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Advocate for Housing Stability since 1996

Welcome letter from the C.E.O., Laura Hansen

The Coalition to End Homelessness (CTEH) is a collaboration of people and organizations committed to human rights and dignity. We are realistic and know that all people have challenges. Perfection does not exist, and our empathy and compassion should not depend on it.

More Americans face periods without safe or accessible housing than most people realize. We estimate that about one in four Americans will experience at least a few days without safe or accessible housing, although nobody knows the true number. The word “homeless” carries so much stigma that many people who experience housing insecurity never tell anyone.

People facing housing insecurity may never interact with the “homeless system” and therefore are never counted. They may stay with a friend, sleep in their car, use a gym membership to shower, keep their belongings in a storage unit, or rely on a vehicle for shelter.

Most of the people I have met facing housing insecurity work full-time. They have income; it is simply not enough to keep up with today’s inflated housing costs. The public sees them every day and works alongside them without ever knowing that they are struggling to maintain housing.

There are nowhere near enough services for those who need help. Hundreds of unsheltered families, for example, remain on waiting lists for emergency shelter. At the same time, asking for help is often accompanied by judgment and discrimination.

Our society places tremendous value on wealth, independence, and success. Poverty, financial hardship, and precarious housing are often treated as shameful, making people reluctant to share what they are experiencing. It is easier to look away, build walls, and convince ourselves that someone else will handle the problem.

Hardworking people tell us they have worked all their lives, paid their taxes, supported their families, and even given to charity. Many are still working full-time when an illness, separation, or reduction in work hours suddenly makes their housing precarious.

Many assume that a system exists to help them when they need it. They are often shocked to discover how inadequate that system is and how few emergency shelter beds are available. In the unlikely situation that they are able to find shelter, they may encounter strict rules, limited autonomy, and conditions that are far from what they expected.

Our minds are shaped by cognitive biases that influence how we see the world. We tend to trust our own groups, favor certainty, and assume that what we see represents what exists. If we do not see people experiencing homelessness, we may unconsciously assume they are not there.

This creates a psychological blind spot around poverty and housing insecurity. Let me assure you: thousands of individuals and families in every county live without shelter or in precarious housing situations where homelessness is a constant concern. Children experiencing housing insecurity are in our public schools, too. The Coalition refuses to deny what we see.

As a grassroots volunteer organization, our impact is only as strong as the people who join us. Our members, funders, volunteers, and supporters are people who refuse to look away from those living on the streets or in precarious housing. We know that denial does not solve the problem.

The opposite of help is happening. More individuals and families are living without shelter, and an increasing number of children in public schools lack stable housing. It is not true that there is nothing you can do.

You can join us and become part of a movement committed to our shared humanity and to challenging discrimination, dehumanization, criminalization, and disrespect based on income or housing status. Not only can joining the Coalition make a difference in the lives of people without shelter, it can also make a difference in your own life.

When we shift our focus from ourselves to others, we can experience a greater sense of purpose and connection. Service helps us step outside the exhausting cycle of comparison and reminds us of how fortunate we are. Purpose, helping others, and gratitude are among the strongest sources of fulfillment I have found.

Research consistently connects a strong sense of purpose and service with greater life satisfaction and well-being. Humans are social beings, and our own happiness is deeply connected to the well-being of the people around us. Helping others is not simply a noble idea; it is part of what allows communities to thrive.

Our responsibility is not simply to accumulate more, but to help relieve suffering and reduce inequity. The future of humanity is collective. We rise and fall together.

Every action by every person and organization has ripple effects. Helping one person can begin a positive ripple; harming one person can begin a negative one. We owe it to ourselves, our families, our communities, and our future to make as much of a positive difference as we can.

There are many good causes that need your support, and giving your time to any of them can benefit both you and society. Most selfishly, I hope you will consider working with us to lift the dignity of all human beings. We would be grateful for whatever you can give.

And if there is nothing you can give, consider sharing our volunteer opportunities with your circle. We have active volunteers throughout the world, and all that is required to help is an internet connection and a computer.

Laura Hansen
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