

WHO SOLVES HOMELESSNESS?

A TRAVELING PHOTO EXHIBIT POWERED
BY "THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU"
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN.



WELCOME, AND THANK YOU FOR STOPPING BY.

TODAY, YOU ARE ENGAGING WITH **WHO SOLVES HOMELESSNESS?**, A TRAVELING PHOTO EXHIBIT THAT CONTINUES OUR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN, THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU.

IN FRONT OF YOU ARE PORTRAITS OF ORANGE COUNTY RESIDENTS. EACH PERSON CONTRIBUTES, IN A DIFFERENT WAY, TO SUPPORTING NEIGHBORS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. THEY ARE OUTREACH WORKERS, HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS WHOSE WORK OFTEN GOES UNSEEN. WE CALL THEM UNSUNG HEROES.

AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THE EXHIBITION, EACH PORTRAIT IS PAIRED WITH THE SUBJECT'S STORY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES. TOGETHER, THESE STORIES REMIND US THAT HOMELESSNESS IS A COMPLEX CHALLENGE THAT DEMANDS COMPASSION, COLLABORATION, AND SUSTAINED COMMITMENT.

SEE *YOU* AT THE END!

AVAILABLE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES HERE



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

THE UNSUNG HEROES YOU WILL MEET THROUGHOUT THIS EXHIBITION WORK EVERY DAY TO ADDRESS ONE OF OUR NATION'S MOST PERSISTENT CHALLENGES. YET THEIR STORIES CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD WITHOUT FIRST UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY THAT SHAPED THE WORK THEY DO.

HOMELESSNESS DID NOT EMERGE OVERNIGHT, NOR CAN ITS INCREASE BE EXPLAINED BY ONE SINGULAR CAUSE. IT IS THE RESULT OF DECADES OF ECONOMIC CHANGE, PUBLIC POLICY, HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS, AND INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES INTERSECTING OVER TIME. EACH GENERATION INHERITED NEW CHALLENGES WHILE CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLUTIONS.

AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THIS EXHIBITION, THIS TIMELINE TRACES SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINTS IN THE HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES. THOSE MOMENTS INFORM THE REALITY THAT IS OUR PRESENT TIME.



MEET CHARLES LOZANO, PROGRAM MANAGER AT AMERICAN FAMILY HOUSING.

CHARLES SPEAKS ABOUT CHANGE WITH THE CONFIDENCE OF SOMEONE WHO HAS LIVED IT. HIS OUTLOOK SHARED IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS JUST MOVING THROUGH LIFE, MAKING CHOICES THAT LEFT ME EMPTY. I ALWAYS KNEW THERE HAD TO BE SOMETHING MORE. THAT SEARCH LED ME TO CHANGE EVERYTHING. I STARTED AT THE BOTTOM OF A HOMELESS SHELTER, MAKING BEDS AND WELCOMING PEOPLE THROUGH THE DOOR. TODAY, I HELP OTHERS KEEP THE HOUSING THEY'VE WORKED SO HARD TO FIND. EVERY PERSON CARRIES A STORY, AND EVERY STORY DESERVES COMPASSION. I DON'T TELL PEOPLE WHAT TO BELIEVE; I TRY TO SHOW THEM THROUGH THE WAY I LIVE. I NEEDED A PURPOSE, PURPOSE OF MY LIFE. TODAY I HAVE MY PURPOSE."

HOMELESSNESS BEFORE MODERN AMERICA

BEFORE THE 1930'S

HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES HAS EXISTED FOR MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY, BUT FOR MOST OF THAT TIME, IT WAS UNDERSTOOD DIFFERENTLY THAN IT IS TODAY. IN THE 1870'S, THE WORD "HOMELESSNESS" WAS FIRST USED TO DESCRIBE THE "TRAMPS" OR ROAMING LABORERS, WHO TRAVELED ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES HOPING TO FIND EMPLOYMENT.

POVERTY AND HOUSING INSTABILITY WERE LARGELY TREATED AS MORAL SHORTCOMINGS RATHER THAN THE RESULT OF BROADER ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL CONDITIONS, THIS PERSPECTIVE SHAPED AMERICAN ATTITUDES FOR GENERATIONS. THAT UNDERSTANDING WOULD CHANGE DRAMATICALLY DURING THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE OF THE 1930'S, KNOWN AS THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

MEET T.D. NGUYEN, COMMUNITY SUPPORT NAVIGATOR AT CITY NET.

T.D. SAID, "I SPEAK FROM THE HEART", AND YOU CAN FEEL THIS IN HIS PORTRAIT. IN HIS OWN WORDS, HE TELLS YOU WHO HE IS.

"TO BE HONEST...I DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS PROFOUND KINSHIP I SHARE WITH THE POPULATION I'M SERVING. IF I'M FORCED TO DIG DEEP DOWN ...IT PROBABLY HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH HAVING BEEN A REFUGEE...AS A REFUGEE, AND AS IF HOMELESSNESS WAS NOT ENOUGH...I WAS ALSO "STATELESS," NO COUNTRY TO CALL HOME...NO ONE TO STAND UP FOR YOU...YOU SEE...I CAME TO THE STATES FROM A REFUGEE CAMP IN 1979...IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE VIETNAM WAR...I WAS 15 THEN.

I GUESS THE EXPERIENCE GAVE ME A TASTE OF HUNGER...OF THIRST...OF WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE NOT WANTED...TO HAVE LITTLE CONTROL OVER YOUR OWN FATE...TO HAVE TO BEG FOR KINDNESS FROM OTHERS...

I'M SURE MOST OF MY COLLEAGUES IN THIS FIELD SHARE SOME SORT OF EXPERIENCE SIMILAR TO MINE...THE FORCE BEHIND WANTING TO SERVE...BUT THEN STRESS SETS IN...COMPASSION-FATIGUE PLAYS A ROLE...ADD IN A SYSTEM THAT CAN BE CUMBERSOME...DISCOURAGEMENT THREATENS THE COMPASSIONATE SOUL...WHAT I HOPE TO NEVER HAVE TO EXPERIENCE...

I'M NOT THERE YET...SINCE I'M STILL ABLE TO SENSE IT...THIS DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN THE POPULATION AND I...AND AS LONG AS IT'S THERE, I WILL EMBRACE IT WHOLEHEARTEDLY."



THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1929

THE GREAT DEPRESSION FUNDAMENTALLY TRANSFORMED AMERICA'S UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS. FOLLOWING THE STOCK MARKET CRASH OF 1929, MILLIONS OF AMERICANS LOST THEIR JOBS, SAVINGS, AND HOMES. ENTIRE FAMILIES, MANY OF WHOM HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED POVERTY, FOUND THEMSELVES LIVING IN TENTS, OR CROWDED SHELTERS. "HOOVERVILLES" (NAMED AFTER PRESIDENT HUBERT HOOVER) BECAME SYMBOLS OF A NATION IN CRISIS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, HOMELESSNESS WAS RECOGNIZED AS SOMETHING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO ORDINARY PEOPLE THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND THEIR CONTROL. THE GREAT DEPRESSION RESHAPED THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN RESPONDING TO POVERTY AND LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR FEDERAL INVESTMENTS.

IN 1932, THE "EMERGENCY RELIEF AND CONSTRUCTION ACT", AUTHORIZED LENDING OF PUBLIC FUNDS TO CORPORATIONS TO BUILD HOUSING FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES. THE NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL RECOVERY ACT OF 1933 HELPED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF LOW-COST HOUSING. AROUND 40,000 HOUSING UNITS WERE PRODUCED THAT YEAR.



MEET VY HO, FSS PROGRAM COORDINATOR AT THE GARDEN GROVE HOUSING AUTHORITY.

VY BELIEVES LASTING CHANGE BEGINS BY RECOGNIZING THE PROGRESS THAT OFTEN GOES UNNOTICED. THAT BELIEF INSPIRED MILESTONES MATTER, A PROGRAM SHE HELPED LAUNCH TO CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS BIG AND SMALL, FROM EARNING A DRIVER'S LICENSE TO COMPLETING A DEGREE, OR FINDING EMPLOYMENT. FOR VY, EVERY MILESTONE IS WORTH CELEBRATING.

POST-WORLD WAR II LEGISLATION

1945

AS THE NATION MOBILIZED FOR WAR, THE UNPRECEDENTED SURGE IN FEDERAL DEFENSE SPENDING ALLEVIATED THE GREAT DEPRESSION-ERA HOMELESSNESS DUE TO ECONOMIC INSTABILITY BY DRAFTING MEN INTO THE MILITARY AND PULLING MILLIONS OF UNEMPLOYED CITIZENS INTO WELL-PAYING JOBS. WHILE THE WAR SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF HOMELESSNESS BY RESTORING CONSUMER PURCHASING POWER, IT SIMULTANEOUSLY TRIGGERED A HOUSING SHORTAGE.

IN RESPONSE TO THIS HOUSING SHORTAGE, CONGRESS PASSED THE HOUSING ACT OF 1949. THE GOAL WAS TO OFFER “A DECENT HOME AND A SUITABLE LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERY AMERICAN FAMILY”. HOWEVER, JIM CROW LAWS AND THE BROADER SOCIETAL SEGREGATION SHAPED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING ACT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE ACT PERMITTED LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES TO MAINTAIN STRICT RACIAL SEGREGATION. ALMOST 20 YEARS LATER, THE FAIR HOUSING ACT OF 1968 AIMED TO ELIMINATE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE HOUSING MARKET AND THE SEGREGATION CREATED BY EARLIER FEDERAL POLICIES.



MEET LISA PEREZ, SERVICE NAVIGATION MANAGER AT FAMILIES FORWARD.

LISA KNOWS THAT HOMELESSNESS DOES NOT ALWAYS LOOK THE WAY PEOPLE EXPECT IT. IT CAN BE A FAMILY SLEEPING IN A CAR, A CHILD TRYING TO FIT IN AT SCHOOL, OR A NEIGHBOR QUIETLY ENDURING A CRISIS. WHEN SHE RESPONDS TO HELP FAMILIES IN NEED, SHE DOES IT WITH CALM, CREATIVITY, AND COMPASSION. EVEN WHEN THE SYSTEM CANNOT PROVIDE AN IMMEDIATE SOLUTION, LISA BELIEVES EVERY STEP TOWARD SAFETY MATTERS, AND THAT LASTING CHANGE REQUIRES ALL OF US TO PAY CLOSER ATTENTION TO THE PEOPLE AROUND US.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

1950-1960

AS THE HOUSING ACT OF 1949 GAVE FUNDING FOR DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN AREAS, LOCAL OFFICIALS AND PRIVATE DEVELOPERS USED THIS POWER TO CLEAR OUT THE CHEAPEST, HIGHEST-DENSITY HOUSING. THOUSANDS OF LOW-COST HOTELS, BOARDING HOUSES, AND SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCY (SROS) BUILDINGS WERE DEMOLISHED. THESE BUILDINGS HAD QUIETLY PROVIDED AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH VERY LOW-INCOME OLDERADULTS, VETERANS, AND INDIVIDUALS LIVING ALONE.

ALTHOUGH URBAN RENEWAL MODERNIZED MANY DOWNTOWNS, RELATIVELY LITTLE AFFORDABLE HOUSING REPLACED WHAT HAD BEEN LOST. AS RENTS INCREASED AND INEXPENSIVE HOUSING OPTIONS DISAPPEARED, PEOPLE LIVING ON THE ECONOMIC MARGINS HAD FEWER PLACES TO GO.

THIS MARKED A PROFOUND SHIFT. HOMELESSNESS WAS NO LONGER SIMPLY ABOUT POVERTY; IT WAS INCREASINGLY ABOUT THE GROWING MISMATCH BETWEEN INCOME AND AVAILABLE HOUSING. BY ELIMINATING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES LIKE SROS WITHOUT REPLACING THEM, THE LEGISLATION DIRECTLY SET THE STAGE FOR THE MODERN HOUSING AFFORDABILITY CRISIS.



MEET MAGDALENA MARTINEZ, HOUSING SOLUTIONS PROGRAM MANAGER AT MERCY HOUSE.

AS A 1ST GENERATION AMERICAN, MAGDALENA'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD HAS BEEN SHAPED BY HER OWN EXPERIENCE NAVIGATING SYSTEMS ON BEHALF OF HER FAMILY. HELPING HER PARENTS ACCESS HEALTHCARE AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES TAUGHT HER THAT BARRIERS ARE NOT ALWAYS VISIBLE. TODAY, AS A PROGRAM MANAGER, SHE BRINGS THAT PERSPECTIVE INTO HER WORK, ADVOCATING FOR CLIENTS, AND HELPING THEM NAVIGATE SYSTEMS THAT CAN OFTEN FEEL OVERWHELMING.

A CHANGING MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

1960–1970

BEGINNING IN THE 1960'S, THE UNITED STATES MOVED AWAY FROM LARGE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS IN FAVOR OF TREATING PEOPLE WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES. KNOWN AS DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION, THE SHIFT LOOKED TO PROVIDE MORE HUMANE CARE AND GREATER INDEPENDENCE.

THE SUCCESS OF THIS TRANSITION DEPENDED ON BUILDING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS, SUPPORTIVE HOUSING, AND LONG-TERM SERVICES. HOWEVER, IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, THOSE SYSTEMS WERE NEVER FULLY FUNDED OR DEVELOPED. MANY INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS STRUGGLED TO FIND CONSISTENT CARE AND STABLE HOUSING.

WHILE THE GOAL HAD BEEN TO REPLACE INSTITUTIONALIZED CARE WITH COMMUNITY-BASED OPTIONS, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PATIENTS WERE LEFT HOMELESS AND WITHOUT ADEQUATE TREATMENT, EFFECTIVELY LINKING HOMELESSNESS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE IN THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION. ALTHOUGH MENTAL ILLNESS IS ONLY ONE OF THE MANY PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS, THIS PERIOD EXPOSED HOW HOUSING AND HEALTHCARE ARE DEEPLY CONNECTED.

MEET HANNAH POPLOSKIE, STAFF ATTORNEY AT THE PUBLIC LAW CENTER.

HANNAH'S STORY IS DRIVEN BY CLARITY. AS AN ATTORNEY, SHE SEES A SYSTEM THAT IS UNNECESSARILY CONFUSING AND HAS DEDICATED HER CAREER TO MAKING IT UNDERSTANDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE. SHE KNOWS THAT INDIVIDUALS FACING EVICTION OR LOSING THEIR HOUSING ARE FACING DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING A SYSTEM THAT WASN'T DESIGNED WITH EVERYDAY PEOPLE IN MIND. THROUGH HER WORK, SHE HELPS TRANSLATE THAT COMPLEXITY INTO SOMETHING PEOPLE CAN UNDERSTAND, GIVING THEM NOT ONLY LEGAL REPRESENTATION, BUT THE KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES.



THE MODERN HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

1980

DURING THE 1980S, REDUCTIONS IN FEDERAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING INVESTMENTS COINCIDED WITH RISING HOUSING COSTS AND WIDENING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY. DURING THIS TIME, THE GOVERNMENT TRANSITIONED AWAY FROM FUNDING PUBLIC HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND SHIFTED TOWARD MARKET-ORIENTED, TENANT-BASED SUBSIDIES (LIKE SECTION 8 VOUCHERS) TO CUT LONG-TERM FEDERAL COSTS. THE NATIONAL ECONOMY SHIFTED FROM MANUFACTURING TO SERVICE INDUSTRIES, WHERE WAGES WERE LOWER (A PROCESS KNOWN AS 'DEINDUSTRIALIZATION'). DURING THIS TIME, 4.5 MILLION UNITS WERE REMOVED FROM THE NATION'S HOUSING STOCK, HALF OF WHICH WAS OCCUPIED BY LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS.

HOMELESSNESS ROUGHLY DOUBLED IN THE MID-1980'S ALONE, EXPERIENCING A MASSIVE AND RAPID INCREASE THAT BIRTHED THE "MODERN ERA" OF HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA.

HOMELESSNESS BECAME INCREASINGLY VISIBLE IN CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, TRANSFORMING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN VIEWED AS AN ISOLATED ISSUE.



MEET KAZANDRA MALDONADO-RAMIREZ, YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR AT COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP OF ORANGE COUNTY.

KAZANDRA BELIEVES EVERY YOUNG PERSON DESERVES SOMEONE WHO SEES THEIR POTENTIAL BEFORE THEIR HARDSHIP. THROUGH MENTORSHIP, ADVOCACY, AND COMPASSION, KAZANDRA HELPS YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS FIND STABILITY, CONFIDENCE, AND THEIR OWN VOICE.

AMERICA RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS

1987

AS HOMELESSNESS BECAME A NATIONAL CRISIS, CONGRESS PASSED THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT IN 1987, THE FIRST MAJOR FEDERAL LEGISLATION SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS. THE LAW EXPANDED FUNDING FOR SHELTERS, OUTREACH, HOUSING, AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS, MARKING A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN NATIONAL POLICY.

ITS MOST PROFOUND IMPACT WAS RESHAPING THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM, LEGALLY GUARANTEEING HOMELESS YOUTH IMMEDIATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, THE RIGHT TO STAY IN THEIR SCHOOL OF ORIGIN, AND FREE DISTRICT TRANSPORTATION.

THROUGHOUT THE 1990'S, RESEARCHERS LIKE DR. DENNIS CULHANE, OBSERVED THAT MANY PEOPLE CYCLED REPEATEDLY THROUGH SHELTERS, HOSPITALS, EMERGENCY ROOMS, AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH EMERGENCY SERVICES SAVED LIVES, THEY OFTEN ADDRESSED IMMEDIATE NEEDS WITHOUT HELPING PEOPLE ACHIEVE LASTING STABILITY. COMMUNITIES INCREASINGLY RECOGNIZED THAT HOMELESSNESS WAS NOT SIMPLY THE ABSENCE OF SHELTER. IT REFLECTED THE INTERACTION OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, HEALTH CARE, EMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND UNIQUE LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES.



MEET JOYCE LEE, HOUSING NAVIGATOR/HHIP LEAD AT ASIAN AMERICAN SENIOR CITIZENS SERVICE CENTER.

IN HER OWN WORDS: "A LOT OF THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH HAVE SO MUCH TO SAY, ESPECIALLY OLDER PEOPLE, BUT NO ONE TO SAY IT TO. SOMETIMES WHAT THEY NEED FIRST IS SIMPLY AN EAR, SOMEONE WILLING TO SIT WITH THEM, LISTEN, AND LET THEM KNOW THAT WHAT THEY ARE FEELING MATTERS.

BEFORE I BEGAN THIS WORK, I DID NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND HOW MANY CIRCUMSTANCES CAN LEAD SOMEONE INTO HOMELESSNESS. PEOPLE MAY LOSE THEIR JOB, BE FORCED OUT OF THEIR HOME, OR FIND THEMSELVES WITHOUT FAMILY OR FRIENDS TO TURN TO. IT IS RARELY AS SIMPLE AS PEOPLE ASSUME. THERE IS ALWAYS MORE BEHIND WHAT YOU SEE."

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

2008

THE FINANCIAL CRISIS LEFT MILLIONS FACING FORECLOSURE, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND FINANCIAL INSTABILITY. ALTHOUGH THE ECONOMY RECOVERED, HOUSING PRODUCTION DID NOT KEEP PACE WITH DEMAND. TODAY, A SEVERE SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOMES REMAINS ONE OF THE STRONGEST DRIVERS OF HOMELESSNESS NATIONWIDE.

HISTORICALLY, HOMELESSNESS WAS CONCENTRATED HEAVILY IN DENSE INNER CITIES. THE FINANCIAL CRISIS COMPLETELY ALTERED THIS NOTION. SUBURBAN FAMILY HOMELESSNESS SPECIFICALLY GREW BY NEARLY 56%.

IN 2009, THE HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND RAPID TRANSITION TO HOUSING ACT WAS SIGNED INTO LAW, WHICH REQUIRED COMMUNITIES TO PRIORITIZE RAPID RE-HOUSING AND PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING TO RECEIVE FEDERAL FUNDS. FOLLOWING A MODEL THAT PROVIDED PERMANENT HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS.

THIS SETS THE GROUND FOR THE CENTRAL IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT IN THE CONTEMPORARY HOMELESSNESS CONVERSATION. SHOULD HOUSING BE A FOUNDATION FOR ACHIEVING STABILITY, OR SHOULD HOUSING BE EARNED AS A FINAL STEP OUT OF HOMELESSNESS?



MEET ADAN REYES, EMERGENCY SHELTER CASE MANAGER AT PATHWAYS OF HOPE.

IN HIS ROLE, ADAN HAS LEARNED THAT HOMELESSNESS IS RARELY THE RESULT OF A SINGLE CIRCUMSTANCE. IT IS SHAPED BY A COMPLEX NUMBER OF FACTORS, ECONOMIC, EMPLOYMENT, FAMILY DYNAMICS, TRANSPORTATION, AND ACCESS TO BASIC RESOURCES.

ADAN HAS SEEN IN THE FAMILIES HE SUPPORTS, THAT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REMAINING HOUSED AND BECOMING HOMELESS IS OFTEN NOT DETERMINATION; IT IS WHETHER THEY HAVE ACCESS TO A SAFETY NET OR NOT.

HOMELESSNESS IN ORANGE COUNTY

PRESENT TIME

- 6,321 PEOPLE WERE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN ORANGE COUNTY DURING THE 2026 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT. THIS REPORT PROVIDES A SNAPSHOT OF A SINGLE NIGHT IN JANUARY. DATA FROM THE HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS) SHOWS THAT 17,145 FELL INTO HOMELESSNESS OVER ONE YEAR, 2024-2025.
- LOCAL DATA REPORTS SPANNING TEN YEARS ALL INDICATE THAT FINANCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP FACTORS ARE THE TWO MAJOR DRIVERS OF HOMELESSNESS IN ORANGE COUNTY.
- RESEARCH FROM UC IRVINE SHOWS THAT HELPING SOMEONE MOVE INTO PERMANENT HOUSING COSTS LESS THAN LEAVING THEM UNHOUSED AND LIVING ON OUR STREETS.
- FOR EVERY 12 SHELTER RESIDENTS IN ORANGE COUNTY WHO COMPLETED ALL THE NECESSARY STEPS TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR HOUSING, ONLY 1 WERE CONNECTED TO HOUSING IN 2024. THIS SPEAKS TO THE NEED TO INCREASE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR COUNTY FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.



MEET ANGEL DE LA FUENTE, ACCESS POINT COORDINATOR AT FRIENDSHIP SHELTER.

HERE IS ANGEL IN HER OWN WORDS:

"SOMETIMES THE HARDEST PART OF MY JOB IS TELLING SOMEONE I CAN'T GIVE THEM WHAT THEY NEED. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR IMMEDIATE HELP, AND I HAVE TO EXPLAIN THAT THE SYSTEM CAN'T ALWAYS RESPOND THE WAY THEY HOPE. THOSE CONVERSATIONS ARE HEARTBREAKING. BUT I'VE LEARNED THAT PEOPLE APPRECIATE HONESTY, AND THEY APPRECIATE KNOWING SOMEONE ACTUALLY CALLED THEM BACK.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE'RE ALL LOOKING FOR CONNECTION. THAT'S WHAT SO MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS HAVE LOST, NOT JUST HOUSING, BUT TRUST, COMMUNITY, SOMEONE WHO SEES THEM AS A PERSON. IF SOMEONE WALKS AWAY KNOWING THAT I CARED, THEN I KNOW I'VE DONE MY JOB. SOMETIMES THAT HUMAN CONNECTION IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD EVERYTHING ELSE."

HOMELESSNESS TODAY

THE HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS IS NOT THE STORY OF ONE DECISION, ONE POLICY, OR ONE PERSON. IT IS THE STORY OF MANY FORCES INTERSECTING OVER GENERATIONS. UNDERSTANDING THAT HISTORY REMINDS US THAT HOMELESSNESS CONTINUES TO REFLECT OUR COMMUNITIES' PRIORITIES AT EVERY INFLECTION POINT. JUST AS DECADES OF CHOICES SHAPED TODAY'S CHALLENGES, TODAY'S CHOICES WILL SHAPE TOMORROW'S OUTCOMES.

THROUGHOUT THIS EXHIBITION, YOU HAVE MET PEOPLE WORKING EVERY DAY TO RESPOND TO HOMELESSNESS WITH COMPASSION, PERSISTENCE, AND COLLABORATION. YET SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EXPERTISE COMES NOT FROM A JOB TITLE, BUT FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE. PEOPLE WHO HAVE NAVIGATED HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING INSTABILITY UNDERSTAND THESE SYSTEMS BECAUSE THEY HAVE LIVED THEM. THEIR VOICES ARE ESSENTIAL TO SHAPING SOLUTIONS THAT ARE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND HUMANE.

THE QUESTION IS NO LONGER WHAT SOLVES HOMELESSNESS.

IT IS WHO SOLVES HOMELESSNESS.



MEET MARINA GARCIA, LIVED EXPERIENCE PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER AT UNITED TO END HOMELESSNESS.

IN THIS ROLE, MARINA IS HELPING PAVE THE WAY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSECURITY. DRAWING FROM THEIR OWN LIVED EXPERIENCE, THEY ARE WORKING TO IMPROVE THE VERY SYSTEM THAT ONCE SHAPED THEIR LIFE. AFTER THEIR MOTHER BECAME ILL, MARINA ENTERED THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, AN EXPERIENCE THAT INSPIRED THEM TO BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR YOUTH NAVIGATING SIMILAR CHALLENGES. THEY USED THAT DETERMINATION TO BE THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND ORANGE COUNTY'S FIRST-EVER YOUTH ACTION BOARD (YAB), A GROUP OF YOUNG LEADERS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE WHO ADVISE LOCAL AGENCIES AND POLICYMAKERS ON PROGRAMS AND DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOUTH EXPERIENCING OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS.

WHO SOLVES HOMELESSNESS?

SOMETIMES, THAT IS THE PERSON IN THE PORTRAIT.
SOMETIMES, IT IS THE PERSON STANDING BESIDE YOU.
PERHAPS THE ANSWER IS: THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU.

THANK YOU FOR STOPPING BY!

ENDING HOMELESSNESS REQUIRES MORE THAN AWARENESS; IT REQUIRES PARTICIPATION. WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME, SUPPORT LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, ADVOCATE FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING, CHALLENGE MISCONCEPTIONS, OR SIMPLY LEARN MORE, EVERY ACTION CONTRIBUTES TO A STRONGER COMMUNITY.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOMELESSNESS IN ORANGE COUNTY AND HOW YOU CAN BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION, VISIT:

THEPERSONINFRONTOFYOU.COM OR SCAN THE QR CODE.



Exhibition Credits

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Scan the QR code to explore the reports, historical sources, and local data that informed the stories and timelines presented here.

