

# Why We Fight For Those Who Are Homeless

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National Coalition for the Homeless Board Member

We are the National Coalition for the Homeless. We give our time, our energy, our talents, our resources and our money to make sure everyone has a home. Why do we do this? We give generously of ourselves because we believe that home is the singular foundation that supports us, protects us, and enables us to build better lives and a better world. A home can be a physical structure where we can store foods and cook nutritious meals so our bodies will be strong. It is a place where we can get clean so we can stay healthy. Homes ideally have a safe and comfortable space where we can curl up when we are tired, sick, and weary, where we can close our eyes and revitalize ourselves so we can get up and live another day. A house is a physical place and space. A house and a home can be similar, but they are not necessarily the same.

A home is far more than walls and refrigerators and beds. While “a house is made of walls and beams, a home is built with love and dreams.” A home is where people care for us, listen to us, help us, and believe in us. Home is where our values are born and where our futures are paved. “Home is where the heart is” is a commonly held notion, and people think of home as the place where they grew up, played, laughed, and shared fond memories. Children need a home to give them a good start in life, since “home is where one starts from,” as T. S. Eliot reminds us. What children get in the home sets them up for the rest of their lives. Our nation’s original leaders knew this; Benjamin Franklin reminded us that “a house is not a home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as the body.” Home is where we have the space to think, to read, to reflect, to work and to plan. It is the place where we may become loved and accepted for whatever we are. Home comforts us when things don’t go well and celebrates our joys and accomplishments.

Sometimes people may have shelter but no sense of security. Their struggles of fighting to survive, to hold a job, to have enough to eat and a place to sleep may be exhausting and enormous. The pressures associated with lack may be overwhelming and lead us down a path filled with problems and despair. The social forces associated with poverty may rip families apart and etch in the minds of children a picture of reality in which they are not enough and the world doesn’t care for or about them. Children may not have a mental place where they can go to be safe or build dreams. They may suffer from a lack of belongingness. Physical homelessness breeds emotional homelessness, and neither type is good for individuals or the world.

What happens in the home doesn't stay in the home. When children live in a sense of abundance they can grow forward to spread it around to others; when they are deprived they will require assistance to merely survive. We are all interconnected. One person's sense of lack inevitably impacts us; we pay for others not having or being "enough" with our own money, time, energy, and resources. The biggest way lack hurts us is by creating a skewed way of thinking about things, ourselves, and each other. The result is that our world suffers from the creation of a host of preventable social problems. Conversely, every act of loving kindness and generosity nurtures the heart and makes the world a better place. Confucius said that the strength of a nation is derived from the integrity of the home. Growing strong children brings forth strong societies. We don't need a crystal ball to show us what will happen if all levels of society don't step up to help children and families - the result is inevitable and unpleasantly clear.

We are the National Coalition for the Homeless. We fight for people who are downtrodden because the integrity of society depends upon someone having a voice for those whose plight is ignored or discounted. We fight for the homeless because we believe in our nation's underlying principle of equality. We believe that each person should be treated with respect. We fight for democracy-in-action so those deemed the least among us may have the same chances as those who are regarded as best. We fight for the homeless because our nation can't build a strong house without investing in the human foundation. We believe that homelessness is unacceptable for any citizen of the United States of America. We fight for those who are homeless because others can't, won't or don't. We hope that each citizen, organization, and governmental leader will join us in a new partnership to ensure our nation's mandate of liberty and justice for all.

\*The views expressed are those of Yvonne Vissing and may or may not reflect the policy positions of the NCH staff or board members.