

**Homeless to a life of dignity
Demonstration Project
May 15, 2019**

“Start with the premise that every human has worth. The broken and damaged must be salvaged.”

Members of our society view homelessness as an eyesore. A nuisance in our neighborhoods. We often forget the homeless among us are people with degrees of issues and situations that put them on the street. The homeless among us have families. They are sons, daughters, parents, children, brothers and sisters. They are neglected, broken people who desperately need help.



Suffering from mental illness ranks high among those in the homeless population. Many more suffer from a combination of addiction and mental illness. Some are fleeing abuse and struck by financial catastrophe due to a loss of support or



employment. People living in homelessness are complex. Those committed to helping themselves require intensive, expensive care and rehabilitation.

Society has left those suffering from chronic homelessness behind. If those on the street were cured, they would still face unemployment and financial instability because they don't possess marketable skills to sustain themselves. Many, damaged beyond repair would require a life-time care and shelter. It is said we are a compassionate society. We should prove it by committing necessary care and shelter for our homeless.



The issue of homelessness has impacted hundreds of thousands in California, from those living in squalor on the streets to residents concerned about their health and safety. Experts have issued warnings of the return of diseases like typhus and bubonic plague. Wildlife are exposed, suffer and spread diseases throughout our ecosystem placing us all in jeopardy.

There seems to be no long-term solutions to fixing the problem. Society and government appear unable or unwilling to tackle underlying problems of homelessness. We accommodate the blight. We endeavor to spend millions (if not billions) to clean up the aftermath of homelessness. We turn our heads the other way, expecting others like the police to deal with it.

Homeless service providers have done a one-size fits all, piecemeal approach to helping people from the destructive life of homelessness. Government coffers are flush with taxpayer funds dedicated to the problems of homelessness. After decades of the conditions of homelessness, there appears to be many questions on how to spend those funds.

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My friend Ed Ballinger and I have had many discussions on how to fix the problem. One thing is clear; we must take a comprehensive approach to move those living on the streets to living a life of dignity that includes the restoration of good health, sobriety, care for mental illness and skills development for obtaining self-sustaining employment. Doing anything less perpetuates the neglect of those suffering on the streets. We must truly help them transition from the conditions that keep them in a state of homelessness.

What does a human need to survive?

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Safety
- Sanitation
- Clothing

If you were the average person living in homelessness and chose to get off the streets, you would immediately need:

- The desire to get well and leave the streets. A hunger to achieve personal stability.
- Intensive triage to determine what your underlying needs and conditions are and whether you possess the capacity to accept and work towards appropriate care and skills development.
- Medical treatment for illnesses and conditions associated with living a life without sanitation and neglect.
- Intensive treatment to stave off the need to abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Mental health counseling and treatment that includes dispensing of medication under controlled conditions.
- Time.
 - Time for treatments to kick in.
 - Time for personal lucidity and comprehension to leave the street life behind.
 - Time to develop an exit plan.
 - Time to transition to a life of self-sufficiency and dignity.

I will say something controversial. People do not have a right to languish in filth. People don't have a right to impose those conditions on our neighborhoods. It is not right to expose the rest of us to disease pestilence. The sight of homelessness should shock the conscience of the average citizen. We cannot allow those living in homelessness to slowly decay and die because of neglect.

It is long past time to fix this crisis. As my friend Ed said, "You can pay now or pay later."

Read further for a concept that could work...

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“Project Details”

Ed and I have discussed creating an opportunity for the homeless to clean up from their addictions, clear up from mental illness and tool up for work and self-sufficiency.

The ingredients of the program:

- Government funding and oversight.
- Grant of the use of a closed government facility such as an air force base housing complex or other closed institution. (Counties, the state and federal governments have inventories of closed facilities.)
- A trustworthy community-based organization or non-profit to establish, coordinate and manage the program.
- Case or social workers to process and evaluate potential program recipients.
- Altruistic big-box corporations that would donate building supplies, tools, equipment and food to start the physical rehabilitation of the community site.
- Trade unions and their volunteers willing to teach the skills necessary to rehabilitate housing sites and souls, from electricians, plumbers and home construction.
- Vocational instructors able to teach 21st Century skills such as automotive repair, air conditioning, machine manufacturing, light assembly, retail and inventory control, electronic troubleshooting and repair, culinary arts.
- Educators to teach curriculums and certify completion.
- Medical staff from doctors, nurses to technicians.
- Any and all people necessary to care, develop and implement the project.
- Suitable candidates with the desire to change for the better, committed to complete the programming and the temperament to live and work peacefully around others.

I often told Ed about closed and empty military bases. I always thought it was a shame to see military base housing rotting in the sun. It occurred to me that maybe they could be repurposed to house, treat and train homeless people to help themselves from a life of despair and neglect to a future where they could sustain and provide for themselves. It's not just closed military base housing. It could be a closed state hospital, a facility used for incarceration or closed school campus.



Empty Housing, Closed George Air Force Base

Think of the idea of acquiring such a property with government funding, putting it under the management of a worthy non-profit that would collaborate with home improvement companies to supply material and equipment to rehabilitate the structures for habitation and use.

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Think of the concept of collaborating with trade unions and construction companies to train suitable homeless candidates to learn a vocational skill such as electrical, plumbing, drywalling or flooring installation and repair. Capable homeless participants could learn and work to fix their own housing facility and receive certifications and potential job opportunities.



Think of the opportunities for supporting functions at such a facility. People need food, sanitation and other needs. Other qualified candidates could staff kitchens, supply warehouses, medical facilities, groundskeeping and sanitation services, each with a chance to perform useful functions and work experience for future employment.

The concept is a community where all the needs are met for those who wish to leave the life of homelessness, where one can work, learn and receive treatment and care for addictions and mental health issues all designed to prepare each participant for a future graduation to personal sustainability.

Medical staff and treatment specialists would work, and in some cases, live on site to meet the needs of those participating in the program. New doctors could serve their internships at the facility.



Counselors and case managers would work at the facility and handle a manageable caseload. Each would be responsible for evaluating each applicant and developing a plan or referral to services to meet the specific needs of each participant.

All participants must volunteer for the program. Participants would have to be thoroughly evaluated to see if they could complete the structured program. Each applicant must be afforded an opportunity to get off the street. If they don't initially qualify for this program, every effort should be made to refer them to services that can accommodate their needs. They must sign a letter commitment to accept treatment and training. They must promise to live by a code of ethics and understand their failure to live by the standard could mean dismissal from the program.

Each participant must be an American citizen and resident of the state and surrender a portion of their monetary entitlements to the program for their training, care and shelter.

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About the author: Joe is a 27-year retired veteran of the Santa Monica Police Department. He is an expert on the issues of homelessness and Community Oriented Policing programs and tactics. He has been a street-level peace officer. Joe also implemented and supervised a specialized unit dedicated to solving neighborhood issues caused by homelessness and has worked with non-profit and municipalities. Joe speaks on the topic to community groups business owners to help mitigate the impact of homelessness. Joe serves as presiding Commissioner of the Los Angeles County Probation Commission.

Thanks goes to my good friend, Captain Ed Ballinger, USN, Retired who has collaborated with me on this and other projects. He has been my mentor and advisor. We love our Country and its people.

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