

Students of the Street

Meet Alex. She has long, light brown hair and is in seventh grade. She loves to climb and sing and spend time with her friends. She loves math and reading. There's something different about her, though. She carries a knife in her pocket. Dirt is clumped under her fingernails, and her hands are calloused and covered in grime. Her pockets are big and deep, better for carrying everything she needs. She doesn't sleep well on the hard ground, nervous about who will come by. She often wonders what she'll eat. Alex is unable to think about school. She's worried about food and her safety. Alex is one of the tens of thousands of homeless students in Washington.

I chose the Sustainable Development Goal 'Sustainable Cities and Communities' - specifically student homelessness, for a very important reason. Everyday, when I am on my way to school, a friend's house, and even the store, I see homeless people. On Sundays, my family and I feed a group of homeless in South Seattle. They are a small fraction of the homeless community in Seattle. There are 35,000 homeless children in Washington state. Seattle, specifically King County, has the third-largest homeless population and one of the largest homeless student populations in the United States. To put this into perspective, this number is around twice the size of Harvard University, and three times the size of Yale. This is roughly 300 times the size of my school. More than 3% of enrolled students in Washington state are homeless. One in every 27 kids are homeless. In such a rich state, the one Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates call home, it's morally unacceptable that this is such an issue.

According to the Schoolhouse Washington's Analysis, one out of ten African American kids is homeless. For every 11 Pacific Islanders, one is homeless. One out of 12 American Indian/ Alaskan Native is homeless. One in 20 Hispanic Latino Students. And one out of every

38 white students are homeless. These statistics show how homelessness impacts students of color, and the large gap between them. In addition, students experiencing homelessness are twice as likely to get suspended or expelled.

Right now, actions are being taken to change hunger, but it is not enough. Every Sunday, I, along with a small community of neighbors, feed the homeless a warm meal. Though this gives people free food, it feels like we are just mopping up the mess. Here's what I mean by mopping. Imagine you walk into a room and the sink is overflowing. The faucet is still running, but instead of turning off the faucet, we reach for the mop. The faucet represents the root causes, and the problems we have to fix. We can turn off the faucet, but only if we stop the root cause.

I believe that housing is a right for all. And without housing, students are unable to focus on school. The Coalition for the Homeless suggests there are three main solutions to stop Homelessness: 1. Get people into housing, such as the Housing First initiative. 2. Establish a Legal Rights to Shelter 3. Take steps to prevent the issue from occurring in the first place. I believe that Housing First is the most sustainable solution, because they are addressing all three of these goals.

Housing First provides housing for anyone no matter their reasons for homelessness. When in housing, people have to take on more responsibility. I recently interviewed expert Linda Olsen from Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and she said "The Housing First initiative treats housing as a right. Once someone is in stable housing, there is the ability to heal, gain skills and change their lives." Richard Cho, deputy director of United States Interagency Council on Homelessness says, "In the past several years, communities have come to realize that the Housing First approach is not just one possible approach to ending

homelessness, but in fact, the only truly effective approach to ending homelessness... the way to end people's homelessness is by helping them obtain and maintain a safe and stable home." We are striving to end homelessness, and the Housing First initiative is one way that I believe we can complete this.

A cheap and quick way to achieve this is to build tiny homes. This is one way to turn off the faucet. Tiny Homes give cheap housing for people who wouldn't be able to afford a place to live otherwise. One tiny house could cost as little as \$2200. There are approximately 1,052,000 students in Washington. If every student donates \$75, we could end student homelessness. Currently, schools might feed the homeless and I think it would be more effective if schools built tiny homes instead.

When I would build the tiny homes, I would make sure to use solar heating, to maximize the use of the sun. I would also collect rainwater, as it rains a lot in Seattle and this water has many uses. Another energy efficient solution is to use small wind turbines. When building, I would make sure to insulate, otherwise heat would leak, and this burns more fossil fuels and creates unnecessary carbon emissions.

With Gates Foundation grant money I would promote this issue, and have students help their fellow students. That way, homeless students would know that their friends cared enough and used their own money to try and solve this issue. If each student in a group of 120 people brought 20 dollars, this would equal more than the necessary \$2200 to build a single tiny home. In companies, they throw away building materials deemed attractive. I would collect these materials and use them for construction of tiny homes.

To sum it up, there are 35,000 homeless children in Washington, and they need our attention now!

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