And maybe it's scary be-
cause people think that that could maybe
that could happen to them, or maybe it's
scary because it's not something that they
could very easily understand.
AD: Have you ever thought about what
you would do if you suddenly became
homeless?
AS: Sure, I think it is perfectly normal to
put yourself in other people's shoes. It's
important to remember that these people
had jobs, and they use to be in the service,
and they use to have family members that
cared about them, and I think a majori-
ty of the homeless are people that at one
point had things together.
AD: Do you believe there will ever be an
end to homelessness? Or is there any way
that it could be reduced?
AS: Well, the president of our country has
been challenging a lot of federal agencies
to end homelessness by I believe 2015. So
apparently, he thinks that that could hap-
pen. I think that there are some things that
could be put into place that could help, but
I don't believe there is sufficient funding to
end this particular issue.
AD: Do you believe that it could be solved by 2015?
AS: No, there’s really not the money being put towards the issue to make it happen. Housing is very expensive. It is extremely expensive to house people for free. For our shelter, just to run a 12 apartment shelter, costs us about $2 million a year.
AD: Why is the cost so high?
AS: You have to pay for the building to keep people in, and we own our building so we have to pay mortgage on the building. We have to carry a lot of insurance because we’re housing a lot of people. We have to pay for the utilities for all those apartments, so water, trash, electric, gas. We have to buy furniture to have in the units, we have to buy food to provide for people because they don’t have money to buy food, we have to pay people to clean the facility, to repair the facility, we have to buy the supplies in order to do that, we have to pay people to do case management and counselling with the residents, we have to pay for internet, telephone, and all the things that go into supporting a regular office.
AD: Where do you receive your funding from?
AS: We have some funding from HUD, which is a federal agency, we have some funding from the county of San Diego, we have some funding from the city of Chula Vista, and we fundraise.
AD: What do you guys do to fundraise?
AS: We do things during the year to engage businesses in sponsoring ours, and once a year we have a large kind of gala event.
AD: What do you do at the gala?
AS: Well, it’s like a big, fancy party, and people get really dressed up and we rent a hotel in San Diego, and there’s a band, and food, and we have a silent auction and a live auction of different items.
AD: Do you ever get a negative response to when you say you work with homeless victims of domestic violence?
AS: Generally people, when I tell them what I do, they either don’t have any questions because they’re probably uncomfortable with the issue, or they may have questions like “How can you do that?” or “Isn’t that hard?” People will a lot of times say they can’t imagine what that’s like.
AD: Isn’t it kind of depressing to read through every case file for families? Or do you ever become attached to them in any way?
AS: Yeah, I mean once you get to know families, you want the best for them and you can see the potential in them, but in the end, you really have to realize that every family is going to make their own decisions, and that I can only make decisions for myself and my particular family.
AD: Do you ever follow up with families?
AS: Well, they usually stay with us for about 2-4 months, and then may move on to the longer term programs so they’re with us for a while. But once they leave, we don’t necessarily follow up. Sometimes, they’ll call back and let us know that something really good is happening in their life or they want to share something with us.
AD: Why don’t you follow up with your families?
AS: It’s really not something that’s part of the program, it’s not something that’s built into our contracts.
AD: You said some people like to call back, what is one of your favorite success stories from your program, if you have any?
AS: We had a woman who was in our shelter and transitional housing programs, she had 2 boys and she did really well in our program and she moved out. A few months later, she called us to let us know that she had moved to Georgia, since the cost of living over there is slightly more reasonable, so that she had gotten herself a really nice apartment, and that she was going back to school and working in an agency very similar to ours. She was doing some mentoring with other women, and she really wanted to share with us that she wanted to be able to give back some of the things that she had received and that was a really great story.
AD: If you could do anything, with no constraints, would you/what would you do to end homelessness in America, or change your organization in any way? Why?
AS: Well, I think that a lot of general homelessness happens due to mental health issues, so I would put more support in place for people who have mental health issues to have housing that is going to work for them. That is going to ensure that they have somewhere safe to go. And that they have access to medication and psychiatric care.
AD: I’m sure you’ve heard of the Homeless Bill of Rights, and I wanted to know what your opinions are on it.
AS: I think that anything that helps people to be able to identify and articulate what they deserve and what they need is a positive thing.
AD: What do you think of the people who argue that that bill would make them more accustomed to the homeless lifestyle, and those who are living in nicer neighborhoods but have homeless living near them, or outside their property in a car?
AS: I think that the person who does live in the property with the homeless person parked in front of it should go out and talk to them, so they can be able to connect their humanity.
AD: Why do you believe people don’t do that now?
AS: Because it’s easy to not react out and blame people for their circumstances. I think we often forget what it means to be a person, and that deep down we are the same person. All you have to do is look, or in this case, ask.

Temukisa Letuligasenoa: Church Without Walls
By: Arik Espineli

I have known Ms. Tee for a few years now and she was one of the first people I thought of to interview for this project. Setting up the interview was fairly easy because I knew I would see her on most Saturdays. I met Ms. Tee while volunteering with my family at a homeless outreach group called Church Without Walls. Church Without Walls is an organization started by the Rock Church in San Diego. Every Saturday it holds a service at three different locations around San Diego. The service provides a place for homeless people to worship. After the service, the homeless are served lunch and occasionally there are clothes that they can take. Tee
is the South Bay homelessness ministry leader for the rock church. She is in charge of the two south bay campuses: Chula Vista and Spring Valley. She has been working with this outreach program for a little over five years. When I arrived at her house for the interview, she welcomed me in and led me to her living room. Throughout the interview, her passion for the organization and homelessness was clear. I could tell that she has had many great experiences while working with the homeless. Her face lit up with joy when talking about all the people she works with and her favorite moments that she has had while working with the homeless. Also I saw that her religion had played a major role in her passion for the homeless and was her drive to continue working with them.

A.E: How did you get started with working with the homeless? T.L: I started through the church and got involved with the homeless ministry. A.E: Was it with Church Without Walls or another organization? T.E: It was actually with the Rock Church and their homeless ministry. The pastors at the Rock Church emphasize getting plugged into different ministries. After we are saved, we want to be equipped with God’s word, then we are sent out. So it was through the Rock Church and I didn’t choose the homeless ministry -- I prayed and God brought me to the homeless ministry. A.E: Was this the first homeless ministry you have worked with? T.L: That was my very first. Then I found out through the homeless ministry at church that there are different outreach. There is Evangelism which is held throughout the week and then there is Church Without Walls that’s held on a Saturday, so it was through attending Saturday Church Without Walls. A.E: How long have you been with Church Without Walls? T.L: I would say now going on about five or a little more than four and a half years. A.E: You are the head leader of the Spring Valley and South Bay campuses now, correct? T.L: Correct, and for the homeless ministry through the Rock Church and now South Bay for Church Without Walls. But there are so many leaderships within Church Without Walls, I believe that there are so many more leaders, but as the Rock Church ministry leader, yes. A.E: What made you want to start the Spring Valley campus? T.L: I started Spring Valley because being at Eucalyptus Park for about a year and a half, I had had sense passing Spring Valley Park. I would come home and I would pass Spring Valley Park and I was always led in my heart that there was something that needed to happen; our homeless neighbors in the Spring Valley needed to be reached. So with that being said, I put that in prayer and then I prayed that God would put the volunteers in place, because as you know, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. However, God provided the volunteers and servants and we were able to start Church Without Walls in Spring Valley. A.E: Is it time consuming to lead both the Spring Valley campus and now the South Bay one? T.L: All I can tell you is God’s timing is always perfect. When we are following God’s guidance and his direction and we are seeking his will and not ours, he totally provides and supports. So is it hard? No, because the leaders of our group have stepped up and now they have taken on Spring Valley totally without me being there so that I can focus on Eucalyptus Park. A.E: Church Without Walls is part of Rock Church, so does it receive funding from the Rock Church or is it the volunteers who provide everything? T.L: Everything is through volunteers. Through volunteers, we get clothing, blankets, and other items that our homeless neighbors need. That’s all available for us through the homeless ministry at the Rock, so we have that available if we need it. However, everything else is volunteers; the resources we put in as far as the money to provide the food is all on donations or out of our own pockets. A.E: Why do you call homeless people neighbors and not just simply homeless? T.L: We call them our neighbors because in the word of God, he ultimately refers to us as neighbors. I see them as homeless -- they are but they are more. Not everybody ends up homeless and not everybody begins their lives being homeless. So I refer to them as my neighbors because that’s biblical. I see them as being much more than homeless because they didn’t begin that way. A.E: Has your opinion of the homeless changed through your five years of service? T.L: It did, at the very beginning. Coming into the homeless ministry, I had no idea what to expect. I had only searched information, but I didn’t know then what I now know. It has changed my outlook on people in general and that we are all created in God’s image. They are so much more to me now. They are precious to me because I have the understanding of the love of God and how he loves. That’s not just loving what someone can do for you or their outer appearance, but actually loving people through the eyes of Christ. So yes, my opinion has changed from when I was first coming in. I was a little taken back, reserved, very cautious – maybe more cautious than I am now and it’s because I was worried about the diseases that are out there, but now I have the understanding that God’s hands of protection has been over us. A lot of things could have not happened, so my outlook on people has changed because I know that they are more than just the homeless. God has given me a passion, a new love for them. A.E: Where do you think the stereotypes of the homeless came from? T.L: I think it started from people not understanding that homelessness goes deeper than just addictions. There is so much more to the story of a homeless person than just being homeless. There was an addiction, but beyond that addiction there’s that person that God has created, that person that through struggles, battles, everyday troubles that we go through but I totally believe the situation with everyone is different and how people handle situations are different. So I would definitely have to say that there is a story behind every homeless. To stereotype is to not understand. Without understanding why someone is homeless and why they became homeless, it becomes easier to stereotype them. A.E: What is the best thing people can do to help the homeless? T.L: How can we help homeless people, of course. In our community, every little help in every capacity helps. So as a community, each and every one of us doing something makes a big difference. Whether it’s providing food or clothing, I think more so that as a believer, as a Christian, as a daughter of the King is providing the spiritual food. The spiritual food is what they need so that they understand, because it’s the mindset. So by
me being out there, it's not just to serve them food or clothing but to give them the word of God that I know changed my life and will change theirs, too. Just continue to provide and do the best you can in any capacity. With each of us in our community, there is so much we can do.

A.E: I know that your family is also very involved with the organization. Did you have to make them to go to the ministry at first or did they just choose to go?

T.L: It all started with me. It did start with trying to find myself and how I can serve God. At that time I had just started leading a small group. But the blessing of that was Jacob, our eldest son. Jacob became a leader for our small group, for the youth group. It was then that we had come together and said, we are a small group and we have been meeting for about a year now and we sit in our nice, cozy homes and we fellowship, which is awesome and we have a good time but there is so much more work that needs to be done. As a group we can do this, so [my family getting involved started with me]. What happened is a mother, I am responsible and accountable for my children: where they are at and what they are doing. That being said, because the small group got started with Church Without Walls, automatically the children joined in with the adults. It wasn't until about 2011 when our family decided that I had gone so far ahead of my family, making the decisions for them, making the decisions for us and God totally stopped me where I was at. It came through my husband's medical issues and put a stop to my going ahead without consulting with my family first. In 2012 I had spoken to the kids and said, as a family I like to do Church Without Walls but I see your love for music (my kids have always loved music they have always loved instruments), I see that passion and that love and the gift and the talent that God has given you guys, so why not use that and do what you love to do at Church Without Walls? [They said], “Oh, great, yeah, we can do that, Mom.” Of course it's because that's something they love to do. For my children, it started with worship. It started with being able to use what they love to do and take it and do worship for Church Without Walls. Then from there it was just myself and my children; my husband was quiet serving Church Without Walls yet. Mainly because he is the bread of our family, so he works 16 hours, six or seven days a week. I believe that it was important for him and I to be on the same page. As he is the leader of the household and I a mother and a wife to my husband and my children, it was very important for us. It was his decision and he joined us later with church without walls. As a family, that is how it all started. I did go full speed and started making decisions, but in the end today, I can tell you that as a family, we love being out there.

A.E: That's great! What is the most poignant moment in your five years working with the homeless?

T.L: The highlight is seeing our homeless neighbors and witnessing God's work through our homeless. Seeing their lives changing, them transforming after accepting Christ, after being ministered and being planted the seed, them coming to accept Christ and now seeing our homeless neighbors off the street, being given a second chance. Being given the chance to a life that we live now and the life that they had before. Whatever it was, from addiction or the economy, people have lost their homes. Whatever reason, it is being able to see God's work and seeing homelessness end. I love to see us surrender, and we say, “God, let your will be done”, how we just place everybody in order and how we come together as two different churches but one body. That is one body of Christ to do the work of the Lord.

Lisa Bacon Food Bank: The Interview of a Lifetime
By: Zuri Smith
Painting by: Zuri and Alicia

I opened the door to my teacher's office feeling nervous and rushed. I had already tried to contact Ms. Bacon before in another office, but the signal was low. I ran my hands through my hair feeling stressed, scared about conducting my very first phone interview as though I'm some kind of reporter. I didn't know how this interview was going to go. I opened the computer, re-logged in and paced around the room, trying to calm my nerves. When I dialed the number, a cheery voice was on the other end, and suddenly, it wasn't so intimidating.

Lisa Bacon is a non-profit service manager for the San Diego Food Bank. She also oversees two of the programs at the food bank. In the short conversation we had, I could tell that this was a woman with passion and conviction. She stated emphatically that helping the homeless and impoverished in San Diego is the main reason she gets up every day and goes to work. The city of San Diego is lucky to have such a dedicated community hero working to help the less fortunate. It was for precisely this reason that I wanted to interview her for the project.

ZS: What exactly is it that you do for the Food Bank?
LB: So basically I am the non-profit service manager so I oversee two of our programs here called the food non profit program as well as the emergency food assistance program and that is one of our government programs we run. So um through these two programs we partner with about 300 non-profit organizations throughout the county and the receive food from us, food that is donated to the food bank, food that is purchased food from the government.

ZS: How long have you been involved in your position at the food bank?
LB: I have been at the foodbank for 4-5 years and I just recently became the um profit services manager in July um but I've worked in the department um for 4-5 years

ZS: What made you want to get involved with this organization?
LB: The Food bank has a really great mission we um serve about 320,000 people per month, and last school year we got about 20 million pounds of food so, there's a lot of need here in the county and the food bank does a lot of really great work to make sure um food and secure people have access to nutritious food on a regular basis, so it's a really great mission, a really great organization and um through the food bank I've been able to um meet um a lot of really great organizations and those partners that I mentioned
before with a great network of people who are um out there and i'm working hard to make sure that san diegans have enough food to eat.

zs: what do you think is the hardest and what do you think is the easiest aspect of your job?

lb: i think the hardest part of our job is um there are so many needs out there in san diego county and um at times, not only do people need food but they also need help with medical bills, help with their rent, or help with their search to find a job and so it can be overwhelming when you think about how many people um are really in need and that leads into the best part of our job which is that we are doing something to help these folks and we do um feed, like i said about 320,000 people per month so these are folks that wouldn't otherwise have food and we're helping them to make sure that they have enough food for themselves and for their families, so it's difficult to see the need and so many people struggling and it's great to be part of a solution for that, providing food for them so that they you know can use the money as a limited fund that they have for other resources.

zs: so you mentioned that there's a lot of other aspects of it, that people need help with--like medical care and things like that--is that also part of what you do? or is it just the food or are you helping in all areas?

lb: so the food bank food is our main goal, so we do work hard to connect our clients to other social services agencies in san diego, so we have what is called the community terrace program, where we bring in social services agencies to some of our distribution sites, so folks can get information while they're waiting in line on you know medical services or dental services, um how to get a discounted energy bill, things of that sort. um we do ask to connect our clients to resources all though we don't provide those things under our roof um there are a lot of great non-profits throughout the county that do provide those other resources so we do work hard to connect our clients to those resources, because like i said, we do know that often times in many cases these folks need more than food so, we work hard to make sure they know where to go and we try to bring folks also to the distribution site whenever we can so that it's a one-stop shop, but in the event that we cannot bring a social service agency we do make sure that they're referred to the place.

zs: ok. do you work with a lot of families or is it people that are more coming in by themselves or do you get like a lot of families?

lb: it's really a mix, um we do serve a lot of families, there are actually a lot of children who are food insecure um so we do serve quite a few of those children. we also serve seniors um we do have a uh government program where we serve only seniors and so that is a big percentage of the people we serve, um we serve people who are single, people who um, their whole lives are in transition so it really is a mix. we serve all different types of people.

zs: a lot of people who come to your organization, are they, a lot of them homeless or are a lot of them kind of on the brink of it?

lb: um many many of the people that we serve are not homeless, they um you know are maybe tight or possibly on the brink of homelessness um so a huge percentage of them do have a place to stay at night, however we do of course serve homeless folks and um so there are certain communities that there's a bigger issue that have more homeless people but um it really is a mix of who we serve but the majority of those we serve are not homeless.

zs: who do you think the food bank is making a difference for the most?

lb: so beyond just the food that we provide the folks on a daily basis we do um have some other efforts that we have here, working to provide the most nutritious food packages that we can, because not only are our clients struggling with food and security but often times umm a lot of those people will also be struggling with obesity, um and related diseases like diabetes and life protection. so the food bank has made some great efforts to provide more nutritious foods to our clients so that we're not contributing to the issues that they have with their weight, issues that they have with their diabetes um a lot of the foods that we provide is fresh produce which i so expensive in the stores and are often out of reach for the um folks who have very little to spend on food, so we make some great efforts to distribute fresh produce so it's not only healthy, it's also um you know gives them access to something that they wouldn't otherwise have access to given their limited funds so um that's a great thing that the food bank does additionally we also provide the uh outreach for the calfresh program, so calfresh is californias name for um an organization for food stamps we have a team of three here who go out into the community and pre-screen people for this program and if they qualify they help them go through the whole application process and when calfresh program was a way to put more food on the table and an assistance program and folks who qualify get a certain amount of money on an ebp card which works like an atm card and basically they have the ability to purchase food for their family thanks to, the calfresh benefits so the food bank has great team of folks who goes out and pre-screens people for the programs and make sure that those who are eligible are receiv-ing benefits. so those are some great ways that the food bank does make an impact rather just than the distribution of food but also in the promotion of health.

zs: are you in direct contact with people who are in need of your assistance or does the work with people happen in other departments?

lb: so um a huge percentage of the food that we distribute actually, first goes to our nonprofit partners and they distribute to the direct user to the client um, because we are the food bank and we only have forty employees, we couldn't possibly serve everyone in need in the county so we rely on partnerships which um other non-profits like churches and social services agencies who have food pantries at their sites and we have non-profits who pick up food from us on a daily basis, and then they then take that food back to their site to then package it for distribution or prepare it for a meal, so other agencies are interacting with clients on a daily basis. um the food bank does have a couple of direct client interview programs so that um the calfresh outreach program that i mentioned is directly prescreening clients everyday and also we have our senior program that um is a direct distribution that the food bank employees that have um for people that go out to about 45 distribution sites and the county are are directly distributed to the seniors um and like i said we do go through a network of those non profit partners and they do have some direct interactions with clients and we do have several actually come up tour warehouse and umm its not necessarily a convenient place
for people to go, since we are located centrally towards the county but its a very industrial area so we encourage people in need to go to one of our partner distribution sites, however some folks to come up here if they don't know where to go, but we do feed clients here and other warehouses as well.

ZS: Right. And how are your senior program and your programs for families different from one another?

LB: So, the difference between our senior program and our what program?

ZS: And like your programs for your families and um other people, how are they different programs or are they just or how is that different?

LB: Yeah so we do have, it's a government program, our senior program, so there is a USCA, we receive an allocation of food and it's distributed, we have about 8,000 seniors on the program and every 3 months they receive a 35 pound box of food and all these seniors are sixty and older in order to be eligible for that program umm that program is not for anyone who does not meet that age requirement and also has some income guidelines, but we do have a number of other programs that don't have age limits, there are no guidelines, and anyone who is in need, so there are different programs that we offer, but our senior programs are unique in the sense that we only serve that age population.

ZS: Are a lot of the seniors that you serve veterans?

LB: We do have a large military community that we serve, um we serve every month about 48,000 military members and their families, and some of those are veterans, um that's definitely a big number of people we serve. It's sometimes hard to capture how many of them are veterans because many of our programs don't ask those questions, we don't want to um be asking for too much information, that's a lot of clients because it's already difficult for so many of them. So based on experience and based on what we currently know from our partner agency, that there are quite a few veterans that are out there, that we're serving and there are a lot of military families as well.

ZS: What would you say would be your most life changing experience that um you've had in your job, what was a moment that you've had that really changed for you?

LB: Yeah, I think that um the first distribution that I worked in and really seeing how many people are really desperate for food and wait in line for hours to receive a food package um, those aren't things that I necessarily grew up knowing about or understanding, so when I was hired at the food bank I went out to my first distribution and it was definitely an eye-opening experience for me to see that here in this community in San Diego where so many people were associated with wealth and beaches and it's not, not necessarily associated with people who are low income I'm going out and seeing the distribution and seeing how many people were affected by hunger um, it was definitely life changing. It definitely reminds us why we come to work every day and have a food bank.

ZS: What would you say would be your military families as well.

Volunteering and Changing Minds: An Interview with High School Student Karissa Schummer

by: Israel Sandoval

I decided to ask my good friend Karissa Schummer if she wanted to be interviewed by me for the project exploring homelessness since we are both learning about this issue together, and we both went on a volunteer trip with the class. I assumed she would have some interesting things to say about the topic from a student perspective.

Karissa Schummer is a very compassionate young lady that has a lot to offer to others. She is a current junior at High Tech High Chula Vista and is very outgoing in all her classes. The work that Karissa did while visiting a homeless shelter as a volunteer changed the lives of many people. She was able to bring smiles to children faces simply by giving them milk and serving the homeless breakfast. She also inspires her peers to want to be more compassionate just like her.

IS- What inspired or motivated you to be a volunteer?

KS- I really wanted to help the people and it was part of the class field trip so I was excited for it that I was going to be helping other than are in need of help and that don't have much.

IS- That's really nice that you were excited to help others. What was one of your first impressions when you volunteered?

KS- My first impression was when we were like outside of Saint Vincent de Paul's and I saw homeless people outside of the building and they looked cold and I felt sad and sorry for them, and then when we served them breakfast they were so nice, you could automatically tell that they were very appreciative for us to be their serving them breakfast.

IS- What is your definition of homelessness? And how do you view them?

KS- When I used to think of a homeless person I thought of a person who does drugs and they can't find a home because they're on drugs and I thought of a person with a shopping cart and stuff, but now I think of a family that their parents just lost their home and now their on the streets because they don't have enough money for a house.

IS- So your perspective changed because of what you saw and experienced?

KS- My perspective? Yes it changed because of the fieldtrip.

IS- And how or what did you do to help the homeless when you volunteered?

KS- When I volunteered we served them breakfast and I gave the little kids milk and they were very thankful and they said thank you and please and they were so nice.

IS- Have you tried to announce the importance of the issue to other people?

KS- Well I've talked about homelessness with friends, but I don't I think I've tried to talk to my peers about helping the homeless.

IS- What do you think is a solution to homelessness?

KS- I think that one solution could be to try and get people a home that are just trying to get stable and on their feet again and then to give them a home so they can find a job.

IS- Ok, and from your volunteer service what would you say was your greatest take away?

KS- I took away that the feeling of
Luis Cacho: The Student Experience

By: Karissa Schummer

On the afternoon of November 18th, I interviewed Luis Cacho. The room was quiet, the chairs comfortable, and the air was still, but refreshing and calm. There were papers and classroom materials inside the teacher office, and a general sense of productivity.

Luis is a student at High Tech High Chula Vista and is also in my class. I wanted to get his perspective on all of the things we had been experiencing and learning as a class about homelessness.

I also wanted to know what it meant for him to be a volunteer. The expression on Luis's face was bright and he was clearly ready to begin answering some questions and eager to share all he had learned with me. His eagerness to share is what makes him a perfect voice for getting future generations of people involved in solving the issue of homelessness, once and for all!

K.S: So Luis, what do you think the purpose of volunteering is in general?
L.C: I think the purpose of volunteering is to realize how grateful we are and how fortunate we are to have the things that we have and I feel that through volunteering we are here to help others but we also benefit ourselves because we get that sense of humility and it just feels good overall to help someone in need or someone who is less fortunate.

K.S: Why did you volunteer?
L.C: The reason why I volunteered is because it was a class field trip to St. Vincent de Paul's and it was very important to go and help the people that came there.

K.S: What did you learn?
L.C: I learned that, you know, not only do young adults that are struggling go to homeless shelters, but I also saw a lot of kids like my age or younger so I learned that homelessness really affects everyone. It's closer than what you think, it hits you right in the heart. It saddens me that people my age are struggling to get a meal while I'm complaining about things I have to do and chores I have to do. I learned to always be grateful and appreciative of what I have.

K.S: Will you continue to volunteer?
L.C: I believe so. You know, with my busy schedule with all honors classes and volleyball management and games on the weekends and church, guitar [it's hard]. I will try my best to volunteer, however, life is busy but there are other ways to volunteer. You can donate money. You don't have to physically go. But definitely I plan to volunteer at a shelter maybe once a month or something. Perhaps with my family.

K.S: What was your first impression of the shelter?
L.C: Well it was really early in the morning so I was kind of tired so I didn't really see the shelter like physically how it looked but I mean inside it looked like a multi-purpose lounging area with tables but like you could tell how it was like for a basketball court. It looked kinda like a less modern YMCA structure but I think its pretty good for the homeless population there is no problems with weather. It was warm inside and um there was good food for the people there.

K.S: So, would you say that is one moment that stood out to you?
L.C: Yeah it really did stand out to me a lot.

K.S: How did you feel about volunteering?
L.C: Hmm, I mean you never know what to expect really. If you'll get a positive experience or a negative one, but I guess I was kind of just worried because I wasn't really sure what we were going to do exactly. Fortunately, with my group we were able to actually distribute food to the homeless people and it was great to see their energy so early in the morning and how thankful and grateful they were for us to be volunteering there.

K.S: How were the other people there, the ones they were working there, how were they like?
L.C: Hmm, they were, they weren't like mean, but they were kinda strict. They knew they have their responsibilities to do and that there's a certain time and place for everything. They were kind of managing us very responsibly.

K.S: What was your first impression of the people?
L.C: Hmm, at first I thought that there were going to be less appreciative and I just thought that, well even with all of the research on the homeless and stuff like that I still had the idea that they just want to take cuz they can you know. Like they feel that the government should provide the service so they wouldn't be thankful. However, mostly everyone said thank you to us for volunteering. I remember one lady, and she was telling us how good it was for us to volunteer and she was thankful and grateful. That really struck me.

K.S: What was something that surprised you when volunteering?
L.C: Like I mentioned before, the most surprising thing was seeing kids my age you know having to go to shelters to get a meal before school like I saw a student, probably a senior at some high school. He looked young but you know like those people are the stronger ones. I always try to be a strong student and have determination. What some kids have to do to survive it's just really astonishing and amazing, the efforts that they make and its unfortunate that that's the case.
but it shows just how strong and independent they are.

Joalby-Phoenix Lopez  
(Advisory Board member of the Urban Street Angels)  
By: Andrea Vazquez and Ja-haad Jaikaran

Joalby Lopez is an advisory board member and director of the Urban Street Angels. Urban Street Angels is a non-profit organization that aims to offer support and services for young homeless people. They also strive to inspire change—in the eyes of non-homeless about homelessness, and in the homeless to see that they are cared for. As soon as Mr. Lopez picked up the call in for the interview, I knew we were talking to someone special. For twenty minutes, we talked, and within those twenty minutes Jahaad and I were convinced that an interview with anyone besides Mr. Lopez wouldn’t have been as insightful nor as honest. Over the phone, I was able to hear the true sincerity of his voice as he spoke about his passion for charity. It was clear that Mr. Lopez valued every aspect about his work at Urban Street Angels, including those he helped through his service. It turns out that Mr. Lopez’s passion may come from the fact that he had a few first hand experiences with being homeless, too. At a young age, he and his family were homeless and were subject to finding shelter wherever it was available, with friends, family and once in an abandoned building. It was when Mr. Lopez turned 20 that his interest in helping the homeless community was sparked, thus, beginning his volunteer work at various organizations. When Mr. Lopez was recommended to the Urban Street Angels, it was as though he was meant to be there from the very start. “After I joined the Street Angels, I was able to do more than what I was able to do with past organizations” he says. Today, Mr. Lopez continues his volunteer work, nurturing and providing to those who have yet to feel the warmth from a helping hand.

AV: How long has the Urban Street Angels of San Diego been up and running can you give us some background on your organization?
JL: Urban Street Angels had been around probably since Mission Gathering and has been around for numerous years. I came into Urban Street Angels about four years ago. Before I began Urban Street Angels, a friend of mine who has attended the outings, told me about it and I had a previous background volunteering at food kitchens. My mom and I would cook and hand out burritos to the homeless people around our neighborhood. So it kind of seemed like something that I’ve wanted to be involved in. It sort of came about by our pastor, Richard, who has more experience with homeless youths. His experiences would soon lead (Richards) him to establish Urban Street Angels back when it was just Street Angels Ministry focusing on the urban area of San Diego community. Now we (Urban Street Angels) are trying to focus on the youth community while providing resources to whomever we can.

AV: What is your role as an Advisory board member of the Urban Street Angels?
JL: The advisory board holds monthly meetings to plan on who is going to lead the outings, of which, I once lead for a class from High Tech High Chula Vista. On some outings, my mother and I made the meals some time out of the month. Also we plan out charity events with other outreach organizations from time to time. I have also organized benefit concerts and brought in musicians to perform at local bars to raise money for the cause.

AV: What other organizations have you partnered with so far?
JL: Right now we have partnered with another organization called the Urban Angels, but since Eric wanted to do a big Thanks Giving event, he was going to partner up with an organization in San Diego to do a thanksgiving feast at an actual food kitchen with a couple of hundred people.

AV: Is the Urban Street Angels situated anywhere or located anywhere in San Diego?
JL: Actually the head quarters is out of the Mission Gathering Church. We operate separate from the church even though it originated under the church. A lot of companies won’t donate if it’s a church organization. However, while it is affiliated with the church we do operate separate from it. So we are able to receive support from different organizations.

AV: How long in total have you helped the homeless?
JL: Let me see probably about 11 years. I started after I finished high school. My family went through some rough times when I was in my junior/senior year and that caused us to be homeless. In my junior year of high school, we were couch searching and homeless for a few months in my senior year. So it kind of hit me to get involved. I began volunteering in my early twenties, making food and driving around Chula Vista and National City; handing out burritos to anyone that I saw. Then a former church that I was involved with and myself would go volunteer at food kitchens to feed the homeless. After I joined the Street Angels, I was able to do more than what I was able to do with past organizations. So I kind of latched on to it to do as much as I could.

AV: What is the most difficult part about helping the homeless?
JL: The most difficult part about helping the homeless is no matter how much resources you accumulate it’s never going to be enough and that’s something that we struggle with. For example, if we were to go out, especially in downtown, you can take 50 meals, 100 meals, 200 meals but it’s never going to be enough. For instance, there are times when we take out over a hundred meals to the homeless in downtown and we still run out. And it hurts. It hurts so bad to leave and not have something for those last few people. So we try to figure out what we can give them in that moment and start to put together our resources to get them what they need. Any organization that helps the homeless will tell you that no amount of food, no amount of clothing, no amount of anything is really enough because there will always be a group of people who didn’t get the opportunity to receive the same resources as the others did. At the end of the day, the fact that someone is still left unfed lingers and leaves a heart wrenching feeling. A feeling
of wanting to help everybody and having to go home knowing that you only helped a bit of people; not everyone.

AV: You’re right that must be very heart breaking. Through your involvement was their a certain moment that impacted you the most or surprised you the most?

JP: Two years ago, on Thanksgiving day, we had an outing in obi , and on that day staff form the Urban Street Angels got together to make a thanksgiving feast along with turkey and ham that my family made. Then we carried on to serve the homeless on the obi peer border wall. We actually served them there on the border wall and we sat there with them, talked to them and ate with them. Being able to share such a precious moment together instead of sitting there, is a lot more valuable because you experience community with them .It’s just the same as when we hand out the sleeping bags during Christmas. I don’t think there is any other memory that has impacted me the most. That has left me completely in tears. When they give you a hug after opening their gift, is heart-warming and painful all at once. It is heart warming to see them moved to tears by the gesture but also saddening to see them having to endure the long winter nights without shelter. Overall, to put time and effort into a gift and go out on Christmas eve to hand them out is a great and amazing experience that I will never forget.

AV: What is the most challenging aspect of working at the Urban Street Angels , maybe this question is a bit repetitive but if there is any thing else that strikes you as challenging can you share a bit of it. I am very curious to know ?

JL: You know the one thing I think is the most challenging is that sometimes we want to do so much; we have these ideas that we want to fulfill, but regulations are in place that keep us from doing what we want to do . For instance, we have plans in the future, to possibly organize a 5k marathon that we would like to put in place but there are so many legalities that we have to take into consideration. While our hearts are in the right place and we have these awesome ideas, there are so many things that we need permission to do. So we can’t just go out there with grand expectations, because it takes months and months of cooperation, permission, contracts, initiatives and partnerships with people to see our ideas come to life. We have the people that want to help out but we have to follow appropriate routes to make sure that it works.

AV: What are some things that San Diegans don’t know about homelessness that they should?

JL: I have had the experience of dealing with people who have the idea that the homeless population doesn’t want the help, that they don’t want to get a job and thats not necessarily true. There are homeless people in down town who do work. There was one woman who worked at target, her check was not enough for rent she had to enlist herself to a homeless shelter to shower after work but she was still out on the street. Also without a mailing address, references nor experience many are not able to get jobs because they’re unqualified to work . Also, they don’t have the references, they don’t have the experience to work . Hopefully, they’re passion and drive gets them a job ; giving them the start to do amazing things and flourish. However, a lot of times the money isn’t enough to support them. So the whole idea that their living on the street because they don’t want to do any thing is a complete lie. Alot of the people who are out there live on the streets because they don’t have the option. For Example, many people apart of the homeless community are children who are trying to escape abuse. These kids just want get away from a terrible experience with their families and it’s not that their bad kids, it’s not that they’re lazy, it’s just that they have to get out there as soon as possible. As a result, shelters are the only place where they feel safe enough to live peacefully because they’re surrounded in a community that’s going to look out for them. One of the most tight knit homeless families that I met were in the East Village area. One family, had two pretty little red head girls and the other was a lady that had a baby about a month old. The two families would look out for each other. If there was something wrong with somebody in the family they would say ”here give me the baby and go do what you have to do” ; they look out for one another. They care for one another. It’s a community thing. So it’s not like everybody is in it for themselves.

AV: Have you ever experienced homelessness?

JL: I have. In my junior year of high school we were living in an abandoned building. Same thing, we hit hardships and we just had no other way to make it work. So for about two months in my junior year we were living in a an abandoned building with no electricity, no running water. It was my mother, my sisters and myself at the time. Then in my senior year, we were couch surfing a lot of the times staying with friends and relatives for as long as we could. We really didn’t have a place to call our own, but we would do what we could to find a place to lay our heads at night. I know the experience of being homeless first hand; waking up and not knowing where you’re going to sleep for the night. My greatest happiness during those times was school . I was homeless and I still had to go to school. My mom told me to get up every day and I liked it because for me, a lot of the times, it was the only place where I was go to receive a meal or two . I was on the free and reduced lunch program and for me that was exciting because that meant that I was going to be full of food.

AV: I’m very sorry to hear that, can you say that your experience sparked your interest in working for the Urban Street Angels ?

JL: Absolutely it did . I am at a place right now where I can give some of my time and my resources to help out the homeless community which I was apart of . So if I am able to go out on an outing and let somebody know that their loved while listening to their story, I can’t find any other purpose to my life than that. I want be there to listen to their story of which I never experienced for myself. So the fact that I can be that person , to listen to them , means the world to me. I’ll always try to give them what I can and never had . .

AV: I you could , how would you involve the community in ending homelessness?

JL: It seems like such a big question but it’s such a small answer. If everybody just did something and made it a point to care about someone other than themselves , by donating something to the homeless community, that would be great. I believe, that in todays society, the majority are worried about their homes and are preoccupied by the amount of stress in their own lives that the thought of giving what little they can becomes to much of a hassle. If you can get a pack of tortillas and a bag of beans you can easily make burritos that aren’t at all expensive to make . That alone is enough to feed more than two families and more if every donated something as small as that. If it were me, I would buy a homeless man a meal rather than buying
that starbucks in the mourning. That alone can make someone's day and possibly save them from starvation. A simple act like that is just enough to show someone that you care. If you don't want to give them money don't give them money. Instead you can stop somewhere and buy them food. So instead of them having to go around and collect from 8 different, people I'll gladly provide them a meal; anything that will fill their stomachs with food. Most of the times they just want a burger or water. It's not going to cost much for people to pay attention and take into consideration the people that their struggling off on the side of the road. All in all, the simplest act of compassion can go a long way.

AV: And if I wanted to donate food or get involved how would I go about doing that?

JL: You can actually hit up Urban Street Angels.org where you can find some more information about the organization and how you can help. Also we are willing to accommodate to your needs where as we will arrange schedules for you to come in on certain days out of the week.

AV: Wow I am definitely considering donating food to the Urban Street Angels. It seems like you do a lot for the homeless community and I would definitely like to help out in any way that I can as well. By the way would you happen to know the mission of the Urban Street Angels?

JL: Our mission is along the lines of helping as many people as we can and doing what we can for the community. If that means providing one person with a full stomach before they can go to bed, clean water and at least something to keep them warm at night. We want to help as many people as we can.

AV: Lastly, sadly our conversation is quickly coming to an end, if you can offer a homeless person some piece of advice what would you tell him or her?

JL: Be strong, don't give up and keep trying. A lot of the times people are so down and broken that they begin to believe that it is impossible to get out of poverty. Unfortunately, the people that I see give up because they think that nobody cares. That nobody is going to be there to help them and they just stop trying. On the other hand, if they can keep it in their heads that anything is possible great things can really happen. It takes a lot of courage and positivity to want that change, to pursue a job and fight homelessness. If you are able to achieve that then why can't you be successful in the future? Similarly, overcoming addictions is a difficult and daunting journey. However, with motivation and the right help anything is possible. It can happen. Keep going and keep at it. It sounds kind of weird if you want it enough it could happen, which also sounds good on paper. However, in all honesty, the most determined people take a really long time to recover from their situation. Therefore many lose sight of hope. So to whomever it may be, keep persevering, keep being strong and if you want to get off the street, if you want to get a job, keep at it and never quite. Eventually, someone is going to acknowledge he or she for their efforts. Lastly, use all of your resources and never stop trying. I have seen so many people burnt out because of their constant self doubt. Never give up and always persevere.

KW: Could you please explain to me what it is that you went to go do at St. Vincent De Paul?

JC: Ok so, us-- our class-- went to serve breakfast to the homeless people that came in to St. Vincent De Paul, and I was one of the three people that was actually serving to them. We served muffins, this little burrito thing and then like a pastry.

KW: Thats awesome! So can you tell me something you experienced there? Any specific stories or something you would like to share?

JC: Well, there wasn't a specific moment, its just like when they were going through to get their food they would be like “Oh thank you”, or like, “good morning!” and I would just be like “Oh, hey guys! haha” Like they were just so nice and they were, you know, obviously not in the best situation at the moment but they were just nice to everyone and they seemed happy to have guest and new people to converse with.

KW: Wow. Could you tell me something you learned from going to do that service?

JC: I learned that all the people, well its more of a mixture of things because they were talking about like, those were the people that were in the homeless, not shelter, where they were giving them food. They were more of the people who wanted to change and not be homeless because I personally was scared of homeless, because of drugs and all the stereotypes and things like that; and from

Happy and excited to interview my classmate Jessica Castro, we sat down in an office and got the interview started. I was pretty nervous even though Jessica is a close friend to me because I didn't want to start laughing or say something irrelevant to the topic. Jessica kept fidgeting with her hands and flpping her hair, but I didn't blame her at all. We both took a deep breath and I started asking away. Jessica shared about experience on a class field trip to the St. Vincent De Paul's and to the San Diego Rescue Mission. Throughout this interview Jessica shared stories and specific moments that stood out to her about these homeless people she interacted with and the lessons she learned throughout the experience. The fact that these people are so happy and are in a worse situation than any of us, really, made Jessica feel for them and appreciate what she has in life.

Jessica Castro is a student at High Tech High Chula Vista, and is currently in 11th grade. I have known her for a full year now, and she has proven to be an amazing person and friend. She is an honors student who always tries her hardest to not only achieve her goals, but exceed them as well. This was Jessica's first service with homeless people, but as we talked after the field trip I realized that she was interested and it was an experience that had impacted her. I think that Jessica will be doing more service from now on, and I also think that she will be sharing what she learns with other people, which is exactly what we need to do to help the homeless in our community.

**By: Karla Wade**

**Jessica Castro: A Student With A View**
being there I realized that not all of them are like that and most of the people that go to the shelters and like things where they are getting help, are the people who do want to change, and the people who want to better their lives. I also learned that not all of them are the same, they are all separate people, and they all have their back stories and yeah.

KW: What was your impression on life in the shelter?

JC: Umm, well. It was like a cafeteria like type of situation there, and even though the people were like nice and they seemed happy, I sure that if it was more like a happier place, then people would want to go there more. Well not go there more but like, more ok with being in that situation, and I feel like it would just brighten their morning or their day for wherever they go. Or if it was less dreary and more alive I guess you could say.

KW: Right, right.

JC: But yeah, thats my impression or perspective on the shelter.

KW: So do you think that the stereotypes for homeless, like drug addicts sex-offenders and what not, do you believe that it's society that has singled them out or classified them like that?

JC: I think that they don't really want us to look at them that way but since that is how society has practically classified them then, yes I do think that every other person is going to think of homeless in that negative way. If we believe that they are all drug addicts and crazy people we won't ever want to help them, but if we look more into it, we realize that most of them all they need is help and are people who are struggling to do better. I don't know if that answered your question, hahaha.

KW: Yes, definitely did. To follow up with that question though, do you think that if people did more service, or people that have never done service would have a different look towards homeless people?

JC: I think most people, would definitely change their perspective but of course not everyone will. I'm sure that some people would just stay the same you know like "ugh they are what they are" but I feel like the more people that did it, the more they would think into it and be like Wow. They are not just crazy homeless people, you know?

KW: Yes, exactly what I feel too. We know that there will always be greaty people who will not care about anyone but themselves, but if more people got involved with the cause then people would definitely change their perspectives. How was volunteering for you, were you excited or not even up for the trip?

JC: Umm, well I'm not a morning person, hahaha, so that definitely threw me off a little bit. Waking up at 4:30 in the morning so we could go be there at like 5:00. So when I got there, I was not happy, the sun wasn't even out. I was really tired and it was super cold! But as we were working, I was definitely a little afraid when I first walked in because I was in the non-family side, so people were just alone. It kinda scared me a little bit because there was security guard outside the door and they were like “You guys should of gone through the back!” and I was like, Oh my gosh what's going to happen to us, what does that mean, are we going to get attacked hahaha. but umm as we were serving them they were just being nice and simply happy that we were there.

KW: I guess I already kind of asked you but once again was there a specific person or moment that stood out to you?

JC: Mmm, well, there was one point now that I think about it. This guy, we were just waiting, Mahlia, Nadine, and I were the three people serving. So one of they guys was like, “Oh this is life on the other side.” Like I sat there and thought to myself like, do they think that we are like, eww homeless people. But he was joking because he started laughing after. It was just a weird experience to see how they think and look at us in a different way just like we look at them differently too, yet they are still nice to us and they will thank us for things, or for the food and great us goodmorning. Basically they have a better attitude towards us then what we would have towards them if we stuck to the stereotypes.

Homelessness Is Not A Crime:
An Interview with Sergeant Richard Schnell
By Christopher Wicking

Sergeant Schnell has a way about him. He exudes warmth and friendliness. Even when he was talking to a class of fifty eleventh graders, he had a way about putting people-- a whole crowd of people-- at ease. I guess this makes him a perfect candidate for working with one of the most sensitive and at-risk populations in the city. He has been on the police force for thirtyfive years and has dedicated thirteen of those years to helping the homeless. He is currently part of the San Diego Police Departments Homeless Outreach Team, where he helps people get off the streets by talking to them, treating them with respect and dignity and working with them as citizens (or clients, as he calls them) who deserve service and protection.

Throughout the interview I could tell that Sergeant Schnell really cared about homeless people. He doesn't see them with a stereotypical lense, but instead, as normal people that have been knocked down, and just need a hand to get back up. Sergeant Schnell is so passionate about his job, and his goal to help the homeless men and woman in San Diego. He is a true example of the police motto “to serve and protect”.

CW: So what is your opinion on homelessness?

RS: You know, I don't really have an opinion on it, I accept the fact that it exists, and I just try to work with in the communities to help people move out of homelessness, and into an appropriate placement.
CW: What does your outreach team do? RS: We try to umm... facilitate movement of the client from the street into existing programs, programs that are already out there working, we have open beds in a certain place, we know the intake personal, so we'll talk one on one to people on the street, and move them from the street and into a program if they want to go, everything is voluntary.

CW: How long have you been with the outreach team? RS: I have been doing the outreach team for like uhh... let me see, thirteen years, I've been on the police department for thirtyfive.

CW: Are there any benefits to being on this outreach team? RS: Oh yeah its a huge bonus (he stuttered a little) a huge help to the patrol officers, because they get calls all hours of the day, all times of the week, with people that they shouldn't be dealing with, they are not committing crimes, they're mentally ill, or have physical disabilities, there are all sorts of variables, so the benefit is that they have somebody to call, we are a resource to the patrol guys, just like K-9 is a resource for search and rescue, we are like the resource for chronic homeless guys.

CW: Is San Diego the only city with a homeless outreach team? RS: You know I believe we are it, well that has the police apartment attached to it.

CW: Really? RS: Yeah I don't think there is anyone else that does this. Well there are outreach teams out there.

CW: But like civilians? RS: Yeah, none of them are attached to a police department.

CW: Seems like there should be more. RS: Well it works pretty well, its pretty affective.

CW: What is the most challenging thing about working with the homeless population? RS: You know just getting them to go... to go into treatment is really difficult. Yeah.

CW: Has there been anybody who has impacted you in this profession? RS: Sure, there is a couple of people that umm... who are people that are beyond what I called repair, and now have full time jobs, because of the team being able to move them at the right time into the right place, thats what keeps you going, that ability.

CW: Do you have any specific inspirational stories about a client you worked with?

RS: (he paused to think) You know I don't like to talk about individual clients too much, but there was one that was a chronic alcoholic, and he was getting arrested everyday, had been on the streets for thirty years maybe, so he was like sixty years old, and he wouldn't go into treatment, couldn't get into treatment, did not want to go into treatment, he was getting arrested, so we went to jail to talk to him, and we convinced him that instead of staying in jail, why don't we try some treatment programs, so we got him out of jail, worked with the public defender, he went into treatment, and relapsed, then we found him got him back into jail, then he got back out, then arrested him again, then back out of jail into treatment, and then he relapsed again, but not into a police car, he called us up, me and my partner and said "hey you gotta come talk to me" and were like "ok ok" so we came back down, we got him back into treatment without going to jail, then for some reason it just sort of clicked with him, and he became sober, and when hed been sober for a year and a half, we helped him with the program to get a job working at a local car dealership, just washing the cars, then he went from there to being the parts manager, so hed been working there for five years and he call us up and says "hey I'd like to take you guys out for a cup of coffee" and we were like "ok why don't you meet us at the police station" and so he shows up at the police station and we were gonna go to such and such location and then he said "well ill drive" and we were like "you're gonna drive" and he was like "yeah I drive, I got my license back now" so like everything had stuck with him, he had got it together. He actually did some public speaking with us, and it was pretty powerful stuff. To see someone that was literally in a garbage can and the gutter, for like thirty years drinking heavily, you know he had the big beard and everything.

CW: Those are the people you think will never get out if it? RS: Exactly! And they do, they do get out of it,but it's just a matter of putting yourself in a situation to help them out, they do all the hard work you just have to give them the ability to get the help. Yeah, so that was pretty cool. The drivers license thing was kind of wild, it was like wow he used to push around shopping carts.

CW: What made you want to do this job?

RS: You know I saw success, I saw success in it, I didn't see a lot of success in putting people in jail, I also saw the patrol officers struggling with this population, spending to much time on them, and then this team was developed and it really works.

CW: Have you ever had to arrest a homeless person? RS: Oh yes all the time. Mostly drunkens because we have a program for that. So yeah it happens once and a while, but not so much now that i'm on the homeless outreach team. But you know they get arrested for a variety of things.

CW: Like what? RS: Mostly sleeping on the sidewalk, and putting all there stuff out.

CW: That's illegal? RS: It is, in certain locations, a lot of times in the canyons, but my team doesn't really arrest anybody anymore. But you know it has happened.

CW: If you could change the way the city handles homeless people, what would you change? RS: Hah (he chuckled) I would change the way the homeless shelters are run. I would be a lot more assertive working with the individuals in there.

CW: What is something all San Diegans should know or do for the homeless population? RS: ( He paused to think) First, they need to know that it is not a crime to be homeless, and that a lot of these individuals are seriously ill a lot more ill than they think, and that they are not necessarily dangerous, but there are not enough programs out there to work with them, so you know to let them know that there needs to be more programs, for drugs and alcohol, and mental health programs need to be expanded.

CW: Why is it important for the people in San Diego to be aware of the homeless? RS Uh because I believe they(homeless) have direct impact on their(San Diegans) businesses and lives, and there are people, these are peoples kids, it could be your kid, it could be you, and somebody has to care, and as a society we should care, why is a dude that is mentally in standing in the corner with pouring rain with no socks on and only a thin jacket. Is that ok? That is not okay. We should speak up.
Arik Espineli: Changed to Make a Change
By: Angelo Cortez

Arik Espineli is a junior in high school. Like most juniors, he cares about his grades, works hard in school and plays sports. His sports?: track, cross country and swimming. Like many students-- especially students at High Tech High Chula Vista, where community service days happen school wide and annually-- he is also involved in community service. But, what I learned in the interview with Arik, is that this project about homelessness allowed him to get even more involved with a type of community service that he is already passionate about-- working with the homeless.

It was a cold day at school when I pulled Arik outside to be interviewed. It took awhile to get him to comply because he kept saying he wasn't good at answering questions, but he grew the courage to finally get up and do it. He was actually really good at answering the questions I asked him. He was very specific and the way you see in his eyes and his hand gestures he knew what he was talking about and it was very good information given from his point of view.

AC: When and what was your first experience with the homeless?
AR: My first experience with the homeless was with my parents church small group and they heard about this homeless organization called Church Without Walls in downtown Balboa and we went once every month on Saturdays.
AC: What was Church Without Walls all about?
AR: Basically what it was, was church service in Balboa park and they have a worship team that does the worship, someone says the sermon and then we feed [the homeless]. Sometimes, for holidays we even give out clothes for special occasions for example: Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. And yeah, that was my first experience.
AC: Nice well you seem like you enjoy helping the homeless after doing it alot. Why do you enjoy it?
AR: I enjoy helping the homeless because it helps me see everything. That people could change, and that i’m helping them and they could be helping me, like I would be learning from them because it is opening my eyes to what’s really going on and I would think everythings perfect.
AC: What made you want to work with the homeless in the first place?
AR: Umm.. What made me want to work with the homeless was that well, my parents took me the first time but after that I liked going there once every month and now more often , but I like talking to them seeing how their life is going and seeing if things are getting better or worse for them.
AC: What have you physically done to help the homeless?
AR: Like I said, we go to the church without walls and we make and bring food or water and help set up and clean up the event to feed the homeless.
AC: Are there other organizations you’ve worked with besides church without walls?
AR: I worked With Saint Vincent De Paul’s and the Rescue Mission and I did those with my advisory class and our class for community service day and we just served breakfast and we cleaned up after the service was done.
AC: There are many stereotypes about the homeless, do you agree or disagree with them and why?
AR: I don’t [agree] because every Saturday we get to go and meet people and I know one guy named Jeffery and he is really nice and he just says hi if I am just sitting there. Everyone has their flaws but they really do care and they’re all nice and not scary like everyone says.
AC: If you had the power to end or fix homelessness what would you do or how would you do it?
AR: I would want to start an organization like the FTS which is the Federal Transit Service and that was during the depression and basically what they did was like provide a shelter for the homeless and helped re-educate them, shelter them.

Giessella Elena Castaneda Reyes: A Young Woman With A Valiant Heart
By: Reyna Flores

Elena is a 16 year-old junior at High Tech High Chula Vista. I’ve known Elena since Freshman year, when we were 14. In those two years, I’ve seen her morals and kindness grow. We both have been taking the city bus to get to and from school
throughout our high school years. In our walks to the bus stop she often talked to me about her volunteer work. As she talked, she always sounded so responsible and her eyes glowed with determination. At that time I hadn't done much community service. Listening to her made me admire her. She seems so passionate about being nice and helping.

One time, she talked to me about waking up at 3 a.m. because she had to be at a homeless shelter by 5 a.m. with Miss Angie's advisory. I was glad to not be in her place. Then I felt guilty having those thoughts, because she genuinely spoke to me with amusement. Elena has been volunteering with the homeless for three years. This year we are focusing completely on the homeless population as a project. I decided Elena would be a perfect person to interview about her feelings towards it and experiences because of her sincere passion for the service she has been doing over the years. Elena enjoys helping out, especially the needy, and I'm sure she will continue to volunteer for as long as she can.

RF: Before you started volunteering, what was your first impression on homeless people?
EC: Uh well my first impression was that they- they all have their stories I mean we can't blame them for being homeless. And I didn't really think of them as bad people, I just thought they were people and I feel- I felt a lot of sympathy for them it's just that I was I guess kind of scared before I started volunteering. I wouldn't make contact I wouldn't uh talk to them uh and yeah.

RF: What made you want to volunteer?
EC: Well for the first time that I volunteered was for Ms. Angie's advisory, so basically we just went to the- to I think it was Saint Vincent de Paul's and (sniffles) I uh volunteered uh with serving food so I was um on one of the first rows and uh people would come up to me and say thank you and um it was just basically I wanted to go volunteer because I wanted to have the opportunity to serve the homeless and to just get to know more about them.

RF: What steps did you take in order to volunteer?
EC: Well I didn't really take any steps it was basically all Ms. Angie's doing, I just kind of took the initiative to actually go to the community service.

RF: What kinds of things do you do when you volunteer?
EC: Well it's basically just either it's either serving the people or it's uh working to create little lunches or as we did last time separating tortillas and um marinating the fish for the lunch it's b- it's just basically helping uh the organization with the food and then there's also the part where uh we got to prepare paper and like got to do crafts in order to prepare for an event.

RF: What goes through your mind when you see all these homeless?
EC: I would just wonder what they've been through, and how they feel 'cause I have- I can kind of relate to them and I- I feel very sad to see them go through it 'cause I have- I haven't been homeless but I've been close to homelessness so I know how they feel and I- I just want to help them in anyway that I can but sometimes it's hard.

RF: What were some of the challenges you faced while volunteering with homeless?
EC: Um okay so basically, just kind of comparing them to me 'cause I know that I felt really bad as myself kind of having to um move a lot because of our situation with money and how I thought it was so hard for us to like go to school and like um like I- I just like compared myself to them and I see how like they have it so much worse than me and I just like yeah just kind of relating myself to them was kind of the hard part.

RF: What was your favorite experience about volunteering?
EC: Um it was talking to them, I really enjoyed talking to them and just like knowing that I'm helping them out and knowing that even though they might not say it to me I know that someone who is receiving what I did is thanking- like is thankful for what we are doing and yeah.

RF: What has been your favorite organization to work with? Why?
EC: Saint Vincent de Paul's because I've been there um more- multiple times.

RF: What is something you learned, that you did not know about homeless people?
EC: Mm, basically that they just- they're also people and that they've- it's really- I mean it must take a lot of courage for them to actually come up and talk to us about their problems 'cause I know that it's hard for people to talk about their problems, and how hard it is for them like being close to homelessness and it just like- yeah I just realize it.

RF: What do you think is the most important thing all San Diegans should know, about homeless people?
EC: They should know that it's not- some of the people think it's- it was their choice they wanted to go into homelessness they decided to go through that- to that path, and basically just tell them that sometimes people can't um they can't- they can't really help it they are just they just can't come out of it it's- it's a problem that they're facing.

RF: What is something all San Diegans should do, for the homeless population?
EC: Um they should volunteer with people not just actual like, um they should volunteer not just want to help- um when I interviewed the officer they said that don't just go up to them and how they said that some people just go up to them and buy McDonald's and give them McDonald's-yes that might work for that day for that hour to k- to keep them um out of hunger but overall in like a week they'll still be hungry and basically just volunteering, overall is basically it.

RF: Based on your experiences from working at different organizations, what is the most effective strategy to raise homelessness awareness?
EC: Uh basically creating I guess um, community events- getting the community together and having presentations, going to uh- going to schools, going to classrooms, teaching them about homelessness and not just the overall but kind of in depth 'cause some people when they have just the- the basics of homelessness they kind of still don't get how important ending homelessness is.

RF: What do you think is the best advice to give to a homeless person wandering the streets?
EC: I would tell them that there is help out there and that even though it's hard to get on your feet it's worth it all on the end um just because they feel that they can't make it or it's hard that shouldn't get in their way of believing that they can have a better life than they do right now.

RF: If you were to start a homeless organization, what will you name it and what will you focus on?
EC: Okay so I've been thinking (chuckles) about this for a long time, um the name I'm not so sure um it's- I would name it Care, just plain Care and then I would basically focus- what I was doing is like what I was kind of thinking is that when I grow up I kind of want to create um
housing for them and basically from that housing I can separate the homeless from families who are homeless, people who are homeless, and then the people who are actually addicted to drugs, alcohol and have like mental illnesses and then from there just kind of give them each separately as individuals the attention they need and the services they need in order for them to uh have what in order to actually receive the attention that they need.
RF: In what ways do you think you can grow as a volunteer?
EC: Mm, well I’ve noticed that a lot of people um they learn more to sympathize, I-I think sympathy, sympathy is one of them and basically just learning that sometimes it is no all about you it’s about other people and just- just not being selfish think of others.
RF: What has been the saddest story you’ve heard about a homeless person?
EC: Well it wasn’t really sad it was just I was kind of thinking about what got him to that place, and I learned from him um ranting was he was a veteran and I guess after he came home from where he was stationed -wherever he was stationed- uh he didn’t- the government didn’t help him and I mean I find it really hard to believe that he worked for the government at one point and then when the government didn’t help him he just kind of stopped believing in the government. And then he kind of went against the government and tried to convince the people to stop. And it just kind of like he went through all that to help the government and at the end the government kind of just like, didn’t have the necessary help for him, and they just kind of the government let him down and that’s what like disappointed him.
RF: What accomplishment do you want a homeless organization to achieve?
EC: Uh basically just to, uh reduce the homelessness in whatever city or whatever area they plan to reduce.
RF: What skills did you bring to the community service events?
EC: I brought compassion, to volunteering and my hard work.
RF: What skills did you learn from volunteering with homeless people?
EC: I learned (sighs) I learned how to separate tortillas and I learned more morals than I already did have. I learned how to be open minded.
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A.G: Well, I think there have some amazing transitions happening. I don't know if you have heard of the HEARTH act [Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing]. So there's the transitions of HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] and, for instance, our continuing care money is separated to each of our agencies where we get scored by them to see how our project is doing and they provide funds from there. They are basically constructing themselves like they are creating a government committee and an advisory committee. They are basically shifting the power they have in function to make sure that we are compliant with ours. So there is change happening, but I think it might take a long time to try and solve. I honestly think it will shift. I recently went to a training for HUD were they talked about a small town in [either] Ohio or Iowa, where they actually solved the problem of homelessness in a very small town where only ten people were homeless.

N.C: Do you think that media has to do with our knowledge about the homeless, like they have given us the wrong idea?

A.G: Of course. The county sends a lot of money to do ad campaigns, you know the ones you see on the bus, benches about mental illnesses. I mean, they give a understanding about many different things and unfortunately the media plays a part in that. Honestly I think that if someone volunteers their time and they see you person to person, they get that human connection. [The homeless] aren't different from anyone else. I mean, we all had a relative, a friend of a friend, or even ourselves that were homeless at one point. They might have been at risk of being homeless, lost a job, had to sleep on a friends couch… so it's a human thing and I don't think they are different from you and I. I mean, they might have lost their job at a construction site or lost their job six months ago, so it can be a mixture of different variables. I've met people who have a PhDs who were homeless and it's also the economy that plays a part of it.

N.C: What do you think has been your most intense or rewarding experience you’ve working here at PATH?

A.G: There was a guy a while ago, at the very beginning, again we haven't been open for at least twelve months, but you have seen the start of our group, the Beat-en Path, and the client participation. From that group, there was an individual who was looking at the housing program and the excitement on his face... just having his application packet in his hands, you could see the fear, the excitement, all the feelings mixed into one of this new chapter in his life. It was so amazing to see. Also, a micro moment that happened this morning: an older, senior gentleman talked about how he got approved for an apartment at a senior housing and just to see his excitement... he talked about how he would sleep behind a bench and held his thing really neat and wrap it up. He was so thankful that he had been able to survive and just to have a day where he could be on a bed, his own place. So it was nice to hear someone being so grateful and positive and being able to see how lucky he was to have an apartment. Just to see those stories and seeing the stories we have as a staff really works with the clients the most. Their blood, sweat, and tears are here everyday connecting with them and hearing the bad times and the good times is just beautiful to see.

N.C: What has been the organization's biggest event?

A.G: Well, we don't want to be an attraction point because we aren't in an open site. We have educated the community, but also having your services utilities, so a lot of it comes from our outreach guys. That team goes out into the field and does all kinds of presentations to local agencies that are needed and reach out to folks we want to connect with, but a lot of it upstairs is funneled through our outreach team. The big event that we did have was about eight hundred or a thousand people at our grand opening on March 11th and you can probably still see stuff online about it, like on our Facebook page. It was just a fun event where people could see what we were about. I think it was also fun for the team because most of them started before we even had offices, desks, or chairs where we started at the housing commission and that was where we did our training... then we went to a little front door space and we started our outreach and then we finally got our space here.

N.C: Out of all the people who stay here, how many actually get a job after living? The goals that we are reaching for interim a hundred and thirty-four beds plus the sixteen. Count it together and that's a hundred and fifty beds. We have to get about thirty percent of the number of assisted individuals who had no income at the beginning of the program and the percentage of assisted individuals who increased their income. That means that if they already had an income or they leave with a job, we have about thirty percent. I think right now we have seventy-four percent which is really good, so we are above our goal. The one that might be the most challenging is for folks who gain employment and they are disabled, whether 's mentally, physically, or they're dealing with trauma or medical issues they need to address first. It's kind of challenging, but when you finally get to rest on a bed, take a nice long shower, and get some sleep and do it all over again... It was really exciting to see the numbers go up.

N.C: In your opinion, what do you think makes PATH more original than other organizations?

A.G: We bring the community together. I think we really know that we are not the experts in everything and we shouldn't be the experts in everything. We are good at pulling everyone in. We are the good kind of committee that pulls hands to work together because this is a community issue and we should solve it as a committee. We have legal aid who is good with legal situations, we have [Veteran Affairs] who deal with vet issues, we have Sally Hampers with medical and Manuel with metal. So we have these experts that work together to help. Being able to work with all of these agencies is PATH's biggest strength. The building itself, the project connects housing, it's composed of Alpha project contractor floors, perser grants for those with special needs. We have all these layers of special things and we really come together to make this nice bouquet of programs and that's PATH's greatest strength.

N.C: What do you think the future of PATH looks like?

A.G: That's a good question. We had couple of people tour from Colorado and a few people intern in San Jose and I really see people duplicating this model via contacting PATH or even doing their own version. I think people need to have all these things in one place. It's just a positive model. I think you will see it duplicated, definitely.
SF: I thought it was going to be really depressing to see all the people, but it turned out that the people weren't as bad as I thought. They were funny. They had a lot of fun with each other. It's like they knew each other.

GF: What was a moment that stood out to you?
SF: There were a few moments that stood out to me... I saw one person play a little joke on another person and they started laughing. And then another part is when they started putting music on and everyone around us started singing at the top of their lungs and dancing around and having a good time.

GF: Why did those moments stand out to you?
SF: Those moments stood out to me because they changed my perspective on homeless people.

GF: Would you continue to volunteer?
SF: I would continue to volunteer because it was a fun experience and it changed my perspective. I would like to take my family out there, or maybe some more friends to show them that what we think of homeless people is completely different than the truth.

GF: Did any of your stereotypes regarding homeless people change?
SF: Yeah. I thought that homeless people were dirty, smelly, and rude. They weren't as well groomed as we are, but pretty decent and they weren't rude... they were nice, saying thank you and everything that we did was life changing in a way.

GF: How would you spread the word about homelessness so that people can do something about it?
SF: Like I said before, I would spread the word by bringing in friends and family to show them more about homeless people and help them out a bit.

GF: What would you do to prevent homelessness and what do you think the community should do?
SF: I don't think there is anything I could do to prevent homelessness, but I can help in a way. My family, we go around town sometimes and see the people on the streets begging for change and we give them either money or if there's some place like fast food we go buy them some food. I think the community could help by building more houses. I know my church does it. But I really don't go to those. I really should.

GF: Why do you give out food to the homeless?
SF: I give food to the homeless because my family taught me to give back and help people. Especially those in need because they are less fortunate than I am.

GF: Why do you give food and not money?
SF: I give food instead of money because I feel like if I give them money, they would not spend the money on something they really need.

GF: Do you believe helping the homeless is good or bad?
SF: I believe helping the homeless is a good thing because we need to help people get off the streets so they can have a normal life.
Change Doesn't Happen by Itself
By: Luke Helton

For this project we did research on homelessness and how much of it there is. Also we went to two different homeless centers and helped at Saint Vincent de Paul's by serving food or helping to make it in the back. We also got a tour at the San Diego Rescue Mission and they told us what the main homeless they deal with and how they treat and help them. For this project we also read a lot about the depression and how it affected the homeless and we also read chapter from the book “Down and out, on the road The homeless in American history”. And that is what lead up to this interview because we had to pick someone that helped with the homeless and send them an email requesting an interview but mine never responded so I interviewed one of my classmates.

The person I interviewed is Jose Furreil. He is one of my classmates that went to the two homeless centers and did research on homeless. Furreil (as we call him) has been attending High Tech for four years and is in Ms. Angie’s Humanities class for his junior year. The reason I chose to interview Furreil is because he went on our field trips and has been involved in the project and I wanted to get a point of view from someone that they do not volunteer often and also because he just like anybody else and so I wanted to know what he thought of homelessness.

L.H: So the first question I have is why volunteer?
J.F: It was a school project but I was also really excited to help people that were in need or are not as fortunate as most people are. And just for the satisfaction.
L.H: So what did you learn when you volunteered?
J.F: I learned to be thankful for all the stuff I have. And being thankful and listening to my parents and working hard in school so that I could get a good future and not end up in the streets.
L.H: So do you think the homeless people on the street are uneducated or lazy and that is why they are homeless?
J.F: No I don’t but I think this is the safest way for me not to end up on the streets. And I learned that I am not scared but would not like to be homeless.
L.H: So what did you do when you volunteered?
J.F: I was in the back in the kitchen helping all of them A.J. and a lot of other friends to take out boxes of tilapia and stack them on a carts so we could feed the homeless and after we had to cut the tilapia out of their individual bags and we cut like over two thousand bags of tilapia.
L.H: So will you try to continue to volunteer?
J.F: I will yes I will try but I do not know where I will or when I can.
L.H: So if you were to go volunteer what do you think you would try to do like volunteer like feeding breakfast or helping with a food drive, or simply helping count the homeless or?
F.F: I would do a food drive.
L.H: What was your impression of volunteering?
J.F: That I would see a lot of homeless people which i did but at the time I didn’t know they were homeless because they did not look like homeless so my impression is not everyone is stereotypical homeless you see on the street.
L.H: So what was something that surprised you?
J.F: The lady that was helping me was homeless and I would of never thought see would of been homeless and that they are nicer than what they look like.
L.H: So what moment stood out to you?
J.F: Seeing a homeless man in a wheelchair looking helpless and cold while I was warm.
L.H: What about the homeless people smiling at each other and being happy even though they don’t have anything?
J.F: I don’t think there happy that they don’t have anything but that you don’t always have to be sad and upset in those types of situations and.
L.H: So what did you think of homeless before you volunteered?
J.F: I did not think much of them i would just think of them as a guy holding a cardboard piece that has a writing for a dollar i’m hungry and there walmart carts.
L.H: What did you think of homeless after you volunteer?
J.F: I thought that they were not that like they were nice people you just need to get to know them most people would ignore them just because of their looks and smells and not all of them came from bad backgrounds and were not all drug addicts.
L.H: So have you volunteered before without your school?
J.F: Yes I have well. It was not in the U.S. I actually went over to T.J. We gave homeless people food, blankets, water and we even had a raffle for who would take a microwave.
L.H: So what do you think is the difference between homeless in America to homeless in other countries like Mexico?
J.F: I don’t think there is much of a difference. Some people are born into poverty and lost on the street. They did not go to school so they stayed like in Mexico. If a kid is born in poverty he does not go to school for most of the time and he stays in the streets and thats all he knows and here in the U.S. that homeless people or homeless kids have more of a chance of leaving.
L.H: So do you think people in America that are homeless might have it easier because Americans they like to get the newest thing available so they might just throw something away or donate it somewhere and it might go to the homeless. Do you think that would happen in Mexico?
J.F: I think so. I think that problem is all over the world and not just in America that some people are just greedy rich people and they don’t care and they are not grateful.
Together As a Community To End Homelessness: Katie Bradel
By: Mahlia Lagai

Katie Bradel is the Volunteer Coordinator at the Monarch School. She plans the volunteer work that is held at the Monarch School in downtown San Diego. She is such an inspirational person with how dedicated she is to the work that she does with Monarch School and Invisible Children, another non-profit organization here in San Diego. Even though we didn't have a long conversation, I could tell by her response and the sound of her voice that she is passionate about the topic of helping young people who are less fortunate.

Ms. Bradel was a volunteer at the Invisible Children programs in Uganda for six years. She is now working with Monarch School, but still goes to help out with Invisible Children. It is so inspiring to hear about somebody's goals to help better the community. It really shows that if you put your mind to it and you're passionate about the work you do, then the finish line won't be so hard to reach. She believes that by the support of the community we can end homelessness.

ML: How does your work impact these kids?
KB: The community with our students and help them trans. uh go through a process of transformation for success.
ML: That's really cool. So, um how long has the Monarch school been like helping out these kids?
KB: Well, it kinda goes through some different stages, um for example we were first open in 1988 as a drop in center, so that was when it was just a high school and there was only one teacher, um but since then we've expanded more and more um and now we're K through 12 and we have a brand new building. We moved in 5 months ago and we doubled our student population to 300.
ML: Wow that's really cool
KB: So, even though its been around since the late 80's um and its current space we've only been here for 5 months, so we've been through a lot of different transitional periods.

ML: That's really awesome. Ok, so um in your opinion how does a school for uh homeless kids affect the community?
KB: Um, I think, well that our end goal is to break the cycle of poverty and a lot of, you know all of our student didn't decide to become homeless and a lot of their parents didn't decide to either, but through different situations and the economy and all of that, then somehow or someway they ended up in the situation that they're in. So, I think that our school really affects and helps the community by changing and by providing education and to break that cycle and to have future leaders that aren't on the streets like their parents have ended up, but are able to help their families.
ML: That's really great. Um, how do you feel when you see these children and learn about their background and what they've been through?
KB: Um, I think that all of our students have very individual and specific stories and no two students are alike and they're not part of statistic; they're apart of their own life and their own story and how they are able to strive and work hard and um just get their education through a lot of other obstacles. I know when I was in highschool, it was hard enough and I didn't really have any obstacles. Um, but these students go through very difficult times, even just to get to school everyday, um after school. You know there are many barriers and obstacles that they have to go through. So, its really inspiring to see how hard they work.

ML: Yeah, I understand, we've been uh volunteering at St.Vincent De Pauls and the San Diego Rescue Mission, and its been such a humbling experience, its really cool to see everything. Um, so what's your overall opinion on homelessness, and has it changed over the years that you've worked at the Monarch School?
KB: Um, definitely. I think that it's...a lot of people when they hear the word homeless their mind goes to the people that are living on the streets with the shopping cart or maybe someone standing on the corner with a sign and that's kind of the stereotype that people straight go to when they hear the word. At our school, its a very different story and I see a lot of people working hard and going over various obstacles they've put into. So, I think overall since then Monarch, the stereotype has definitely been growing and I've been inspired by the families that I'm surrounded by.

ML: That's really cool. Where do you see yourself and the organization in 10 years?
KB: Um, that's a good question. One of my friends just asked me that the other day. In 10 years I see myself continuing to grow the programs for Monarch School, to be able to reach more students and more effectively.
ML: Ok, so I understand that you and my teacher Ms. Angie worked with Invisible Children. Can you tell me more about that?
KB: I worked with Invisible Children in 2004, and I worked there for 6 years and I was a volunteer there, in our programs in Uganda.
ML: That's really cool!
KB: Yeah its really cool because now the Invisible Children offices are a block away from Monarch School. So, I'm able to go other there and still help out there sometimes and then we have Invisible Children volunteers who come here, to Monarch and help out a lot as well.
ML: That's so awesome, I actually want to look into that. Uh, so what's your plan of action to reduce homelessness, like if you could reduce the numbers of people out on the streets?
KB: Um, yeah so the monarch school is a lot longer long term plan of action. Um, a lot of other organizations who work with the homeless are a more of that night or that week emergency situation shelters, but because were a school we look at the long term life of the student, and um our goal is that all of our high schoolers go on to college or trade schools or the military and are able to have careers that then are in the future able give back to Monarch as a whole and through those long time goals that were able to break the cycle of poverty with these students through their education and they're able in term to support their parents and their families because of the education they received at Monarch.
ML: Wow, thats really cool. I actually do want to volunteer at the Monarch School, I think it would be really fun.
KB: Yeah, that'd be great. We don't have any volunteer opportunities for anyone under 18 unfortunately. Um, just because of our students sensitive situations, but as soon as you graduate and you're 18 we would love to have you volunteer.
ML: Definitely.
KB: But then we also have people under 18 at different school hold volunteer by holding supply drives. So, either for toiletries or socks or underwear, or school supplies or different opportunities like that.
ML: That's really cool. Do you ever think homelessness will end?
KB: I don't think it will end completely, but I definitely can see the reasons, the specific reasons for homelessness ending. So, uh for example some people who don't decide to be homeless, it's just because of certain situations that happen in life. Whether its medical problems or language barrier or a job layoff or the economy. Um, and I think that in those situations there is a possibility for those people to get the support and help they need to not be homeless if they don't wanna be. I think that people who decide to be homeless are just because of their lifestyle choices, that might not ever end but for people who don't wanna be I think that it can end by the support in the community.

Shaina Gross is the Vice President of Impact Strategies and Mobilization at United Way of San Diego County. The United Way is an organization that focuses on education, financial self-sufficiency, health and homeless prevention. United Way ranked number one on Forbes “The Largest U.S. Charities For 2012" by collecting almost $4 Billion dollars in donations.

I was able to schedule an interview with Ms. Gross at High Tech High Chula

EF: What is the relation between the United Ways and the San Diego Rescue Mission?
SG: We partner with the Rescue Mission to develop an agreed upon vision of what we want to see changed in homelessness in San Diego. We then figure out who else we need to help us (other agencies, government, etc). Then we identify the role that each group should play. For the San Diego Rescue Mission, they were the best to provide the recuperative beds for homeless individuals discharged from the hospital. We provide them with funds to support the work they are doing.

EF: Why choose the San Diego Rescue Mission? Why not any other charity?
SG: We chose the San Diego Rescue Mission through a competitive process. Various non-profit agencies applied, and wrote a grant proposal of how they would achieve the goals we had outlined (reducing homelessness). The Rescue Mission had an impressive plan of how to help the people, as well as how the would sustain the program after our grant was over. We felt that they were in the best position to treat the clients, and had good relationships with other key groups - such as the hospitals that would be discharging the patients to them. They submitted the best proposal and had the best plan of how to help reduce homelessness.

EF: What do you see as the most effective and efficient way to end homelessness?
SG: The Federal government has a department called Housing and Urban Development, or HUD. They fund all of the homeless efforts across the country. They have identified what they call “best practices" or “proven practices." These are methods that have been tested and researched and found to be more effective than other methods. In homelessness, the best practice is called "Housing First, Housing Plus." This means that you first put homeless people into safe, stable housing. And then you bring them all of the services that they need (addiction services, mental health services, job skills training, and more). The old way was that people had to first address all of their issues before they were allowed to be in a shelter or housing. But, you can imagine how hard it is to keep track of your medications and take them at the same time every day, when you don't even know where you'll sleep tonight. The Housing First method puts people into housing and then brings them what we call wrap-around services. This is a very effective method for people who have been homeless for a long time. For those who have only been homeless for a short time, transitional housing, with fewer resources, is more effective. This means that we need to know what each homeless person needs, because they all need different things.

EF: According to the US Census Bureau, San Diego holds the third largest number of US Military Veteran Resident falling short to Los Angeles & Maricopa County. San Diego County is a home for 240,677 (Study from 2011) US Military Veterans, do you see these as a big variable in San Diego's problem of homelessness?
SG: Yes, veterans are a big variable in the homeless population. We estimate that 25-35% of the homeless in San Diego are veterans. Often they transition out of the military and are dealing with mental health issues, or don't have the job skills needed to transfer into mainstream employment.

EF: Apart from Military Veterans, what do you see as another big reason why people go into homelessness?
SG: Struggling with mental illness and not having the resources to handle the issue is another big reason. There is a stigma about mental illness, so often people don't get the help that they need. In addition, sometimes the doctors or medications that you may need aren't covered by your health insurance. So, many people struggling with mental illness find other ways to cope – primarily alcohol and drug abuse. This can lead to lost jobs, poor relationships with family, etc which can all lead to homelessness.

EF: What can the average San Diego
residents do to help end the homelessness problem?
SG: There are many agencies who serve the homeless and they can contact one of them and ask how they can help. It's best to get involved in an existing organization's work, rather than giving money or clothes individually.

H.G: Start off by telling me a little bit about yourself and how and why you got involved in this organization.
W.P: I am the Chief Executive Officer for San Diego Youth Services (SDYS), which means I'm the boss (we both chuckled). I've been doing non-profit work since 1985 here in the community. I am a social worker, I have my master's degree in social work. I've always worked with at-risk youth and their families. That's always been my focus in my career as far as social work. I got involved with this position here because I had worked with the previous CEO. She was retiring and recruited me for the position. The reason I really decided this was a good fit for me, after I had gone through all of the interviews and was offered the position, was that it fit for what I am passionate about. Helping kids who are at a disadvantage and are at-risk is who I love to work with. We need to address their needs comprehensively. So, this is why I started working here, it's a great organization and we're doing credible things.

H.G: How long has this organization been operating?
W.P: The organization was founded in 1970. The founder, John Wedemeyer, was a brand new graduate from the school of social work and about a year after, him and his wife found a homeless kid on the street. They said that it was ridiculous; that there shouldn't be kids without a home. So he and group of volunteers decided they should do something about it since the kids they met wasn't the only one. So they started SDYS and they started the first shelter for runaway and homeless youth in San Diego. It was only the 3rd in the nation so far. From there, volunteers and staff have grown into what it is today.

H.G: How long have you been working here?
W.P: I've been the CEO here for a little over 13 years.

H.G: And what role do you play as the CEO?
W.P: Well ultimately I was picked by the Board Of Directors and I am responsible for the overall operations of the agency. So basically I have the accountability to make sure everything goes well. Obviously I have a staff under me to help me with finances, project, business operations policies and what not. My job really is to work with the board, policy makers, funders, to make sure that the issues are being addressed that affect at-risk youth.

H.G: I know you guys have other outreach programs for youth who are not necessarily homeless, so what exactly do you guys specifically do for the homeless youth population?
W.P: We have three different divisions within SDYS and one of our divisions is the homeless and transition age youth programs. Transition age youth are those that turned 18 and many of them end up homeless. The second division is our child abuse and neglect division which deals with children who have been abused and most of them have been taken from their families and put into foster homes. And our third division is the community service for behavior health. That is where we offer programs for substance abuse, mental wellness, therapy, counseling. But if you ask companies in San Diego we are the primary provider for homeless youth in San Diego. Other organizations deal with this age group as well but we specialize in it.

H.G: How do you guys differ from other organizations such as St. Vincent De Paul or San Diego Rescue Mission?
W.P: A unique thing that we do separate from Vincent De Paul, we have a great relationship with them, is that the youth that we serve who are homeless are not accompanied by adults. So they don't have a parent involved and they don't really have a place to go. So the youth that we provide to are essentially the kids who really have no place to go.

H.G: Is this the primary location for SDYS and do you have more locations?
W.P: We actually have 14 locations in San Diego and that isn't counting where our staff are colocated in the juvenile detention centers and on school campuses. We have many staff that are housed there as well. For the homeless population we have the shelter called The Storefront. It's a shelter for the homeless ages 12-17. So we have 3 major components to The Storefront, we have a street outreach team that goes out on the streets every night and they try to connect with homeless kids on the street. Bringing them resources such as food, clothing, blankets, socks and we
try to get them to come into our shelter. They don't always want to come into the shelter so we try to meet their needs on the streets. Then we have a shelter that is a 20 bed shelter that you can come in on a temporary basis to get housing, food, and hopefully develop skills to go back into society and get out of homelessness. The night shelter is where they sleep but we also have a day shelter that is attached to the Storefront where youth can come in during the day. If they don't go to school they can receive some sort of education from us. We also have transitional housing for youth who are 18+ and might be homeless who need help. We have apartment complexes for them here. At this location we have a lot of young moms who have children under the age of 5. In addition to that we provide a lot of support services. We provide mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, parenting life skills training, job training and more.

H.G: What are the three main reasons people you have encountered become homeless?
WP: That's a really good question. It's different for youth than it is for adults. Most youth are homeless because they are coming from a home that they cannot stay at. Most homeless kids come from families who are dysfunctional for different reasons such as substance abuse or neglect. A very high percentage of homeless youth are LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning). Often times we find that when youth come out as LGBT their parents kick them out onto the streets. Also there are families who are homeless to begin with and bring kids into the mix and can't provide.

H.G: Who is one person that has changed your perspective on homelessness?
WP: Wow, it's going to be hard to just pick one. One that really stood out for me is a young girl who came to our doors, and her story really made me see how families in our community really do struggle. It was a 13-year-old girl living in our shelter who had been living on the streets with her parents who were substance abusers. Come to find out, her parents had been trying to sell her for their drug money. At the time, my own daughter was around this age so I remember thinking what parent could do that to their ownchild? We were able to get her help and put into a foster home. We have specialized services for victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. What happens is there are pimps and gang members who prey on these kids on the streets, this is why the 24-72 hours right after a child becomes homeless are very crucial because if we don't get to them these bad guys might first, and force these kids into prostitution. And unfortunately for whatever reason there are a market of people who want kids. It's just horrible. So we have a group for girls who are victims of that. So that same girl got those services and that is what really changed her life.

H.G: What are some ways people can help the homeless population through your organization or others?
WP: We have a volunteer program, and a volunteer coordinator, so all opportunities go through her. She tries to match people's interest areas with the needs of our programs. Sometimes groups of people might want to help out at the shelter, like my daughter with her girl scout troop, they came in and brought meals during the holidays. Others might want to do activities with the youth. And then there's individual opportunities.

H.G: What is one thing that the majority of people do not know about youth homelessness?
WP: About kids being sexually exploited. People have no idea that it is happening to a significant number of kids on the streets. Sometimes these young people are in such a desperate place that they will often exchange shelter, food and water for that life because they feel they have no other option. So I think people don't really quite understand that it happens here in San Diego. Most people would never believe that.

H.G: Do you personally believe their is a stereotype around the word "homeless"?
WP: Yes, I think when most people think of the homeless they think of the person pushing a shopping cart, or they guy who is dirty and disheveled on the corner asking for change. That's the stereotype. The one thing about homeless youth is that you don't see them. They are invisible. During the Point-In-Time counts it is never accurate because they don't count the youth. The youth hide, they blend in, and most go to school. They are very hard to count and they definitely don't fit that stereotype.

H.G: Do you guys have any relation to Monarch High School?
WP: In fact Monarch started in our shelter, way back when it wasn't called monarch. It was a teacher from the San Diego County of Education who came in to teach the homeless youth in the shelter. After time they grew, and we grew so they got their own place. We have youth that will go to Monarch but more often we try to keep youth, if they want to, in their home school. Because one of the problems for the homeless is that they tend to lose touch with their education. That's where they have their friends, and connections. They lose everything when they become homeless. If possible I believe they should stay at their home school. Monarch is a great alternative if they are behind or don't have a school to be connected with.

H.G: If you could snap your fingers and solve the issue of homelessness what would you specifically do, and realistically, what do you think it would take?
WP: I don't think it's that hard. I say that because I had a cousin who came into town 2-3 weeks ago and she's from the Netherlands. She's a social workers there and they don't have a homeless problem. Especially with youth they don't have a homeless problem. What they do is they don't let kids on the streets. They don't let them become homeless. They will find the homeless youth and give them all the resources and services and find them housing. One of the problems we have here, and in many cities, is a lack of resources for the youth. Especially for the youth who are not in the foster care system. If you aren't in the foster system, there are very few options. We are one of the only places they can go. So I think if we really put the resources into it and worked with kids all the way up to the age of 18, regardless of why they left their home we could solve youth homelessness. One of the reason Child Welfare can't get involved with homeless children is because they say it's not abuse or neglect. But if we had a system that said it doesn't matter why they left, we just need to get them help and resources, there would be less and less children falling into homelessness. We need to give them whatever they need to not slip back into homelessness.

Right now there are so many kids who slip through the cracks because we have a very robust system for kids in foster care but for those who weren't there's very little we can do. It's not about getting more money it's about re-prioritizing where the money is used.
Melissa Beals: A Woman with a Heart
By: Sierra Green

The first time I met Melissa Beals in person, I felt as though I had just inhaled a breath of cool, fresh air. I'd exchanged a few emails with her prior, but it hadn't been enough for me to get a sense of who she was as a person. I was immediately struck by her self-confidence. Beals is beautiful, intelligent, and down-to-earth. She breezed into the room with a big smile and the kind of posture that commands respect. Yet despite all of this, she was far from intimidating. As soon as she started speaking, I realized how caring and kind she is. Melissa Beals strikes an impressive balance between loving mom and accomplished businesswoman, and she has amazing stories to tell.

Ms. Beals has been the program director of the IMPACT (Intensive Mobile Psychosocial Assertive Community Treatment), a program of Community Research Foundation since 2006. The CRF and IMPACT provide intensive, community-based, case management services for 224 homeless adults in the Central and North Central regions of San Diego County. As program director, Ms. Beals not only oversees the IMPACT programs in San Diego, but also oversees public relations for the organization.

SG: Tell me about how you started at IMPACT.
MB: Yeah... I was recruited during the RFP writing, the grant writing process, because I had experience working in this area, in another program similar to this. SG: What is the number one reason you think it’s important to help the homeless people?
MB: There are so many... That's the difference between back home and here. Myself and my boys see so much homelessness, especially where we live. Here in San Diego there is homelessness everywhere and my boys will even ask [about] them. I never knew about that at all. I never even saw a homeless person [where I'm from]. It’s just very prevalent with the population that we specifically work with. We work with those individuals who are high utilizers of psychiatric services, so if there is no intervention, the cycle just keeps continuing. And I just have a heart for people with mental illnesses. People just don’t understand. When they see a homeless person, they don’t see them as a whole... just someone who is lazy and not working and that’s not the case. They usually have a mental illness that impairs them or they’ve had a lot of trauma in their history. So they are just a cry for help and I have a heart for that.

SG: You talked about the number of homeless in San Diego. Doesn’t San Diego have the third largest amount?
MB: You know, I don’t know the latest stats but we do get a lot of transient folks because of our weather. It wouldn’t surprise me, it wouldn’t surprise me at all.
SG: ... When did you first become passionate about helping the homeless people?
MB: Um, really... [I] didn’t become passionate until I actually started with CRF. I had a passion for people, helping people with mental illness. Obviously that’s why I’m in the field. But I hadn’t really ever considered working with the homeless population until CRF started recruiting me for this position and for the program... so um yeah probably when I started working here about 2006. And more so because I came from working in the children’s world. I mean I had worked prior to that I worked in another ACAT program but having worked with adults and children like I see like if they don’t get intervention then I see what they are going to grow up like and [what they’ll] likely have a more probability of becoming and on the flip side I also see in working with our clients now probably what they experienced in the children’s system which is not always the greatest.
SG: So working here made you even more compassionate?
MB: Yes absolutely.
SG: And how do you specifically help the homeless?
MB: Well, I’m obviously more behind the scenes than on the front line. I’m usually pulled in more for when there is a crisis. Um, I look at CRF as everybody helping the homeless. We have a lot of people at our central office because, whether it’s somebody in accounting, processing our receipts to make sure that we are able to purchase items for our staff, or somebody going over our policies and procedures to make sure that we are keeping our staff safe and that we are abiding by the law, or processing insurance so our staff can drive. I mean there are so many jobs that go on behind the scenes that make it work for our front line staff that help on a day to day basis. Um so specifically working with them directly, not so much. But I do the overall, everyday work to try and make it run smoothly around here. And to keep our program funded. You know I do a lot of liaison work with the County and try to make sure we have a good reputation and are doing a good job and training staff to make sure they feel competent and adequate and prepared.
SG: And so you said making sure you have a good reputation. How do you do that?
MB: Um, by going above and beyond what’s required. By making sure we’re doing what we say we’re going to do in our contract, and being respectful to other organizations and agencies working with us. Um Um we have a moto in our RFP of doing whatever it takes, whether that’s a front line staff or me in a County meeting. Just working and collaborating.
SG: And so the front line staff are the people who work directly?
MB: Yeah that’s what I refer to as our staff that have everyday contact.
SG: And what do they do?
MB: ... So um in a nutshell just to let you know so we’re a program has roughly 250 clients in our program. They have to come into our program homeless and once they come to our program our goal is to get them off the street so we try to house them even like the same day. So we have a housing specialist that we work with. They coordinate with our intake specialist who those two are the first staff that clients will have contact with. And then once the client is opened and housed we transfer them to one of two teams. We have the clients split up into two teams just because there are so many of them. And then on each team we have the team lead who runs the day to day...
operations for the team. A psychiatrist, RN’s, we have an employment specialist, substance abuse specialist, peer specialist who is somebody who has experienced mental illness themselves. Perhaps been a consumer of mental health services. And then we have a couple masters level and bachelors level clinicians. We also have a probation officer that we share between the teams. That’s everybody on the teams. So its quite a variety of services that we provide. Its a one stop shop. Yeah we try to get the housing first, we try to give the client choice on where they live, they type of housing they want to live in, and try to get them in immediately because if we can meet their basic needs and their survival needs then they don’t have to focus on surviving, whether or not they are going to get physically or sexually assaulted on the streets or how they are going to survive, whether they are going to stay warm, or were they are going to get their next meal. If we can help them meet those basic needs then we can help them focus on what are your goals for your life? Are you wanting to go back to work, then they have the opportunity to focus their energy on what direction they want to go next.

SG: How could the community help the homeless?

MB: That’s a good question. Well I would basically, an initial response would be to volunteer and get more involved… But I think its also just education… I think if people became more educated about what homelessness is what it looks like and the more they know what’s going on behind the scenes instead of just looking at someone on the street and not knowing the person’s story or why they are there for that reason. That would really really help if they were more educated about those with severe and persistent mental illness and substance abuse because a lot of our clients have co occurring illnesses with substance abuse. So I think if they could just some how become more educated. I know the County has put a big push [that] its up to us campaign. I don’t know if you’ve seen that. Billboards, posters, TV commercials, they have a website that’s good to refer people to so they have been trying to educate more through that. Specifically for homelessness, too. It might be a good website for you to look at. Itsup-tous.org is what it is. It talks a lot about our housing projects that the County is sponsoring for the homeless too, as far as permanent housing not temporary housing… on that website there’s also interviews of clients of our program and other programs like ours. So you can look at videos there. Some of our staff are on there…

SG: Who is someone who inspires you to make a difference or help the homeless?

MB: Um well I’ll think of someone like recently I guess. Someone who keeps me motivated. There’s an old woman in our neighborhood who would chronically go around pushing a cart. She appeared to be homeless. She was looking for pop cans… she was adamant, she was diligent, she would do this everyday, I would see her out there. And she was very skinny, very fragile and I don’t know why, but I was drawn to wanting to meet her -- to wanting to know her. But every time I would see her I had my small children with me and just kind of felt a little reserved, I didn’t feel comfortable with them being [with me]. One day my husband and I were driving, we were driving along and I was like oh there she is again! And so we were driving by but we were going on to an on ramp on the interstate. We couldn’t stop because we were in traffic and everybody was behind us. But as we were driving by I looked down and I saw her feet. And they were just appalling! Just her feet were bloodied and swollen and purple and [I] don’t even know how she walked. I don’t even know how she walked and it just broke my heart … but I couldn’t do anything because I was right in the midst of crazy traffic but I remember it just broke my heart and [I was] just crying and wanting to help her. And so she vanished [and] I didn’t see her for a few months. Eventually I ran into her again. I pulled over and got to go and meet her. I met with her and again it’s just somebody taking the time to stop and reach out and help somebody. When I met with her she isn’t someone who is walking the streets looking for or begging for money, she is someone who couldn’t even speak with me because she felt she was hearing voices and she was paranoid and she felt people were out to kill her and to rape her so we had to sit and correspond through paper and pen. She was even leery about that. It was just really really sad because I don’t know if anybody had ever taken the time to sit down with her and try to get her services. Tried to get her the help she needed. Here she is actively psychotic and she is 62. And so I was able to get her 5050ed which means she was involuntarily hospitalized and get her the care, you know, point her in the right directions. Its people like that that inspire me. Unless you take the time to actually get to know somebody and actually help them then they’re probably not ever going to get the help they need. They will always be seen as this scary person that’s just lazy and not was not the case at all. She was actively psychotic and just wandering… they are everywhere! I think of when we were ramping up as a program we did a lot of outreach. Like we would actually go out and recruit people because had to ramp up. Now we can get referrals from hospitals, or from anywhere. But when we were first starting we were going to the beaches, we were going to bridges, we were going to intersections and just recruiting people and we heard story after story after story of people who are similar. Of people who have psychotic break[s] and who don’t get the help that they need and have some sort of traumatic event in their life whether its a divorce a death or some other environmental stressor that could trigger their psychosis.

SG: How did you do that? Did you call a PERT team?

MB: No I just called the police. I didn’t have to go through PERT. I went through non emergency police and they came out and they looked at her feet and they were like oh we need to get her to the hospital. I haven’t seen her on the streets since. So I hope she’s in a good place and getting help. SG: Would it have been different if you had gone through PERT?

MB: Um no PERT I usually use for someone who may be violent or refusing help where she was, I was able to correspond with her on paper and she was willing to go to the hospital. She was reluctant at first but eventually she agreed to be assessed by the police and coaxed into going. She was a little bit reluctant. But she ended up going. But it was great because I had everything on paper to show the police. This woman is actively psychotic. It wasn’t just me telling them trying to get them to take her.

SG: If you could tell the community one thing about the homeless people or about how to help them, what would it be?

MB: Um I guess the biggest way I would want to help is just to try to get rid of stigma. I’m not saying that people need to
I was able to get a last minute interview with Juliette Sherry. I got to meet her during our tour at The San Diego Rescue Mission when our class visited as part of the project on homelessness. I really liked the way she talked about helping others with so much passion.

Juliette is the Community Relations and Event Manager at the San Diego Rescue Mission. She is originally from Sacramento, but moved to San Diego recently to take on this position at the Rescue Mission. When I interviewed her in November, she had been with the organization for only five months, but her newness does not distract from the significance of her work. She plans all of the events that keep the Mission going as well as coordinates large food donations like those from the San Diego Padres and Petco Park. She is a beautiful woman, from the inside out. She shared with me, that her heart is full of the hearts of all the 100 kids that she has been able to get to know at the Rescue Mission. When she offered our class a tour of the Rescue Mission, she inspired me to want to do better things in life, which is exactly why I think she is a hero in our community.

AP: So one of my first questions is, how long have you been working here?
JS: So I been here five and half months, five months
AP: Well it looks like you’ve done like a lot it the past five months!
JS: I love this place, so it feels like forever! (laughing)
AP: How did you start working here?
JS: My husband and I were going to move and, I was doing sales for a company in Sacramento and so umm we were gon- na transfer but I just wanted to work for non-profit again so I umm saw the application and I applied and they called me on the next day and I flew down from Sacramento, that bought a ticket because I knew I was gonna get the job so (both laughing) yeah I flew down the next day and inter- view.
AP: What’s your title in this job? JS: I’m the community relations and events manager. So I do, I manage all different community activities and groups and go out and talk about the mission, and then I planed all of our event here too.
AP: Wow thats very interesting. Are you the only one who does this job?

J.S: Yeah so I do that, we have, so I am part of like with a non-profit development team, so we are the ones that raise all the money to keep the lights on and keep everything going, so we have individuals gives manager, umm that does a bunch of staff and we also do a bunch of direct mail and grants so we have a lady that oversees all the direct mail and grants.

AP: That’s very interesting, like I’ve never gotten to know more about projects like this.
JS: Yeah non-profits are pretty cool, umm you know businesses-- they’re the same, but total opposites on the way they operate, because it’s all about being efficient and you’re asking for money because you have a product if you have a business or a service and then here we’re providing services and we’re asking people to support us. So we have to ask and talk about what we are doing and like Herbert said we don’t take any government money so we literally raise every penny of that, usually its about in cash nine million dollars of sending mail pieces to people’s mail, asking and just generous hearts of people in the community that love the people here.

AP: What’s the reason why you don’t ac- cept money from the Government?
JS: We are faith based organization, so they won’t umm, if we were to take money from the government they dictate the way you do your program and we’d rather have the freedom to run it the way we want to instead of umm, doing what the govern- ment says because we are Christian, if that makes sense.

AP: What do you think people in San Diego should know about the Rescue Mission?
JS: That there’s, you know roughly a hun- dred women and kids every night that have absolutely no where else to go but the mission you know. And the people that you don’t think about, that are homeless it’s the kid that you’re in class with that you never know, that comes here with his mom and little siblings every night and packs of every day and comes here and that’s the only shower and maybe the only clothes and only food that they’re going to get is that. (tears welling)

AP: What is something that people can do to help the rescue mission?
JS: So they can support us in a buncher ways where its financially or donating any umm items that they have that they don’t need anymore or doing a drive.
Kevin Malone: A Life of Service
By: AJ Kemp

Kevin Malone is the executive director of the San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP), an organization that seeks to find creative solutions to community concerns. Mr. Malone has a long history of service to community and the greater good in society. His activism and service has led him to amazing and inspiring life stories that all of society can learn from.

He was born in the State of Washington and attended Notre Dame, where he received a degree in mechanical engineering. He later joined the Peace Corps, where he did work in Sierra Leon and other parts of West Africa. After leaving the Peace Corp, he continued to do work in Sri Lanka and Cambodia with his wife. While he was in Cambodia, he was kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge, and was the first person to ever be released by them. Mr. Malone's entire life seems to have been dedicated to service and learning how to better address the needs of people around the world. For this reason, he is a true hero!

AJ: Where did you attend college?
KM: University of Notre Dame
AJ: And did that have anything to do with your path to philanthropy?
KM: I wouldn't say I'm in philanthropy, but, I would say that the choice in collage had something to do with my interest in being involved in social change work
AJ: So did that have a class, or anything that encouraged you to start?
KM: What Notre Dame says about itself and what it actually is, that's a different conversation, is that it is focused on, as an institution on, creating a better and more just world. And so within the university, it's part of its catholic nature, it's a catholic university, there were a bunch of different programs and centres where you could get involved in social change work.
AJ: Ok, and did you get involved in any of those?
KM:Yeah I did, yeah.
AJ:Where you in the Peace Corps or anything during college? I know that some colleges actually require that you participate in something of that sort.
KM: I was in the peace corps, but the peace corps was after collage, I didn't really learn about the peace corps while I was there, I guess I sorta did, there were various volunteer efforts that recruited people from universities, and one of them was the peace corps
AJ: How was your experience with the Peace Corps?
KM: It was great, I mean I went to West Africa; I was in Sierra Leon for a little more than the normal time for a Peace Corps volunteer, so more like two and a half, three years.
AJ: And where else do you do missions?
KM: Um, that was the only peace corps experience, but then I decided to go and live and work in south east Asia, and work in a refugee camp, so I was in a refugee camp called ______ on the Thai Cambodian border for a couple years, and then the refugees went back to Cambodia, back into the war zone actually, and I went there as well, and I lived in Cambodia for about eight years.
AJ: So being in Cambodia, I understand

and having work here I am very relational of people so I get to know people, like I like to know peoples names and knowing things like little boy Jerry he probably six and he is here with his three siblings and him and his little brother their like, they just want to hang out, everyday he is like okay I'll see you tomorrow were gonna play basketball alright and I'm like okay, but I'm like I don't wanna see you tomorrow, like I want you to have a safe place but I've gotten to know him and its that part of like, you love those people you having does kids actually I have 100 kids they're all here and I love all of them like that just warms my soul. Yeah, that's the part of like you come back everyday after leaving and seeing that, and its that reminder I am doing something, or I don't feel bad about asking for money because its helping the people that are hopeless.

Voice of the Voiceless

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that it was fairly unstable time for the country, was there any event or any time that you were really in danger, but kept going for the good of the people? KM: Plenty of time, plenty of times. I worked with a Cambodian Buddhist monk, a Jesuit Brother, and a Jewish woman and we built a nonviolent movement for peace, a lot like Ghandi, and every year we would do an annual peace march called the ________, which is Pali and essentially it means walking to bring coolness, or peace. So every year, we would, it built up to like a thousand of monk and nuns a year, and we would walk into the war zone, to try and end the war.

AJ: And there was never a time where being in danger really discouraged you? KM: I was there for a reason, I knew what we were doing, we were trying to end the war, a couple of people did get hurt, we had a monk and a nun killed on one of the walks, and I was briefly kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge, and survived, the only foreigner to ever be kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge and still live, you are looking at him AJ: Do you have any contacts, or is there anyone that you met while in the Peace Corps or Asia that you have kept a relationship with? KM: Yeah, I lived and worked with Cambodians for ten years, it was a long time ago but I am still in touch with quite a few people in Cambodia.

AJ: So did you ever have an experience when you were younger that made you think, “you know what I need to be the change, I need to cause a change”, was there anything that really prompted you to start? KM: Um, I suppose the answer is yes, because I think that it is all I have ever done, so I now find, train, and recruit young people to be organizers and change agents, an everyone has a story that they can go back to, that helped them to understand that they needed to be the change. For me, I think it was growing up in the church, in the Catholic Church, and seeing that what was being taught, in the church, and what was being practiced in the world was very very different. And I think that the early days was my understanding of how women and men were not treated equally. It didn't make sense to me. So I'm older than you, and my mom was a stay at home mom, and like lots of other women at the time, she was

not really, they weren't perceived of as equal, and as soon as I started to understand that, I started to see other things. I grew up in a small, redneck town, and I remember I had a friend in kindergarten. He was the only black kid in class, but I didn't realize that he was black. It wasn't until middle school or later that I was like, “wooo, this world is;” pardon me teacher, but “it's** d up”, and it needs to change. I can remember that I this small, redneck town, these Vietnamese refugees moved into town and I was a coach of a soccer team, and so of them were on my team. Their houses were being firebombed, I mean nobody got hurt, but it was this ugly ugly racism. So I think that that was like, what really prompted me. And then my mom always bringing us to go and do things, to volunteer at rest homes, with people who had no family, and to volunteer in bread lines and work with the homeless. One of the summers in college, I went and worked with the homeless the whole summer and lived on the streets. It wasn't the whole summer, only a few weeks, but some of the homeless activists that were working to end it. I ended up sleeping outside for a few weeks, and seeing how screwed up things were, thanks to Ronald Raegan, for turning out all of the homeless and mentally ill onto the streets, way to go dude.

AJ: So why did you leave Asia? KM: Oh, we had a baby. Declan is the reason. I had lived out of this country for uh.. well, since I had graduated. I was in Africa, then Southeast Asia, and hadn't been back, at least not for much more than a visit. I wasn't really planning on ever coming back, but met my wife, Declan was born in Bangkok. We were living in Penampang. At that time, I was creating, or helping to create, the first national centre for conflict resolution. A military coup happened, and Declan was about two months old. A tank shell, well actually, what happened was Ali(his wife) called me, saying there were tanks in the streets. I was planning a peace conference, so I just said not now, and hung up. I thought she was just joking around with me, but she called again and said, no, there really are tanks in the streets. So I got on a little motorbike, I'm riding back, and it was quite a ways to where we lived. There were tanks and soldiers. They weren't shooting at me, but I weaved my way home, and a tank shell had fallen about a hundred yards from our house.

So I get back to our house, we lived on the third floor of this Cambodian family's house. Ali was there, with the mattresses covering the windows, and holding the baby, and she says “I'm leaving!” and I said, “I guess I am too.” AJ: So where did you meet her? KM: Well, in England. I had a really intense year, doing pretty crazy stuff in Cambodia. I went to do a meditation retreat in England, at this Buddhist centre where she was, and she came back to Cambodia with me.

AJ: So how would you say that working with these people and all of these people have shaped your life? KM: Oh it has made me who I am. I mean, the variety, and you know we took our kids and moved down to Central America, so that they would have a similar experience of living out of this culture. I think that everybody needs to leave this country at some point, and become a citizen of the world. It is a big ole world, and it is too easy for Americans to think that the whole world is here. You don't really learn that until you leave.

AJ: So what is it that made you want to work with the San Diego Organizing Project, and not some other organization or someone else? KM: They do the only thing I wanted to do. The work that I do is called Organizing, Community organizing, and in this case Congregation Based Community Organizing. We work with churches to find and develop leaders, who work on issues that they care about in their communities. It's all I have ever done, in Africa, in Cambodia, and here, it's all about finding people who care and creating change, and holding people accountable. So what we do is not charity, what we do is justice. There is a huge difference. charity is giving something to somebody. It is necessary, people need food, and clothing, and we need a safety net that works for people to get them stabilized. The market economy that we have created has winners and losers, and the winners keep winning, and right now we are living through the most income inequality we ever have in this country. Revolution should be happening, and that is my job. It won't change until people demand it, until people take power back, and organizing folks around their own needs and interests and building power to hold systems accountable is a way to do that.

AJ: One of the reasons
My class went on a field trip to Saint Vincent de Paul's to help make breakfast for the homeless population in downtown San Diego. The day after Saint Vincent, Ms. Angie told us that now that we have all gone on this field trip and had worked with or around homeless people, we could now interview each other. I chose Jack.

While we helped out the shelter, I had the opportunity to work with Jack in the kitchen. I noticed that he did everything with a smile on his face, never complaining and doing his best. I asked him if I could interview him and he replied, “Of course.” My main question for this interview was “What made you have such a great day helping homeless?” The reason I asked this was because all of us had to wake up at 4 - 4:30 AM that day and be at school by 5AM. Most people with the exception of a few looked like zombies working -- not because they didn't want to work but because they were half asleep. Jack, however, looked happy and not tired at all -- I wanted to know why.

JF: How did you feel after leaving the shelter that day?

JH: I felt very good about myself. Not to be all high and mighty, but I did a good thing for the day when I could of easily done something else and I felt good because these people have nothing and it's great to help people in need. It was a great opportunity to make a difference.

JF: Would you be willing to volunteer at a shelter again? Why or why not?

JH: Of course! It's something I would look forward to doing again! The reason I would do this is because it feels good to help others.

JF: What did you like about helping homeless people?

JH: I liked that the homeless people were very grateful and it makes you feel good about yourself because you are helping someone in need and they know you are helping them or wanting to help them and they are grateful.

JF: Was this your first time volunteering to help the homeless or for people in need? If not, where else have you volunteered?

JH: Yes and no. I have done volunteer work before and I've helped homeless people before this trip to Saint Vincent, but I've volunteered mostly with my family to help people during Christmas time with my church and family so it wasn't something new for me. I remember helping when I was younger and I still remember a lot of it. I might volunteer this Christmas. When I was younger, I remember helping my mom and dad and we would go downtown and I don't remember where we went, but I remember there was a lot of homeless people and we would pass out soup and sandwiches. We didn't go buy the sandwiches; we made them all.

JF: Would you keep volunteering and helping people?

JH: Yes. I believe it's important. I would keep volunteering even if I was in a difficult situation, but yes I would still help, and this year I'm looking forward to helping people.

JF: Did this experience change your view or opinion of homeless people?

JH: I can't say it has, but I can say that this process of interviewing or talking to homeless people is when talking to a homeless person is looking at them in the eye, make it so that they know you are listening and they know you know they exist and that is something that changed my perspective.

JF: Are you wanting to do your internship helping shelters?

JH: I can't say I would; that's something I like to do in my spare time. If I can't get the internship I want, then I will volunteer at a homeless shelter for my internship.

JF: Are you planning on picking a line of work where it involves helping others? 

JH: Like I said before, it's something that I would do on my free time. I don't think that I would be focusing on it 100%, but I would be focusing a large amount on volunteering... still, it wouldn't be a full time thing. Next year, I'll be doing an event with this program called Stand Down that helps homeless veterans and I'm really looking forward to that.

JF: What is Stand Down?

JH: It's an organization that helps veterans with their stress. It helps them get back on their feet after combat because a lot of them have seen bad things that leave psychological damage.

JF: That sounds really cool. That's great!

JH: I know, man! They gave me a hat!

JF: What are some interesting things you learned?

JH: Well, the one thing I learned was that the one thing I can really do for the homeless is acknowledge that they exist.

Jack Hawley: A Volunteer with a Smile
By: Jose Furriel
Make them feel like someone cares and respects them.

JF: While helping homeless people, have you ever felt grateful for the things you have now in life?

JH: Yes. There’s people who have practically nothing and I’m sitting in my house with my iPhone and my 3.5 acres of land. It makes me feel very fortunate to have all these things. I have a house, I have my family, I have an endless supply of food and running water… These people have nothing. Reading the book Under the OverPass really changed my perspective of these guys. They have it hard and it really makes you realize how lucky you are.

It's Called Compassion: An Interview Jim Livesy

By: Elena Castaneda

The man that I interviewed works with the San Diego Police Department. His name is Jim Livesy. He works in a part of the department that is called Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). He came in to give a presentation to our class for our homelessness project. After giving the presentation, I had the opportunity and honor to interview him. We went into an office with the perfect amount of lighting. He was wearing his police uniform with a badge and everything that comes with the authority of a uniform. He has worked with the police department for 14 years. The department he works with is a psychiatric emergency response team. What the homeless outreach team does is work with the chronically homeless. The chronically homeless are people who have experienced homelessness three times in a year. They work together in anything the team can provide such as assistance in finding housing for them, and providing help to those who want to change their lives.

GC: So how long have you been working for the San Diego Police Department?

JL: The San Diego Police Department 14 years.

GC: Before becoming an officer, what did you want to be?

JL: Well probably, one of my earliest memories was to be an officer (umm) my uncle was a mountain officer in Toronto Canada, which is where I am from. And so I had from an early on I think it was family background or maybe our social economic status. The most reasonable careers would be the military, fire police public service. I have a lot of family members the (uhh) were like fire captains and chiefs.

GC: Was it because of your family that kind of helped you realize you wanted to work in this type of job?

JL: Well let’s see I had a positive image of the police, not everybody does you know I have people telling their kids don’t talk to them, their bad. (umm) I think for me growing up in Canada culturally that’s very, the majority of the population are very pro. (umm) they really appreciate law enforcement (umm) emergency services, firemen, everybody loves firemen, and military. The military I was in the Canadian military as well, and that over the years has gone is very negative view of the military.

JL: You know why do we need a military. (umm) some of the things the military was involved in, it was difficult sometimes to be in uniform. But yeah I had a pretty good view of what law enforcement was. So, I wanted to help people.

GC: When you first got into the Department what did you imagine your job was going to be like?

JL: When I first got in? Police work?

GC: So how long have you been working for the San Diego Police Department? (uhh) were like fire captains and chiefs.

GC: When you first got into the Department what did you imagine your job was going to be like?

JL: When I first got in? Police work?

GC: Yeah when you first went into the Police Department. What’s the difference of what you imagined you would be doing.

JL: I think the majority of the police, that I know. They join the police department because they want to help people, not so much I mean there’s a lot of people who will give you the cool answer. You know I get to drive cars fast and shoot and arrest people for living, and that’s pretty cool. (umm) after you’ve been in a few pursuits and violent incidents it’s not as cool. (umm) but most everybody that I know when you ask them why, really they might have become jaded after years of trying to help people and then not accepting it, but most people want to help people. (umm) have images of being a kid and a police officer having a significant impact in my life (uhh) you know I have very clear memories of very positives interactions. So. For me its was like I wanted to (umm) kind of give back what, what I got.

GC: Okay, so kind of like you’re saying you wanted to do what you saw the police officers doing.

JL: Yeah they made a difference they weren’t just about arresting people they took the time. I was poor, I had friends that ended up in prison I have teachers that when they would see me they would say I thought you would be in prison. (umm) sometimes it’s a kind of easy way to go one way or another, and fortunately I picked the right way the right way I hope, but sometimes it’s hard when you’re a teenager and you don’t know what to do and you can’t get a job. You know I had friends that turned to other things for sure.

GC: So would you say that your position having to be in a lower class did that kind of make you choose which way you wanted to go, as in you had to go this way or that way?

JL: I think was a couple of times yeah where I had to make a serious decision but I just deep down that couldn’t do anything bad, like it was just my personality. You know (umm) The, the person who is drink and can’t take care of themselves even if they weren’t my friend I would make sure they got home safe. You know that kind of thing. I couldn’t see something and then god forbid something happen and I could have done something that’s the biggest thing, and that’s probably the kind of mentality of why I got into what I do is that. You can sit on the sidewalk and watch and complain or you can jump in and get involved and you know I saw people being victimized I saw really bad things happening and I wanted to actively participate in it. And preventing that I could so.

GC: What has been one of one of you friends that turned to other things for sure. I knew (umm) The, the person who is drink and can’t take care of themselves even if they weren’t my friend I would make sure they got home safe. You know that kind of thing. I couldn’t see something and then god forbid something happen and I could have done something that’s the biggest thing, and that’s probably the kind of mentality of why I got into what I do is that. You can sit on the sidewalk and watch and complain or you can jump in and get involved and you know I saw people being victimized I saw really bad things happening and I wanted to actively participate in it. And preventing that I could so.

JL: When I first got in? Police work?

GC: Yeah when you first went into the Police Department. What’s the difference of what you imagined you would be doing.

JL: I think the majority of the police, that I know. They join the police department because they want to help people, not so much I mean there’s a lot of people who will give you the cool answer. You know I get to drive cars fast and shoot and arrest people for living, and that’s pretty cool. (umm) after you’ve been in a few pursuits and violent incidents it’s not as cool. (umm) but most everybody that I know when you ask them why, really they might have become jaded after years of trying to help people and then not accepting it, but most people want to help people. (umm) have images of being a kid and a police officer having a significant impact in my life (uhh) you know I have very clear memories of very positives interactions. So. For me its was like I wanted to (umm) kind of give back what, what I got.

GC: Okay, so kind of like you’re saying you wanted to do what you saw the police officers doing.

JL: Yeah they made a difference they weren’t just about arresting people they took the time. I was poor, I had friends that ended up in prison I have teachers that when they would see me they would say I thought you would be in prison. (umm) sometimes it’s a kind of easy way to go one way or another, and fortunately I picked the right way the right way I hope, but sometimes it’s hard when you’re a teenager and you don’t know what to do and you can’t get a job. You know I had friends that turned to other things for sure.

GC: So would you say that your position having to be in a lower class did that kind of make you choose which way you wanted to go, as in you had to go this way or that way?

JL: I think was a couple of times yeah where I had to make a serious decision but I just deep down that couldn’t do anything bad, like it was just my personality. You know (umm) The, the person who is drink and can’t take care of themselves even if they weren’t my friend I would make sure they got home safe. You know that kind of thing. I couldn’t see something and then god forbid something happen and I could have done something that’s the biggest thing, and that’s probably the kind of mentality of why I got into what I do is that. You can sit on the sidewalk and watch and complain or you can jump in and get involved and you know I saw people being victimized I saw really bad things happening and I wanted to actively participate in it. And preventing that I could so.

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when they are having a bad day. that's usually when the police get involved in you've been you know seeing somebody later on that who nearly killed for whatever reason. Because of their behavior and then seeing them later and then realizing that what I did for them and that they got to go home that day and that their families still have them. And they're not high on the drugs or whatever else was causing them to do crazy things. (umm) that's very rewarding for me because I feel that there are several people that I can think of that I quite literally saved their lives. So and just sometime I was just getting them away from the drugs. Getting them out of the situation they were involved in (umm) you know part of my job now is that I try to get people who are addicted and try to get them into programs health treatment programs and I've had several people recently who a week later completely different person then what you saw. Completely different person and coming out of the cloud the haze of being involved in the substances realizing what their had become. Very educated middle class kids who ended up you know going through recycling and OB and that was their life. Making seven dollars a day so they can buy a bottle of cheap alcohol, realizing what their life had become. And these are educated people it's a very powerful addiction. So one person is really hard for me to say but there's been several that I feel I have made a difference and I you know I just want to make sure that people get through the rough spots, most people are good people at heart and good people make you know bad decsions. They get involved in things but they still. Their people they have family yes they have kids they have loved ones you know I don't want to be the person who has to say or tell somebody and say you know I could have done more but I didn't you know your sixteen year old. So I go out of the way rather than just putting someone in jail under the influence. I will actively try and convince to try to go to treatment because long term that's going to solve the problem for them because a lot of these people are getting arrested over and over again and the homeless population use the hospital and usually they don't take the time to be insured.

GC: Do you think us as a society need to learn more about homelessness?  
JL: I think knowledge is good and having more of and actively volunteering and participating rather than just look, and say well there is a problem over there; someone should do something about it getting involved in whatever that is law enforcement or street outreach mental health services those sorts of things people are taking time to get involved I think that the homeless population in particular.

The majority of people I don't want to acknowledge that they are there they might feel bad for them and from there political status they might say oh this terrible and they should do something but they take the time do anything themselves and when they see somebody on the street they don't make eye contact they don't want to get involved they want to just pretend they went away unless its affecting their businesses so it's like right in front and they say I want the police to fix this make them go away. so, education is always good and there's a lot of misunderstanding I think that a lot of people have their own perspective of the population and if you're not really in the population you don't really understand it's not just what you're seeing on the surface there a lot more underneath somebody might say all I need is a job or a place to stay. Its what they say but when u dig a little deeper well there a reason why they ended up on the street and it wasn't just they didn't have a place to stay anymore. Its because they get evicted because of their behavior and you know whatever is causing their behavior. So part of the job that I do now I like the most is that police officer and patrol id see people every day and try to help them .can I help you. When other people don't have the time to sit down and talk to them and try ask them what's really going on cause I know I put you helped you out last time and your right back where you were so obviously something is not working and sometimes just taking that time (umm) it makes the difference. A lot of the people part of my job is to just building the trust with the people who have learned not to trust anyone. And especially authority and I think one of the biggest tings is when I introduce somebody and I walk away without taking them to jail. Or putting them in handcuffs or whatever else it's a shock. Because they have never experience that before to them but then there's behaviors that their doing they will get mouthy with somebody and they'll be drunk and they get arrested. You know your behaving badly but they can't see the big picture. It's their own behavior that's causing the problems so yeah their getting attention ( umm) but when you are able to build a bridge, with folks and they trust you then you're opening the door to let's find something more better to than just be out here. And what we do? When people ask me what my job is on the homeless outreach team It's one of those things I hate that question because there is no simple answer to it the bottom line is ill do pretty much anything I can legally to help a person if that means driving them to an office and filling out a form I have never even heard of before but that's the only way these people are going to get benefits, I'll do it. (umm) if it means going into court and testifying for something so that it gets done I'll take the time and dot that a lot of it is just like peace keeping going and talking to land lords. Or different people and just hey lets work this out why did this person get kicked out. You know is there maybe something they could do to correct that and be able to come back. (uuhh) or kicked out of programs, You know like a person I'm waiting for her to call me has pretty much left all the programs. They are not really excited to let her back.

GC: As an individual if you could change anything what would you focus on with the homeless?  
JL: resources would be nice a lot of time there's a frustration of I have astutely no place to put this person even for a night I mean we pay for a lot of things out of our pocket that the public doesn't know and realize they're not. A lot of people have this image that we have all this empty space to keep these people in these hotel rooms and if u just get to the right person they get a free hotel and everything is going to be paid for. It's not like that (umm) there's not as many benefits as other people think I mean there are subsidized housing in San Diego there is way too many to take care of. Can you wait eight to ten years until you get an apartment?  
GC: Yeah I (um) I don't think so  
JL: it's kind of ridiculous when you are homeless. Think about it. Because hopefully in eight to ten years you're not in position that you're not homeless anymore hopefully right. Or now you're so far deep into it that you're going to be stuck in poverty because you have been
doing it for ten years. (uhh) San Diego is a very expensive city to live in and a lot of people come here so the resources that are here are stretched very tightly and one of the biggest challenges is for me is to find a place to put somebody who wants help. most of these people don't want help. Right now but I don't give up I'll tell them that I've never given up on anybody, I will work with you it just might be different what I do for you in future. You know I offer you opportunities sometime being in jail is the best thing for a person honestly.

GC: Do you think homeless get them less into trouble so that the police take them to jail. Just because they think going to jail is better than being in the streets and having no roof over your head, and not having food to eat every day.

JL: The short answer is yes. I think that is not as simple I mean people will simply say they have been institutionalized their whole lives. People can be in some pretty uncomfortable situations living in very poor conditions and they will choose that over being in a shelter. And you kind of go really? It seems like you know sleeping in the rain with absolutely no shelter I would think if I could get you a motel room maybe not the nicest place but it would be yours and you wouldn't have to share with anybody and pay for it monthly. That would be a good idea.

GC: How do you think we as a team can raise awareness about homelessness?

JL: Well I think Rick kind of said it helping and that has a proven track record that aren't just like a pop up of you know somebody that say uhh you know I have a Ministry but they don't even have a building but some of the well know rescue missions like saint Vincent de Paul Rachael's is a women shelter, they have emergency beds. A lot of organizations want to help, but it takes a while to kind of there a lot of perspectives and a lots of misinformation out there and a lot people just kind of want to help. And just show up downtown and start handing out bags of McDonalds. That, That gives somebody a meal but it long term it might not be the best thing (umm) because of that some of these people won't leave the same spot because

THEY KNOW that if I stay here people are going to bring me stuff. So they won't even go down to saint Vincent de Paul's or Neil good day center and sign up for services because they don't want to miss something good. That's going to be given away for free, so if being involved with an organization that kind of know what they're doing has a track record and it's also safety. To I mean I see youth groups going you know at night I am a little worried that why us a police officers do it because we are to protect ourselves and the civilians that come with us. (umm) and they have to be employees they can't be volunteers. But you know it's all for everyone's safety.

Todd Gloria: A View From the San Diego Mayor's Office

By: Jessica Castro

My mind raced as I sat in the plush, green chair, wearing my nicest, black blazer. I still could not believe that the Mayor of San Diego was taking time out of his day to be interviewed by me-- a regular high school kid. His assistant walked in and directed me through the doors into his office. Her warm smile slightly calmed me down. I entered his neat office. He greeted me with a smile. His black suit and, red tie seemed to show off his political power. I wanted to interview Interim Mayor Gloria because of what I had seen on the news a few days before. On November 3, 2013, the San Diego Rescue Mission held a candlelight vigil to commemorate the homeless men and women that died on the streets and Mayor Gloria was not only present at this vigil, but he spoke as well. After seeing this, I knew that he was someone who not only cared about the homeless, but he was also someone who could do something about this issue.

Todd Gloria graduated from the University of California. He was elected to his second term as Council Member on June 5, 2012. On December 3 of the same year, his colleagues elected him President of the City Council. He became Interim Mayor of the City of San Diego on August 30, 2013 and it was as mayor, in his downtown high-rise office, that I began my interview with him.

J.C. What is is the most creative solution to homelessness that you've seen in your career?

T.G. Are you familiar with the Check-in center?

J.C. No

T.G. This is very creative. Homeless people have a lot of stuff right? It's unfair to say they don't have stuff, they just don't have a home. And so you see there stuff in carts, and bags, you know shopping carts and things of that nature. And of course that causes a problem for the community because you end up with a lot of blight, you know a lot of stuff along sidewalks, blocking rights of way, canyons, things of that nature. That's a problem for the community, that's also a problem for the homeless person. You can imagine how difficult it is to get a job if you show up to that interview with all of your worldly possessions. Or you can stash them somewhere, maybe like stash them in a bush, but then it's stolen and you lose everything. So it's a practical problem; how did we solve it, you're asking about solutions. So we took and an old city owned warehouse, we acquired a bunch of city trash cans, you know the typical black and blue ones you might have at home, wheeled them in there, and then we have a non-profit group that allows the homeless to store their stuff in those trash cans, secures it for them. They leave it there, no cost, for a couple of days, then re-up every few days. It's a very low cost solution to a very practical problem. And it was something that was implemented in a short amount of time, and we have had difficulties. We have had some difficulties, it's have had to move locations a couple times because you know, vacant parcels are vacant for a reason; normally someone wants to do something else with it, it's a temporary use. But it's been going for, I think about 3 years now or so. Anecdotally, what we hear from folks who use it is it is very helpful for their peace of mind, they aren't worried about their stuff all the time. Some folks have actually found jobs because of it, and the people that I represent, I represent Downtown San Diego and it's located downtown, the neighbors, the people who live here are happy.
because they notice less stuff kind of stored up on their sidewalks. It's a sort of two birds one stone situation.

J.C. I've never heard about that.

T.G. If you google it, The Girl's Think Tank is the name of the non-profit that currently is running it, there's a whole story behind that as well, and that's probably not necessary for you purposes, but it's called the check-in center. And another name, if you google for it, would be the Waterman or David Ross, and he was sort of the guy who kind of conceived of it. LA has something similar, he kind of brought the idea to the city and we concurred, so if you want to find more, that would be easy to find out.

J.C. Do you believe that our country will be able to end homelessness?

T.G. Absolutely. I imagine for some, that is probably like yeah right, right. And I have to admit, when I first heard that I was like please. But it's how you think of it; it's the framework of when you hear or say that. End homelessness as in end it for you, for an individual. Every day someone will become mentally ill, will develop a substance abuse problem, will lose a job, will get divorced, will be thrown out of their home, whatever the case is. People fall into homelessness everyday, thousands of people across the country. The question is how do you get them out of that, and how long will it take. So if you came to me as a homeless person, presented, maybe you're dually-diagnosed with a mental illness and a substance abuse problem; do we have a way out for you to get off the streets and into supportive housing? The answer is yes, we can do that, with the right kinds of supports. And so, I think when people hear that, they believe a world where you would never see another homeless person again. That's simply not the case. You will always have homeless people, it's simply a question of how long will they be on the streets. And a part of my passion on this issue is that the longer you leave people on the streets, the more expensive it is, and the more costly it is for taxpayers. And so it is in everyone's interest to take the dollars we are spending kind of in silly ways now, for example, having homeless people rely on emergency rooms and ambulance rides for their health care, take that money because both of those things are really expensive, put it into permanent supportive housing, which we know gets people off the streets and gets them up the ladders of housing. Doing those kinds of efforts is what we should do. And so, the answer is absolutely yes you can, it's just a matter of making sure you understand in your mind what that looks like. It means, not that there won't ever be homeless people, but when there, there will be a way to get them out of homelessness.

J.C. I also came across an article about how you were former member of the San Diego Housing Commission, I was curious on how that helps the homeless people and how that works.

T.G. So the Housing Commission is a component of the city, and is chaired by board of commissions appointed by the city council, I was one before I was elected, and they are largely concerned with affordable housing, which is kind of different than homeless housing, in a way. If you think of housing as a ladder, there is how I presume you and I both live, you know in a standard, run of the mill housing situation, to homeless and everything in between. In between would be shelter beds, transitional housing, supportive housing, permanent affordable, and then market. So you have a ladder of housing. The Housing Commission, for the longest time, was really just kind of concerned with affordable housing, meaning to say a subsidy because you can't rent the rent in it of itself, and that was true when I was on the Housing Commission. Since I became a council member, we had asked the Commission to take on more responsibility for the homeless. Probably for you, you're like wouldn't the Housing Commission deal with homelessness anyway? Well until, probably 4 or 5 years ago they really didn't. I mean they had some involvement but not a whole lot. Now, the city has actually taken it's homeless service, which used to be held inside this building actually, in the city, we have given that to the Housing Commission to do so that their involvement on the ladder of housing, instead of it just being this, is this, right. And they now administer the winter tents; they are working to develop new affordable housing that is targeted toward the homeless, so you have shelter beds, transitional housing beds, ext. So there involvement has grown, a large part of that at my request because my experience as a Housing Commission, I was familiar with what they were doing and what they weren't doing. You know I've used my role as a council member to try and push them to do more, and for their credit, they have done a whole lot more. And actually, if you go to their website, you'll find they have a whole housing intention section, which is what they call their homeless unit, and you can see a lot of the work they are doing.

J.C. How do you balance the issues of homelessness and the lack of shelter with all the other obstacles that occur in the San Diego County?

T.G. You mean other issues or priorities?

J.C. Yeah

T.G. Well it's hard. It's hard as an elected official because, just very candidly the homeless don't vote, right. And the people that do often see homelessness, not always with complete compassion. San Diegans by and large are very compassionate people, but many people, when faced with homelessness, whether it's aggressive panhandling, someone sleeping in front of their home, things of that nature. They don't see it with the kind of charitable heart that I'd like them to, and they get very angry, and so the answers are not the sort of long term solutions they are more predatory in nature, you know move 'em along, get them out of here, I don't want to see them. That actually doesn't solve the problem, it just moves it somewhere else. So as a result, working alot on this issue, isn't always politically a plus, ya know. A lot of folks don't run office, talking a lot about homelessness, I did but that was one of several things I talked about, and when you talk to the average person on the street, if you ask them what's the most important thing to them. In San Diego, it would probably be one or two things, it would be the roads and the fact that we have a lot of pot holes, or just broadly speaking public safety. You know, wanting to feel safe in their neighborhood, and wanting a lot of police officers and firefighters and things of that nature. I absolutely understand and respect that, but I just happen to think that we can't be a great city when we have thousands of people sleeping on our streets. And again, I go back to the point that it is actually more expensive, in my judgement, to leave them on the streets then house them appropriately. So it's a difficult thing to prioritize. One of the things that we did in my time here in office was to take a funding source that we call Community Development Block Grants. It's federal money that is sent to cities to be spent on low and moderate income people, and we have set aside a significant portion
of those dollars for the homeless. That actually is a really controversial thing to do and is still kind of politically unpopular. I just happen to think that for money that supposed to be spent on low and moderate-income people, there is no more lower than the homeless right? But there are a lot of folks that are unhappy with that decision. So I think it's perhaps a case study or example of how difficult it can be to prioritize the homeless over other priorities. I just happen to be of the opinion that we have to do it.

J.C. The big question is, I mentioned that I saw you speak at the San Diego Rescue Mission Candlelight Memorial Vigil...

T.G. Yeah

J.C. So what struck you about that whole experience?

T.G. It's just a very raw thing, that folks die. You know, when people aren't as compassionate they may not think all the way through that this is a life threatening condition to be homeless, right. And many do die, and typically people don't see that, I mean you don't come across, we had someone in the river yesterday who passed who was probably homeless, it's just not something that's spoke about. And I think one of the problems with public policy, in being able to change public policy, the way to change public policy is to tell stories. To humanize it, to make it, the decision-makers like myself, even the general public, it has to have public support to get something done, you have to be able to tell the story. Great example right now would be around immigration reform, you are probably familiar with a lot of folks fasting right now currently, trying to bring attention to the issue, or even today there are a lot of fast food workers who are striking to try and bring attention to the issues of low wages. The core of both of those things is telling the story of what it's like to be in this country on undocumented status, right. Or what it's like to work on $8 dollars an hour in San Diego, and how hard that is. That event is really helpful to explain to people that our decisions, if we are not prioritizing homelessness or not dedicating enough funding to it, has real life and death consequences. And as the gentlemen, you were there, the guy who got up and spoke about how he ended up homeless. I mean, stories like those help to humanize the situation, and then in turn help me to make the case to my city council colleagues about why we should increase funding for this program or to try and champion things like the check-in center that continually need additional support. It's just a very human way to take what can sometimes be an abstract issue, you know if you and I are not living the homeless life we haven't experienced personally and you don't understand why it is important. That's one way to make it important, and to give a voice to people who kind of, by their nature don't have voices. I mentioned before, they don't vote typically. They may suffer from mental illness and that can make it difficult for them to communicate; that event helps bridge that gap.
How to Make a Change
By: Alicia Randolph

Homelessness is an issue that has been around for centuries, dating all the way back to 1640. Homelessness is a sad problem that is alive and very apparent in today's society. The most common, stereotypical homeless person is the dirty-looking, smelly, drug-using man holding a sign on the corner of your nearby 7-eleven store. It's difficult to give them money, especially when you don't know where it's going. That's the problem with people and their relationship with homelessness. People do not know enough about the issue. The foundation in fixing an issue is educating people on the problem: how it affects them, and what they can do to make a difference. No, it is not possible to completely end homelessness due to the fact that some people choose to be homeless and there are some people that will not accept help. However, it most definitely is possible to reduce the number of homeless people in America. The solutions would be creating long-term housing programs, jobs for the homeless, and programs that specialize in mental and emotional health assistance therapy.

The very first step in improving the lives of the homeless individuals is creating a long-term housing program to get people off the streets immediately. Housing First models places people directly from the streets into permanent housing units with appropriate services including a safe haven program (Ernest 61). Long-term housing programs would benefit the homeless that do not suffer from mental illness, mainly families with young children. The initial act of providing them shelter and their basic needs will allow them to focus their energy on moving in the right direction, rather than just survival. This will result in a distraction-free environment that will help the people get back on steady feet. Long-term housing helps individuals and families access and sustain permanent rental housing without time limits ("Housing First: A New Approach" 2). Research has proven that once people start to notice a difference in their lifestyle, they feel motivated to maintain what they have done well. This will also give them an opportunity to develop financial skills with the help of financial advisors. Long-term housing programs will also provide children with a stable environment and eliminate frequent moving of schools, for many children experience this. Long-term housing programs could be a very practical and cost effective part in reducing homelessness.

A major factor the contributes to homelessness is the high unemployment rate. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the current unemployment rate in America falls roughly above 7 percent. Homeless programs often provide compensation for work and are paid with federal money for a short period of time to allow individuals to build their skills and experience in the market ("How to Build Employment Programs that Prevent and End Homelessness." 1). Homelessness would be reduced if there were more jobs available. Giving them a job will allow them to develop a stronger work ethic and gain more experience in the job market. There are many positive things that go along with creating new jobs. For example, they have an opportunity build up their experience and resume, so they will be able to work better paying jobs. These better paying jobs will result in a steady income making permanent housing affordable. Creating new jobs for the homeless would even benefit the economy. The general public would pay less taxes for the homeless if there weren't many people on the streets. Creating new jobs is a stepping stone to a more successful future not only for the homeless, but America as well.

A good part of the homeless population suffers from mental health issues. Putting them in houses is one thing, but helping them regain mental stability is another. The final piece of the puzzle to reduce homelessness is creating programs that would be beneficial to the homeless' mental health, such as psychotherapy, counseling, and one-on-one consultations between the doctor and the patient. Exercise and physical activity are constantly gaining attention as adjuvant treatment (Zschucke, Heinz, & Strohle 2). Physical activity has been proven to release endorphins which affect moods positively. A central aim of occupational therapy in any setting is to engage and empower people to live better lives. The main goal with providing therapy is not only help the homeless become healthier, but also to make them realize there are people that are willing to help. While they would have someone to talk to and someone helping
them, they would feel motivated and encouraged to keep going. “The majority of street homeless population has mental illness and/or substance abuse (Homeless Services). Nearly 40% suffer from these issues. Drug counseling classes would be necessary in this department and available to those who will accept help. Providing proper treatment for mental stability is a key part in reducing the number of homeless people in America.

Homelessness is an issue that will never go away. Although, reducing the amount of people that are homeless is an obtainable goal, it won't happen in a day, and it won't happen overnight. It is a very long process that will take years, but it is possible! Homelessness is something that affects everyone, directly and indirectly. The correct and quickest way to support the homeless is by getting them off the streets immediately and placing them in long-term housing programs, putting them on the right track for financial stability by creating more jobs, and developing therapy and counseling programs to focus a bit deeper on the people behind the issue.

Off the Streets: Solving Homelessness
By: Arik Espineli

Homelessness has been a recurring problem throughout American history. The earliest recorded time period of homelessness in America was in the 1640’s (“The History of Homelessness” 1). Throughout history homelessness has been a prominent issue. During the 1900’s homelessness started getting public attention and organizations started forming to help the situation. Although the issue of homelessness has been around for a long time, it can be solved. Today, there are many programs solely for the purpose of reintroducing the homeless back into society. Some of these programs follow a “housing first” model. The Housing First model provides homeless people with housing and different services to help them back into society. The solution to ending homelessness in the U.S. lies in programs like this. Homelessness can be ended through programs that support the homeless and assist them to get off the streets. These programs will help end homelessness as quickly as possible, giving the homeless stability and security in their lives, and it is one of the most effective methods used today.

It is important to help any and all homeless in order to end the problem. There are programs that in order to be admitted to it, a homeless person must go through an admittance process and can be denied from the services because they do not meet the requirements. According to Megan O’Dowd, a housing program analyst for the County of San Diego, “Housing first programs don’t have a screening process to be let into the program.” (O’Dowd). Without a screening process, a wider range of people can be helped and put into homes and given needed services. Unlike other programs that have restrictions and requirements to be helped, no one is turned away. The housing first programs help shelter the homeless first then help reintroduce them into society. After a person is housed, services are provided that will help the person permanently stay off the streets. The National Alliance to Ending Homelessness (NAEH) says, “Housing is not contingent on compliance with services – instead, participants must comply with a standard lease agreement and are provided with the services and supports that are necessary to help them do so successfully” (“What is Housing First” 1). In a housing first program, the main objective is to house the homeless, for it is not required to participate in services as long as the lease agreement is met. Doing this puts the responsibility of getting help on the person instead of them being forced to do things they do not chose to do. Without requirements and restrictions like religion and illnesses, more of the homeless can be helped to get back to regular lives and bring the U.S closer to ending homelessness.

Having a place to call home, even if it is a temporary house allows a homeless person to have a sense of security and provides stability in their lives. This is important to ending homelessness because without stability in their lives a person can fall into a cycle of being helped then end up back on the streets. This cycle can lead to becoming chronically homeless which means they have either been homeless for a year or more or have been homeless four times in three years. “Housing first model promotes stability and individual well being” (O’Dowd). With more stability in their lives, a recovering homeless person will become less prone to end up back on the streets after they graduate from the program. Also, the stability from having a home will help a person get back up on their feet and start on the road to a normal life. According to the NAEH, “A central tenet of the Housing First approach is that social services to enhance individual and family well-being can be more effective when people are in their own home” (“What is Housing First” 1). If the social services provided are ineffective, the time spent on the person would be wasted because they were not helped in the short term program and end up back on the street. With a home and stability, it is easier for a homeless person’s services to be effective and ending their homelessness. On the road to ending homelessness it is important that the services provided are effective so that the person doesn’t stay homeless. The stability of a house makes it more likely that the services will be effective.

The final reason that using the housing first model will help end homelessness is because studies have shown that it is the most effective method in ending homelessness. “Both, government and private sector non-profits have discovered over the past few years that the “Housing First” model works better than any other program currently available” (Barbieux 1). It is important for the government and other organization that help the homeless to know which method is the most effective. With that knowledge both will be able to put more or all the funding towards that program to start ending homelessness. Also, they can start taking funds from other programs that are not as effective to save money of add the the housing first fund. Not only is housing first model effective in getting permanently off the streets, but it is also cost effective. “It [housing first model] has been proven to get homeless people off the streets, and keep them off the streets, for approximately $17,000 a year per person” (Barbieux 1). According to a secretary from The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), “It costs about $40,000 a year for a homeless person to be on the streets” (Donovan). If the numbers are correct, a person living on the streets costs
of fighting homelessness not only will it be cheaper, but also more effective than other models.

Homelessness has been around for a long time and it needs to be ended. This can be done by helping everyone off the streets with the housing first model. The housing first model should be used because it helps everyone, improves the lives of the homeless, and it is proven to be the most effective method. Doing this is a simple solution to a large problem that America faces.

A Change in Mind Makes an Impact
By: Alan Verduzco

“Forget about the idea that all people who have lost their homes are drug addicted criminals.”
--Kylssa Shay

Almost everyone in the United States or other parts of the world accept negative stereotypes about homeless people. How are we, as a society, going to try to help people who are homeless if they don’t see past the image of a negative stereotype? The public is not going to try to help if they always think that their helping hand is going towards a person who is going to take advantage of that in a negative way-- nobody would do that. But the misconception that homeless people are all drug addicts and criminals is something that has to stop in order for there to be more progress in ending homelessness. People need to be informed on the real causes of homelessness in order for there to be people who will volunteer to help.

There are many misconceptions about homeless people; that they are criminals or drug addicts. As Kylssa Shay, a once homeless woman, turned freelance writer states: “Many are neither drug addicts nor alcoholics. While close to half of adult homeless people in the United States currently struggle with addictions or have struggled with addictions in the past many of them do not have and have not had a drug or alcohol problem” (Shay). There are sometimes homeless people in the street that will ask for spare change but, the first thought in someone’s mind while hearing this is, Is this person trying to get money for alcohol or drugs? Might as well not do them any extra harm by giving them money. This can be true some of the time-- to ignore that drugs and alcohol play some role in homelessness is naive-- but, what about the people who actually need it? What about families, veterans and children? “Most homeless people are not criminals and many of those who are technically criminals have only committed what are called status crimes.” (Shay). It is really unfair for someone to be treated like a criminal for just trying to survive by doing things that aren’t going to harm anyone else. Homeless people are judged harshly and that will never help them out of homelessness because an average U.S. citizen isn't going to help a criminal. Ms. Shay is a clear example of someone who hit hard times, struggled, became homeless, but fit none of the stereotypes society had set. Now she writes to inform people about the reality of homelessness in our country, hoping to be an agent of change in America’s attitudes about the homeless.

When someone is educated about what homelessness or hears about it first hand from a homeless person they really don’t expect it and are surprised about the reality. Students who recently visited a homeless shelter to see first hand the faces of homelessness had this reaction: “I didn’t really.. I have never really thought about this problem and I usually just saw individuals, homeless individuals in the streets asking for money and... I thought everywhere it was common like there’s no way really to help them. I’ve never been thinking about it deeply” (Marko). Sometimes, people aren’t aware of their surrounding and their problems and are oblivious to what kinds of horrible situations common people are living through. If homelessness isn’t addressed to the public then how is the public going to act and help end homelessness? When high school students went on a recent service trip to St. Vincent De Paul’s Village, they discussed learning about different people’s problems that led them to becoming homeless, which was eye-opening. Here, Roman Marko, a high school junior stated: “I think there was one man who had a family and wife and they got divorced and she took all of his money, so that was his story. He used to work really hard, like, a normal life. That was all that happened and it ended in a life like this.” (Marko). If a person living a normal life heard that these kind of things happened to a homeless person, hearing that they were and are normal people just like them, they would put themselves in their shoes and realize how much they need help and that they aren’t going to do anything bad. After that happens, there could be a great change. They are really unfortunate people most of the time it’s not their fault so why do they have to continue suffering because of our ignorance and fear?

It doesn’t take much to help end homelessness. “Just help… if you see a guy with a sign that says he will work for food, help him. Yes, there’s a possibility that he will go down to the store and buy a beer, or that he will go down the street to buy drugs,’... ‘But there’s also a chance that he’s trying to get diapers for his kids, or he’s honestly trying to get a meal. Even in the simplest aspect… just try to help’” (Isaacs). Those negative possibilities of homeless people are possible and could happen but it is more likely that they are actually trying to survive or help their children. Most people abhor giving their well-deserved money away for causes that won’t really help, but, in these cases anyone is helping. “Do we need money to run those shelters? We absolutely do… but most of all, come and visit,” Marks said. ‘Take someone under your wing and teach them how to manage their money. Offer transportation… just come and be a part’” (Isaacs). Any kind of help is can make a change and it doesn’t even have to be money. If people are afraid of wasting their money on people who might use it for bad, then, why not just lend a helping hand and volunteer for them to see their charity in action?

Everyone in the United States pays taxes. Most people vote. People vote for where their tax money is going to be spent on. If everyone would have a negative mentality towards homelessness, homelessness would be infinitely worse. If people are aware of how the homeless are normal people they are most likely going to help out and, even helping out once can make an impact. If everyone does it, it could lead towards ending homelessness. Are you going to spend a dollar or two on a lottery ticket that will just go to waste? Or, would you rather have it serve to buy food for a starving child in a homeless family? You make the choice and being conscious about problems is what makes the difference.
The Much Needed Perspective Change

By: Ariana Delucchi

Drug addict, alcoholic, dirty, lazy. A man standing on the edge of the street begging for money, a person holding up a cardboard sign that reads “Will work for money”; a sleeping bag and a messily set up camp under a bridge. The commonality between these words and images? They all represent stereotypes of the homeless. Although at times these may be true, it is a common misconception that most homeless are like that. Homeless people come from all walks of life, and have had different occurrences to lead them into homelessness. People also believe that homelessness can be solved by simply giving poor people some money, as that’s just a common practice if someone walks by a homeless person, and maybe even a job. If it were that simple, would we have a homeless population? There are several problems that arise with being homeless. Even if the homeless do have a job (as many do), how would they get there and back? What if the homeless do have a job (as many do), how would they get there and back? What would they put down as their address? Would they even have clean clothes to use every day? It is evident that homelessness is not a simple issue to solve, which is why the homeless numbers can only be reduced. Some ways that homelessness in America, and possibly even the world, can be reduced by, is through the education of the public to sympathize and donate to the cause, creation of a better budget, and spreading the principles of “Housing First” to give them a stable home.

Education has been the basis for humans for hundreds of years. It provides us with knowledge of the world surrounding us, and can change our entire outlook on life. Changing a homeless person’s outlook on life could be an essential part in leading them out of homelessness, and changing a "normal" person’s outlook on the homeless could lead to more donations, thus raking in money to support the homeless population to change. After speaking with a few homeless, and reading interviews with homeless, it is safe to assume that some agree that if they had known that their choices would lead them to homelessness, they would change. Another trend that was duly noted was that if someone had cared for them, they would most likely not be in the conundrum they are currently in. This is reflected in a mini interview by Humans of New York to Charlie, a young homeless man, when asked why he essentially gave up on life. “I was born broke [...] But I made it hard on myself too. I left school. I left home. I threw all my stuff in the street and left [...] Nobody ever cared about me. Nobody ever said: ‘Charlie, what’s wrong?’ They said, ‘Shut up, Charlie. We’ve got our own problems.’” (QTD Stanton) If society continuously portrays homeless as drunks, alcoholics, and lazy, they would never get to see the rest of the homeless; the group of homeless who are struggling to change their position in life. If we keep a blind eye, it is evident that things will not change. How would the public react if they knew that out of 633,789 homeless people in the nation, only 25% of the population are chronically homeless; aka their seemingly stereotypical homeless? And that 38% are families, and 9% of them are veterans? Surely, their perspective would change then. In San Diego alone, 40% of shelter residents are families (61% being children), and 1,486 are homeless veterans, with a total homeless population of 5,733 (O’Dowd). If this information became more accessible/widespread, society would hopefully become more empathetic towards the homeless, and be more willing to donate to nonprofit organizations that work with the homeless. Money. Seemingly one of the most important things to have in life. Without it, families wouldn’t be fed, business wouldn’t be able to run, and countries just overall couldn’t function. That being said, money is necessary to help bring an end to homelessness. Unfortunately, "It would cost about $20 billion for [the] government to effectively eliminate homelessness in the United States.” (Huffington Post #2) but “The Government Accountability Office (GAO) announced that the federal government spent $2.9 billion for federal homeless programs in 2009." (Poverty Insights) It is clear the budgeting for the homeless programs are either not being used properly, and/or could use some more funding. If we spent nearly as much money on helping the homeless as we do on war, the numbers would dramatically drop. For example, the Iraq War cost the United States “nearly one trillion dollars (on average $10 billion per month)” (Poverty Insights #1). If the government used a fraction of what they used for the Iraq war, as stated before, the homeless population numbers would surely drop dramatically. “The average cost for an affordable housing unit in California can be anywhere from $250,000 to $400,000 per unit.” (Poverty Insights #2) That being said, with the trillion dollars that was allocated to the Iraq war, a whopping four million housing units could have been created! Although one trillion dollars of the federal budget would not go into solving homelessness, that is just a mere perspective of what could’ve been done with the budget being used towards war. Additionally, if individual’s budgeted properly, they could help donate to the cause as well. Considering that nonessentials such as purchasing alcoholic beverages and tobacco, since they cost the average household about $780 (Pinola), and possibly easing up on personal care items such as makeup, in which the average woman spends about $400 a year replacing for lost items alone (Huffington Post #1). If all 313.9 million civilians of the United States directed about $100 out of their yearly budget to homelessness, that would amount to a total budget of $31,390,000,000, well over the estimated total. As you can see, through proper budgeting, whether it be federal or personal, it can be done.

Once there is sufficient community support and funding, housing units may be implemented in communities. A reason why people would be turned away by supporting the homeless is due to the costs. The homeless population is infamous for the numerous hospital visits, in which taxpayers have to pay for. “On average, they visit the emergency room five times per year. The highest users of emergency departments visit weekly. Each visit costs $3,700; that’s $18,500 [...] for the average person and $44,400 spent per year for the highest users of emergency department.” (Green Doors) However, through housing, those numbers can be reduced, as they are in a more supportive environment and are generally more receptive to care. “Offering the provision of housing to the homeless community decreases the number of visits they make to emergency departments by nearly 61%.” (Green Doors) Additionally, through the At home/Chez Soi Project, they conducted a control trial to see the effects of a housing system vs going through the normal treatments. This is what they found.
When faced with a challenge or problem, one is inclined to explore different possible solutions. Ideally, the solution that is chosen is the one that requires the least work and effort, but still achieves the goal. However, the solution that requires the least effort and work can be hidden behind those of more difficulty. In San Diego, the issue of homelessness is prominent. Often seen on the side of the street holding cardboard signs with words written in black Sharpie saying, “God Bless, Any Help Is Appreciated,” the homeless population in San Diego is the third largest in the entire country behind New York and Los Angeles (Fudge). According to Megan O’Dowd, the total number of homeless people in San Diego is 5,733 (O’Dowd). Citizens are well-aware about the issue, and government officials are taking action. However, homelessness is an issue that can be tackled and overcome. Putting an end to homelessness should be encouraged because it affects everyone. There have been different ideas on how to approach solving this issue, ranging from developing parking lots for people who live in their cars, to overnight shelters that provide meals. These ideas are more temporary though. While a meal for a homeless man might feed him for a night, what will he do tomorrow? Where will he go if someone else takes his spot in the shelter. The strategy should be centered around the housing first model. “Housing First is an approach that centers on providing homeless people with housing quickly and then providing services as needed. What differentiates a Housing First approach from other strategies is that there is an immediate and primary focus on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing” (“What is Housing First?”). Temporary housing and services don’t really help the homeless unlike permanent housing which is a better investment over time. Permanent housing also promotes a better lifestyle, opening doors for the homeless to get their lives back on track.

The Right Step
By: Andrew Defante

Temporary housing isn’t a viable solution if one wants to end homelessness. This has been displayed in various projects in the past. “Earlier attempts by the city to completely end homelessness have already failed” (Dean). The city of San Diego and many non-profit organizations have invested in temporary housing projects, such as the San Diego Rescue Mission, the Alpha Project, and Section 8. These projects and services are popular, resulting in a long waiting list to get in. This leaves much of the homeless outside, not solving the problem. The average amount of time a person has in temporary housing is two years. This raises the questions, what happens after the two years? Where will they go, and what will they do? "In 2006, the city devised the “Plan to End Chronic Homelessness," which included building 2,000 new housing units for the most severe cases by the end of 2012. This plan was only designed for a portion of the total homeless population, and as the deadline passed, chronic homelessness remained a major problem in San Diego" (Dean). Despite the efforts to put the chronic (homeless people who are on the streets for a long period of time, and/or on and off the streets constantly) in housing, they still remained a problem. The housing only served them temporarily, hoping to provide a “kickstart” to get them back on track. “Two years sounds like a long time, but it isn’t” (O’Dowd). The two years doesn’t give them a home, but serves them more like a hotel. “You can help detox people from the street,” using the shelter to stabilize them and get them into other programs, he [President and CEO Bob McElroy of the Alpha Project] said. “But once they leave, we can’t reach them” (Cavanaugh, Lane, Pico). Ending homelessness is centered around keeping the homeless off the street and providing them with a home permanently. Temporary housing is what it is stated. Temporary. Problems aren’t solved temporarily.

Temporary housing is also more expensive over time. Consider temporary housing a compounding investment that continues to pull money as time progresses. "All of these issues impact you one way or another, it pulls on your tax dollars for example” (O’Dowd). The taxes that are pulled from people’s earnings go toward a variety of public services. However, if taxes are constantly being spent on various temporary housing services, it
efficient resolution for the issue. It is better to make a larger investment initially for permanent housing, than to continue making medium payments for more temporary housing. The fight to end homelessness can be won, and putting an end to it should be encouraged because it affects everyone. Permanent housing doesn't give the homeless a chance to be thrown back on the streets. It gives them an opportunity to start over and create the life they want to live.

Permanent housing improves the quality of the homeless' lives, completely taking them off the street. Permanent housing gives them an actual home, and takes them off the street completely. "Permanent housing means they have their own unit that has no end date. It is true housing" (O'Dowd). True housing is a reasonable solution if one wants end homelessness. "If we start by giving the chronic homeless a place to call home, then we can create structure to offer support, services, mental health care and job readiness assistance in a smarter, more successful way. The housing first model keeps homeless individuals off the streets and living a better, fuller life" ("Ending Chronic Homelessness in San Diego"). By giving the homeless a definite home, they are given a fresh start which in turn promotes a better life. It allows them to be on their own and have their own space. Megan O'Dowd, Housing Program Analyst for the County of San Diego said that, "With increased permanent housing, chronic and veteran homelessness will be ended by the year 2015, and family and youth homelessness will be ended by the year 2020" (O'Dowd). Once the homeless are taken off the street, the focus can then be shifted into creating a better life for them.

The answer to ending homelessness lies in providing permanent housing for the homeless. Strategic planning and smart spending might result in a more...
Touched by the Homeless
By: Remi Kim

I am not a morning person, and mornings are hard enough without me waking up at 4:15 A.M. The minute I woke up, all I could think about was how awful I was going to look, and what I was going to wear. But then, I began realizing why I woke up so early: to help the homeless. Almost instantly I shut my mind up. “Today, I am not going to be a spoiled brat. I will do whatever it takes to show my compassion, kindness, and respectability to these people. I will not judge anyone.” I told myself. The one thing I can’t stand is when people go to feed the homeless and they come back almost arrogant, thinking that they’re better than everyone else because they did this one act of kindness. I was not going to be one of those people. I was going to help with my two hands that was graciously given to me by God, and serve these people who were less fortunate than me.

As I hopped on the bus and started to head off to St. Vincent de Paul, I tried to fight the sleepiness that seemed to consume me. I remember driving off the freeway into Downtown San Diego, and seeing these homeless people lined on the streets. I mean, I’ve always seen these homeless people while going for a nice dinner in Downtown, but seeing these homeless people today was different. I think the realization that I was about to help people like this finally dawned on me.

Walking into St. Vincent de Paul, I was extremely impressed with how organized everything was. Brittney, Haley, Mariana, Erica, and I were separated from the larger group and were told to serve a delicious breakfast consisting of two pancakes, four sausages, and cream of wheat to anyone who came up to us. I remember my stomach growling as I kept smelling the food under my nose, even when I saw that people needed this food much more than I did. My personal job was to pour the syrup into tiny styrofoam containers. After awhile, I even made a mini competition with myself to see if I could pour the syrup into the container without letting anything spill out of the sides. I was so engulfed in my job, that I forgot to talk to the people standing before. I forgot to say, “Good morning,” and “How are you doing today?” I finally snapped out of it and started to say, "Have a nice day," after every person who grabbed syrup from my station. After awhile, I felt like a broken record chocking out those words after each individual. I specifically remember these two kids. It was undeniably clear that they were about our age, probably even the exact same age as us. I saw them walking in and I stared at them while they walked up to grab some food. I just could not even think that people our age could be homeless. As they stepped up and grabbed their food, I spit out another, “Have a nice day,” which was kindly responded with a, “You too.” I let my eyes follow them to the very back left hand corner of the room. I was kicking myself because I had used the same line I had said 20 times earlier to them. I should have said something different. They touched me, and now they will never know. But even when I look back, I have no idea what I would say. Would they think that we were all spoiled brats? Would they judge us like I had judged them in the past?

Coming out of feeding the homeless, I felt grateful. I also felt and feel inspired to make change. I have learned not to judge the homeless population without knowing each individuals story. I wanted so badly to know how those two teens ended up homeless, but I would never have the nerve to ask. I could and would never disrespect any one of them. I have learned that they all have fought their own battles, and are trying to succeed as much as they can. I think the value of spending a Wednesday morning feeding the homeless is to recognize that they should not be judges on preconceived notions. They are all individuals and that is what makes everyone so similar. I also think the value of feeding the homeless is knowledge. With knowledge and understanding of the homeless, we can create this new perspective that was never taught in schools. We get to make up our own mind about what we think about the homeless without anyone telling us what to think. With knowledge comes power, and with power comes change.
We Are All the Same: Learning Empathy Through Community Service

By: Brittney Aceron

On a Wednesday, my class and I took a field trip to St. Vincent de Paul's and the San Diego Rescue Mission for our Homelessness Project. We arrived at school at the crack of dawn and waited with our heads leaned on the window as the last few stragglers hopped on the bus. 5:30 am came and we hit the road. All of us were still too tired for jokes and giggles—just small talk here and there—until we finally arrived on Imperial Avenue. Out my window I noticed crowds of homeless people throughout the streets with blankets, sleeping bags, shopping carts, backpacks, and signs. One man with ripped sweat pants, a loose shirt, and thick black hair crossed the street without paying attention and I could hear him mumbling something through the crack of the bus window, but there was nobody near him. Then as he began throwing his arms up angrily in the air, I realized he was talking to himself and I wondered, why? As I contemplated this idea in my head I realized the bus had stopped and our first stop had approached to the left of the bus—St. Vincent de Paul's.

At St. Vincent's, we had the opportunity to serve homeless families breakfast. My friends—Haley, Erica, Remi, Mariana—and I formed an assembly line in the kitchen of the cafeteria. Haley served the pancakes, Mariana served the sausage, Remi offered the syrup, I served the cream of wheat, and Erica handed out the cartons of milk. The delicious smell of pancakes and sausage made my stomach grumble, but greeting and briefly conversing with the people we served, made me forget how hungry I was. I really enjoyed working in the kitchen and seeing so many friendly and thankful people. When breakfast was over, we helped clean up trash, wipe down tables, and sweep. Then in the few minutes we had left, we waited in the lobby for the rest of our class to finish their jobs.

Our next stop was the San Diego Rescue Mission. We arrived a little earlier than expected, so we took a quick pit stop at the nearest liquor store off of Elm Street. We refueled our energy from our early morning start with snacks and munchies and then we made our way three blocks down to the San Diego Rescue Mission. When we got there, we were greeted by a friendly young woman named Juliette who worked as the Church/Community Relations and Event Manager of the San Diego Rescue Mission and also acted as our tour guide for the day. She showed us around the San Diego Rescue Mission building, where they housed 100+ women and children overnight daily, where women and children of the year long program lived, where the men lived, the kitchen, the classrooms, and the “playground in the sky.” I was really moved by the incredible stories she told along our tour about families who’ve gone through their organization and have done something amazing with themselves. Especially the changes people made through the classes they were offered at the Rescue Mission, from anger management to GED classes. It seemed as though with a little help and a little communication, people’s lives can be changed and go a long way.

After this experience, I thought back to the beginning of the morning when I had saw a man talking to himself on the street. I remembered how much I wondered about that glimpse of that man’s life that I had seen. On the car ride back to school, I wished so much that I could come across that man again and give him someone to talk to and get him help. I wanted to be that person who makes a difference in his life. Through this thought process, I realized that this field trip not only taught me about homelessness but also about myself.

So many thoughts and questions lingered in my mind throughout the day. Everything that I had experienced that morning made me want to become a more selfless person. From seeing a man talking to himself on the street to serving homeless people cream of wheat, I could almost feel my heart in pain. It wasn’t just that I felt the need to help them, but I also felt something for myself, I looked back at where I am in life and the things I’m going through and I see that I’m so fortunate and privileged to be where I am, under a roof with such an incredible, supportive family. I realize how much we don’t know about other people’s lives and how we judge them based off of appearance and stereotypes, when in reality, so many Americans are just a few paychecks away from being homeless. So why are we defining people based off of their financial standpoint?

Back at St. Vincent de Paul, one of the very first people to come out to breakfast that morning was a little boy. He reached over the kitchen counter to grab his plate of pancakes and sausage. When I saw a little hand come over the table I reached for the plate to help the boy get ahold of it better. He wasn’t nearly tall enough to see past the kitchen counter. He looked up at me and smiled cheerfully, with his bright blue eyes. The little boy looked about 7 years old with tan skin, buzzed cut hair, and a dinosaur hoodie and backpack. He approached Erica next and asked her for some milk, then made his way, confidently looking for a table in the cafeteria all on his own. A few minutes later, a young girl with long thin brown hair a pink backpack, and three younger siblings, approached the breakfast line with their mother. The boy with the dinosaur backpack ran over to the girl. They were extremely excited to see each other. That moment made me think of my brother and his good friends when they see each other. I began to feel both warmth and pain in my heart when I saw the boy and girl smiling together. It reminded me that we are not so different after all. You could tell on those children’s faces that they were happy like my brother and his friends. Sometimes adults need to be like children because children find every opportunity to be happy and they don’t categorize people or discriminate someone because of their differences. I feel like I learn the most from kids because they haven’t been completely brainwashed by society and they think on their own.

In that moment, I learned the true value of service. We are all one and it’s scientifically proven that humans are the only species that rely on each other to survive. When we set aside our differences we see that any one of us could potentially be homeless and sometimes we need a little push to pick ourselves back up. Like with family, we need to look out for each other. By helping others, we begin to see things in their perspective like I did on this day and you begin to see hope and feel the love and gratitude that comes with helping others and being part of a movement in society.
Community Service Reflection  
By: Zuri Smith

In total and complete honesty, I looked at volunteering at St. Vincent’s as an opportunity for community service. Something for the college officials to look at on my resume. That’s all I saw it as.

I woke up at 4 A.M. this morning. I showered, dressed, and ate quickly as I moved quietly through my house trying not to wake anyone. By 4:59, my mom and I were walking out the door and into the early morning. The air was cold, immediately raising goose bumps on my arms. I remember looking up into the darkened sky; the stars filling the empty space with tiny white dots. My mom drove me to school, moving smoothly along the empty highway. When I got to school, we checked in and walked back into the chilly air. Ten minutes later, we were in the darkened bus, racing along the freeway. I put my headphones on and watched the sky slowly turn blue against the rugged terrain. Thirty minutes later, and we were downtown. By that time, it was almost light outside. As we stumbled off the bus, I checked my phone. 5:50 A.M. I put my hand against my head. I remember thinking that this was incredibly early and it was insane to be up at this time. I looked around at my classmates. They leaned against each other yawning, and grumbling quietly to themselves. Soon, our teacher led us to the entrance of the shelter. On the way there, we passed several people who were homeless. The air smelled like downtown and stale cigarettes and I felt myself grow wary, remembering the ludicrous tales of people being attacked by the homeless and my own idiotic fears of being approached, not just by someone homeless, but anyone in general.

We entered the building, blinking at the bright light. We walked in small packs, almost afraid to be separated from each other in this strange environment. At the gated entrance, they gave us visitors passes and we clipped them onto our shirts or pants. We walked into the hall, looking around. It looked like a cafeteria, large round tables dotted around. The sides of the building were curved and open, so that you could walk through them. The walls were painted yellow. As we walked toward the kitchen, people looked around at us, openly staring as we passed. I felt myself become self-conscious again, moving closer to the group. Once we got to the kitchen, we were divided. Paola, Alejandra, Karla, Karissa, Cacho, Israel, and I were left in the kitchen, and the rest of the group was taken somewhere else. I glanced around, slightly uneasy. It was the most primitive of human needs: the dislike of being separated from the rest of the group.

The woman in charge had us wash our hands, put on hair nets and plastic aprons, then set us up at our stations. Four of us serving the food, the other three preparing it. I was part of the four serving the food. The task was quite simple: when someone came up, you grabbed a plate, asked them what they wanted, put it on the plate with the metal tongs, then handed it to them. Quickly, we were put to work as people approached, asking for what they wanted. Some spoke in quiet, humble voices barely glancing up to make the minimal amount of eye contact. Others spoke in almost authoritative voices, looking at us directly in the eye, letting us know that they weren’t ashamed. But there was one thing that remained constant in everyone that we served. Except for one, everyone was respectful, some even thanking us for our services,forgetting up so early. And very quickly, waking up at 4 am wasn’t so bad.

An hour or so into serving everyone, I began to notice that there were a lot of kids there. Ages ranged from months old to about 17, around my own age. I began to worry as I watched a woman pull a tiny baby dressed in a purple jogging suit from a stroller and into her arms. I wondered how she had ended up with a child all by herself. My feeling of unease increased as I watched a boy of around 15, keys around his neck, eyes trained towards the ground, approach me. He had to repeat what he wanted several times before I heard what he was saying. Often times, Paola would remind me that they were only allowed a certain amount. I remember telling her to tell them, because I certainly didn’t want too. I, myself, was calculating roughly how many calories these kids needed in the morning, and this certainly wouldn’t cut it.

I looked at the parents who brought their kids into the line, ruffling their hair affectionately, and asking them what they wanted before they asked for their own portion. I was struck by how, even in these undesirable circumstances, they were still putting their kids needs and wants above their own. Then, I realized that I shouldn’t be surprised. They were still parents.

I kept looking around at everyone. Some looked like they had never known homelessness, while others looked like they greeted it personally at their doors each morning. None of them looked like they deserved it. I wanted to set down the tongs, sit down somewhere, put my head between my knees, and think. Just think out this whole situation. Instead, I tapped the tongs against the metal of the counter, joining in the light conversation with my peers. Why had this happened? Who was here because they couldn’t afford to live where they had any longer? Where any of them on drugs? Whose parents had kicked them out? How could we, as a race, allow this? We, the human race, proclaiming ourselves the smartest out of any organism that has ever lived; we who put ourselves next to the gods; we who know that they weren’t ashamed. But there was one thing that remained constant in everyone that we served. Except for one, everyone was respectful, some even thanking us for our services, forgetting up so early. And very quickly, waking up at 4 am wasn’t so bad.

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of my ignorance, saw the homeless as a group of senile, drug-addicted, aggressive people. In my defense, I knew that not all of them were like this, but I am still ashamed to have ever thought of it all. That day, I learned that everyone has a story and just because they don’t tell it, doesn’t mean it’s not there.

I don’t know why homelessness exist. Financially, I do. But I don’t understand how one person can look at another, know that they’re being denied 3 of the 4 fundamental rights needed to survive to sustain human life (food, shelter and water), and continue on with their lives and not care. My question for anyone is: How can we justify that? How can we pretend not to notice? How do we look at young kids and not immediately offer assistance? How do we look at a man, leaned against a building, huddled in a sleeping bag and not immediately offer him a place to stay? How do we sit around and do nothing? How do we justify homelessness?

In all and complete honesty, I think we’re afraid. I think we’re ashamed. I think we’re afraid to understand. Afraid to care and get attached. Afraid that if we look to closely, we realize that that young woman or that young man could be anybody, could be us. But mostly I think that we’re afraid that if we look into their eyes, they will see all of this: our fears, our doubts, our uncertainties about them.

behind the metal countertop. “Push it, you guys are done,” Alejandra pressed it, signaling that out shift was over. “You guys get what you want. Thank you for your service.” The woman gestured towards the remaining food. The rest of my group went towards the food, filling their plates. I hung back. I had already eaten that morning, therefore I saw no reason to eat now. The rest of my group hadn’t. I followed them to one of the grey tables, thinking that I didn’t want to fulfill the American stereotype of eating more than I needed. I watched my friends eat, laughed at a story that Karla told about falling off the bed, and watched all of them. They were smiling, but there was something in the back of their eyes that told me that they were as affected as I was. Not necessarily bad, but a new understanding blazed behind their otherwise unaffected exteriors.

When we visited the rescue mission, there was one woman who we talked to, that changed my perspective on the homeless population. Smooth copper skin, black hair and dark eyes, she talked in a way that made you want to listen, even if there was something else that you had to do. She talked about how grateful she was that we were here, and that she was here doing the Lord’s work, and that she was just a vessel, doing His work. She spoke about how you had to have a passion for what you did, because if you didn’t then you were going to be unhappy. She left then, thanking us and telling us to have a blessed day. The hallway we stood in was silent, nobody knowing quite what to say. I looked around, slightly shocked to find some of the girls moved to tears. Not that I wasn’t moved myself. I felt as though I had been filled with a new kind of purpose, even though I’m not particularly religious. Regardless, it was a beautiful speech, one that if the rescue mission ever had a conference, they should use as their closing speech, because it spoke not only in depths, but into the depths of each person in there.

When we went back to school, we reflected. We talked about our experiences, our thoughts. Some of us were emotional, some of us were negative. I thought about the things that had changed that day. I thought about how my perspective on homelessness changed entirely, shattering into unrecognizable pieces, then forming into something else entirely. I, in the lowest point
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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”
-Margaret Mead