

# BACKPACK BIGOTRY IN CAFES DOWNTOWN ?

Homeless customers report an upsurge of exclusionary and discriminatory policies against people who look homeless, associate with homeless people, have a guitar on their person, and/or carry their possessions with them..

Recent reports from Cafe Pergolesi raise the question as to whether there is such a policy there or whether certain managers are simply arbitrarily excluding paying customers that they have decided are “homeless”. Homeless customers in some of the other cafes report similar discrimination.

Discriminating against disabled people is against the law. Most homeless people are disabled. It is also abusive, unkind and socially toxic. It violates the long Santa Cruz inclusive tradition of diversity. While legitimate time, space, and customer comfort are a valid concern for cafe management, the exclusion of homeless people on the basis of appearance is a form of invidious discrimination.

Hopefully business will regulate themselves and not succumb to pressure groups and prejudice. However, businesses who continue exclusionary behavior need to be publicized so that the community can vote with its dollars. Those businesses who refuse to renounce such a policy are encouraging those who support fairness to shop elsewhere and encourage their friends to do likewise.

## FACTS and CONSIDERATIONS

1. There are 1500-2000 homeless people in Santa Cruz and the number is growing with the economic crisis, job flight, and escalating income inequality. These people have few to no storage facilities for their survival gear during the day. As nights continue cold, homeless people have a necessity to keep their possessions with them.
2. While time limits for staying in a cafe can be used in a discriminatory manner, they are also a legitimate part of doing business, as is the need to keep aisles clear, provide adequate seating when the cafe is busy, etc. Provided homeless customers respect these concerns, it is neither necessary nor fair to engage in wholesale exclusion of backpacks, guitars, etc.
3. The lack of adequate shower and sanitary facilities in Santa Cruz is undisputed. The only public facilities are cold water showers at the beach during the day and a new 24-hour portapotty at Laurel and Front St. If there is concern about “homeless odor” or the fear of such complaints, such customers (including those with heavy perfume to which some are allergic) can be asked to sit at the outdoor sections—which most downtown cafes now have).
4. Recent crackdowns on street vendors, sweeps of homeless camps, intensified police action under the harsher Downtown Ordinances are all a part of this unjustifiable discriminatory mindset. Certain groups and individuals are deliberately or obviously creating a climate of hostility against homeless people under the label of “public safety”, “deterrent to business”, &/or “nuisance behavior”. In some cases, pressure—felt or imagined—has persuaded or emboldened various businesses to adopt policies that create an unwelcome climate for poor, counterculture, & homeless people
5. Adopting non-discriminatory policies will serve to depolarize a tense climate, restore confidence in the fairness of downtown businesses, and actually encourage downtown trade—a significant portion of which involves poor, disabled, and often houseless locals.

.....Please tear off and post in a visible place.....

## PLEDGE OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

**We are a business open to all, regardless of housing status. We acknowledge that many homeless people have disabilities and limitations that require at least tolerance if not accommodation. We acknowledge that in many cases, such persons have limited choices regarding the possessions they have with them and their personal hygiene. We expect respect for our staff and customers in return.** (signed) ..... (date) .....