

What I would do to help the homeless, speaking from experience

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A world of Catch-22s. Let's say, as a homeless person, I decide that I want to change my life. I want to find a job, but I need to wash my clothes, shave and shower. There is a place that I can do all that. I go down to that place. I get there and they tell me that I will need to be here very early if I want to do my laundry. The doors open at 7:30 a.m. and the line is normally a block long. The next morning I get up early, I get back to the place where I had been the day before.

It's 5:30 a.m. as I round the corner; I look and there are five people in line. Finally the doors open, I go inside and the sign on the desk says it opens at 8 a.m. It is 8:15 by the time my machine gets started, 8:45 when I start the dryer, and around 9:30 my laundry is finished. Then it is off to the showers and a shave.

"Now it's time to start the job search," I say to myself. I look at the clock. It is so late that I decide it is too late to start looking. You need to be out there early. I get up early and get my things together. I find a newspaper and I see a job only a mile away. I go pushing my shopping cart, and I walk to the address in the paper, seeing a sign in the window. "Help wanted," I read as I wipe the sweat from my brow. I push my cart into a parking space and I go inside to ask for an application. I sit down and begin the paperwork. As I finish the application and return to the receptionist's desk, the

owner walks through the door. I'm standing there with a smile on my face, smelling 24 hours fresh. I walk by the owner saying to myself, "I hope I made a good impression."

Now, let's take a look at the problems that could have been avoided: If I could have washed my clothes just before going to bed, they would be ready after I showered and then I would be able to start putting in applications at 7:30 a.m. Also, if I had a place to store my cart with everything I own in it, that might not be as difficult. Then, I might not be sweating when I go inside, and maybe the parking space that I parked my cart in wouldn't have been the spot that the owner likes to park his Lexus.

As a homeless person I have seen several things that do work. There are programs available if you need and want help with drug or alcohol addictions. It is great if you qualify and you can get the help you need. But what about the people who don't want or need the treatment? There is very little help available. The sad thing is that it is sometimes so hard to get help that people just give up. Everywhere, everyone is guessing! How do you help so many? It would be impossible to give them what it would take to make a difference. My solution: Don't give it to them. Well, not for free. There are no free rides. And no one can carry the load.

I had a conversation with a bus driver who asked me, with all my experiences in being homeless, what would I do if I could open a place for the homeless and set it up

just the way I wanted, what would I do?

I started thinking of different things that I have seen, and I told him that I would like an old school and its grounds. On the grounds I would have an area for a tent city, the people who sleep there would pay \$1 per day to sleep there. The dollar would pay for a 24-hour laundry, showers and a place to store people's things. Then there would be a section for something similar to Dignity Village. If you stay at Dignity Village, you pay \$25 per month. In addition to the money, you put in sweat equity.

In the building, I would have a large day resource center, a large commons, and a huge night shelter. If you sleep in the night shelter or on the grass, it will cost you \$1, with the above privileges. On the ends of the main building will be male and female bunkhouses. Those at the bunkhouses will pay the most. It will cost \$50 a week.

Now here is where the money comes in, if you have 200 beds each bringing in \$200 a month, that's \$40,000 a month.

It's \$40,000 a month that is not being paid by taxpayers. Then there's \$1 a day from everyone else living on the compound. If needed, we can do a micro-business to bring in additional income. With this, when a person finds his- or herself in a homeless situation, they can find everything they need all in one place. They can also look around the compound and see how they can improve lives and get back off the streets. It's hard to climb a ladder that you can't see.



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