

# Simple Housing

*The following speech was intended to be given at the Association of Faith Communities – Santa Cruz County Conference on Friday, September 5, 2014. Unfortunately, the community discussion was canceled and the AFC never got to hear HUFF's suggestion.*

First and foremost, we thank you for all of the work you're already doing to help homeless people and for holding this conference today, dedicating yourselves to addressing the issues of poverty and homelessness in Santa Cruz County. We understand that trying to solve such a complicated and widespread issue is quite a daunting task. With that said, we'd like to offer you a simpler way to look at the matter.

We often make homelessness into a complex issue by focusing on its toughest aspects. We speak of highly vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities or untreated mental illnesses who live on the streets; people we don't know how to support properly. We talk about drug addicts and people who have criminal records sleeping in parks and hiding in bushes; so called "threats" to our community. We make pleas on behalf of single mothers and children without roofs over their heads; as we see our own mothers and children reflected in their eyes. We talk about the Recession and the many people forced to leave their homes in the wake of layoffs and the slow recovery of the economy.

But the truth is, all of these kinds of people exist outside of homelessness. You have members of your congregations with learning disabilities and physical handicaps. You have neighbors who have criminal records or who struggle with addiction. There are single mothers living in houses all over the city. And there are plenty of people stuck at home everyday typing up resumes and trying to find work. The only thing that makes homeless people any different from the general population is that they have no space of their own to return to at night.

Taking this into consideration, we at HUFF believe the best course of action to address homelessness in Santa Cruz is to create simple housing. Simple housing is exactly what it sounds like: a roof over your head, something to sleep on, a 24 hour restroom, and a place to shower. We would love to see the faith community come together to create and support an initiative to make 1,000 simple housing units in Santa Cruz County. Given that the 2013 Homeless Census found over 3,000 homeless people in the county, we believe that it is reasonable for us to try to serve at least a third of that population. Once again, all these people need are the basic things most of us take for granted: a roof over our heads, something to sleep on, 24 hour restroom access, and a place to shower.

We ask you for your help as we cannot do this alone. Poverty and homelessness are community issues. It will take the love and care of all of the community to resolve them. As some of the most loving, caring, and knowledgeable folks in town, we turn to you for allyship and support. If you would like to join us in these efforts and continue this dialogue, please come see me after the community talk-back is over. Once again, thank you for providing this opportunity to discuss these matters as a community. My name is Raven Davis and I'll be here later if you'd like to talk more about HUFF's proposal for simple housing. Thank you.