

LOVE ALL NEIGHBORS: IT'S THE WAY TO END HOMELESSNESS

By Voices Contributors John R. Steward And Mark Davis | Wed 14 Nov 2018 7:01 EST



(PHOTO: UNSPLASH/STEVE KNUTSON)

It's no secret that Orange County faces a housing challenge, most pointedly among those who, for one reason or another, have found themselves without a place to call home. In 2017, officials recorded more than [4,700](#) homeless individuals living throughout Orange County, nearly 400 of which are decorated veterans.

The causes of homelessness and the people facing life without a home are varied. Many struggle daily to survive after they've lost jobs or affordable housing. Others are trying to care for their children and unable to make ends meet.

So, where can these individuals lay their heads at night? While the County operates 1,140 shelter beds in the winter – fewer in the summer – clean living quarters, free from harassment or danger, are few. Bottom line: Orange County's homeless community is underserved in resources, services and compassion, and have nowhere to go.

National headlines about Orange County's homeless situation has caused many within our community to lose hope for a real solution and give up. But if our decorated veterans – our most honored citizens – and people with disabilities – our most vulnerable – are left to fend for themselves without a home and hope, what does that say about us?

Fear-based opposition and the ever-present NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard) mentality have slowed or completely halted some well-designed proposals to shelter our homeless. When opponents are asked where these much-needed facilities should be located, the response is often "anywhere but here." Essentially, make it someone else's problem.

We encourage all persons of faith and goodwill to consider how that sounds, as well as the rhetoric that's crept into our public discourse regarding homelessness.

Have we forgotten the humanity of those experiencing homelessness? Who are the souls that we, as a community, are leaving behind? Are we pointing fingers and assigning culpability before fully understanding someone's struggle? Is ours a voice for justice and compassion or are we merely looking out for our own interests?

We are called to love every member of our human family and ensure that every person, whether currently housed or not, is treated with dignity and respect.

In February 2018, a coalition of business, philanthropic, non-profit, governmental and faith leaders launched the United to End Homelessness campaign.

Led by Orange County United Way, this countywide initiative is comprised of passionate individuals who are committed to ending chronic homelessness in Orange County by 2024 by implementing a proven solution: Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).

PSH provides housing and support services for chronically homeless individuals – those with disabling or debilitating conditions who face the most complex health needs.

There's proof of concept in many U.S. communities – including Orlando and Salt Lake City – that significantly reduced homelessness through PSH.

What's more, PSH has been proven to be significantly cheaper than leaving people on the streets, where their health will certainly deteriorate. Sadly, too many of our homeless neighbors breathe their last breaths of life not in their own beds or a hospital but on a cold sidewalk.

All the great faiths have in some form or fashion the lesson of The Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." If you were disabled, couldn't work and living on the streets, wouldn't you want the option of a home, where you could live with dignity while receiving the care you need for a stable life?

On behalf of the United to End Homelessness Faith Leadership Council, we hope to ignite an uprising of compassion for those in need and a movement of champions who support proven solutions to homelessness. If we are going to enact change, we must work together, united for the greater good.

Visit unitedtoendhomelessness.org to learn how you can join our growing movement.

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