

Listening to Homelessness in Norman, OK



**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION,
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA**

An Undergraduate Student Course Project

Edited by Dr. Elaine Hsieh

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WHO WE ARE

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Introduction

This book is possible because of my students. This is a result of student-led, community-based campaigns that emerged in my upper division courses in health communication.

In Fall 2013, a group of students organized a “staying warm in winter campaign” at a local homeless shelter, *Food and Shelter*. Because of the success of the campaign and the support of the shelter, I requested funding from Sooner Parents to conduct health campaigns for a class in Fall 2014. In particular, I planned to use homelessness as the applied contexts as I survey theories and topics of health communication. I wanted my students to be able to see how these theories can be explained and applied to real life issues.

As part of the course requirement, all students conducted an IRB-approved field interview with a person who relied on *Food and Shelter* for resources to cope with everyday life struggles. They all met with a homeless person and conducted a one-hour, semi-structured, one-on-one interview, learning about the experiences and perspectives of the homeless.

After the interviews, I asked the students to design an intervention that could improve the quality of life for the homeless people. When I first started the class, I thought that I’d be lucky if I could change a few students’ minds about how they understand the issues of homelessness in America. What has transpired in the class was much more than I imagined. My students were determined to create a resource to support the homeless.

A group of students proposed to create a resource that can be self-sustaining and continue to benefit the marginalized populations in the Norman community. They decided to create a book featuring the perspectives of invisible people in Norman. In particular, the book will highlight the needs, perspectives, and narratives of invisible people (e.g., including but not limited to homeless people) in Norman by featuring their stories. Because of the goal of creating a self-sustaining resource to the local communities and marginalized populations, they

hoped to price the book around \$10 so that people would feel comfortable to purchase it when approached by a homeless person or when seeing the book in a local store. While my students hope that the book will be available at OU and local book stores, they also want to provide opportunities for the homeless people to sell the book and to interact with local populations. This will allow them to build social skills, find meaningful employment, and become self-sufficient.

When we first approached the University of Oklahoma Press about the book proposal, they were interested in the idea but raised concerns about their profit margin, vendor outlets, and annual distribution of royalties were unlikely to fit what my students had in mind. OU Press suggested that my students not work with them but print the book through local/online printing services, which provide students greater control over proceeds and distribution. My undergraduate students agreed. In November 2014, we received \$1,700 from the College of Arts and Sciences as a startup fund for the publication of this book.

By December, 2014 the whole class executed three different campaigns. With \$500 funding from Sooner Parents, we created this book, held a job fair, and provided necessary resources to help the homeless to stay warm in winter. Many undergraduates went beyond what was expected or required by the course, seeing their efforts as a personal cause. In fact, many students volunteered to pay campaign costs themselves, asking me to share the Sooner Parents funding with other teams who may need it more.

Sachiko Terui, a doctoral student who volunteered to serve as an unpaid teaching assistant, was present for all field activities. She was there for every field interview and every campaign intervention, providing support to all undergraduate students. She served as the liaison between the shelter, student groups, and me. Her commitment and passion for the class were critical to the success of all student projects.

I also want to thank the support of the Department of Communication. Dr. Michael Kramer suggested that if we were not able to receive funding from the College of Arts and Sciences, he would be willing to fund the publication of the book. Kristi Wright, assistant to Chair, was always willing to help. Finally, I cannot express my gratitude enough for

Shelley Turner's support. She volunteered to proofread the book and assisted the publication process by taking care of all the administrative details. There are a million little details when publishing a book like this. She took care of them all.

This book is a direct result of the funding from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oklahoma. In Spring 2015, I reviewed, revised, and edited the students' draft for this book. This book is possible because of the dedications and enthusiasm of the following students: Alexa Hodges, Erin McFall, John Mcloughlin, Mathew McAfee, Powell Fitzgerald, Rachel Minson, Shelbie Coombes, and William Corbin. Chapter 3 features their essays about their transformative experiences.

Thank you for all your hard work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elaine Hsieh". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light gray rectangular background.

Elaine Hsieh, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Graduate Liaison
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1. Voice of the Homeless

In this chapter, we included stories that we have gathered in our field trips. These are comments transcribed verbatim by the undergraduate students who conducted the interviews. A research assistant and I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. We organized the texts minimally through the interview questions. While we were not able to share the complete raw data of all interviews, a group of undergraduate students assisted us to select these quotes. They are not “analyzed” texts. They are shared narratives between a homeless person and an undergraduate student.

Because the content is organized by the questions posed by the undergraduate students, we have primarily included the homeless people’s comments. At times, we have included the students’ comments to illustrate the interpersonal dynamics. In the excerpts, we use H to indicate talk from a Homeless person and S to indicate talk from an undergraduate student.

What is the most common misunderstanding people have about people who are homeless?

1.

H: Think they’re lazy, or- And it’s not true, not even close.

S: Right, I mean you said you went to Las Vegas just to get a minimum wage, just to-

H: My children are raised all I have to do is feed myself, and I don’t have a whole lot of ambition, and like I said pain is my best friend, it never leaves me, it’s always there, trustworthy. (laughs)

2.

H: I guess that they all probably is trying to be homeless. They ain’t really (deep inhale), some of them that, uh, can help it and [some of them] can’t or whatever. I hope I put that right.

3.

H: That they’re all lazy, worthless, that they have no ambition, no desire. And ya know that is true about maybe 75-78% of them. I

mean we have to call a spade a spade, a sharp shooter a sharp shooter, and a garden hoe a garden hoe and a garden wrench a garden wrench. We have to be honest. But there's people up here, I'd say ya know right around 25% of them have really hit hard times. Ya know working for companies that ya know decide they're gonna move out of town or something you know and they got say 250 employees, we got 250 hardworking people who ya know get out here, they've worked like a dog all their life they got up and they bought houses, but they can't find another job and they've gone through their savings ya know their unemployment and all they and don't want to give up what they got and they look for jobs and they can't get them or they get minimum wage jobs and your household structure your financial structure and all that they set it up to where it's all based off your full job, but you get paid income and if you don't have that, you slowly lose everything. You take your savings and all your resources and everything to keep your home and one day you'll get three months behind on your mortgage and the bank doesn't care. You're out. And you've got kids and stuff and you can't take care of them and you've got no place you go. And you load up in your family van and everyone is like "oh bums".

Were there any moments, if any, you felt uncomfortable about how you were treated?

4.

H: Uh, no.

S: No?

H: No.

S: Everybody's been pretty kind?

H: Yeah, especially here.

S: That's good.

H: When I used to come here. Yeah everybody's been pretty kind. You're right.

S: That's good. Because that pisses me off.

H: (laughs)

5.

H: No.no

S: Oh You? Never?

H: No.. I try to uh try not to let some things bother me cause life it hard as it is. Ya know

S: So you do feel uncomfortable at times about some treatment? But you just ignore it?

H: Yeah.

6.

H: (Long pause) Yeah.

S: Would you like to share what that was, or you don't have to if you don't want to.

H: Like some of the places around here or food pantries that are supposed to help homeless people you can't get food or help unless you have a proof of residency.

S: Seriously?

H: Yeah.

S: That is crazy to me!

7.

H: Just in general society- a person walking down the street, if you're carrying your bed roll, you know because it's a very important thing. We all stash it up in designated places around here. Just the looks you get when people are driving their kids to school in the morning. Just the looks you get because they see you carrying a bed roll. It goes from a happy good morning to an "ugh" in disgust. No that's about really the only time.

Do you feel that you are socially isolated? In what ways?

8.

H: Socially isolated? Nahhh!

S: Did you ever? No?

H: No. Living down in Dallas, I always had my crew that I ran with when I was on the streets down there. (mumbles). We had our little group. For safety reasons partly. Who's gonna screw with eight people, right?

9.

H: No, I'm not socially isolated, no. I got family to help, so. I got a girl by my side.

S: Hey, that helps.

H: You got a girl at your side?

S: No, living the single life.

H: What's wrong with you bro? Look at you, big pimpin.

(laughter)

10.

H: Uhm. Slightly, yeah.

S: Is it because you have your fiancé?

H: Yeah. That is why it is only slightly. We have really good friend around here especially when people don't want you for your money are anything like that. You actually get a genuine connection.

11.

H: Yes, very much so.

S: umm ... in what ways do you feel socially isolated?

H: Uhh, like students and stuff like that they can go to a place like the brew house or something like that and enjoy a meal and play pool and things like that. But on our hand, we go in there and try to have a meal and stuff like that it's just it's just very awkward and different because you can feel other people looking at you and making observations of their own.

S: mhmm.

H: And things being said.

What is the health problem that troubles you the most and why?

12.

H: Umm, I'm about to give birth. So, emotional, and mental.

13.

H: Breathing problems cause I'm a smoker, and then that foot fungus.

S: Yes, from the showers.

H: Yeah. And stomach problems because (mumbles)

S: You've got what?

H: I've got a real fondness with the bottle. Which goes along with about 90% of people on the streets. (laughs)

S: Why do you think that is?

H: Cause it's cheap. And I can legally carry it around. Keeps you warm. I don't know about around here, but in Dallas there's a liquor store downtown just about every corner.

14.

H: No, the only health problems that I'm concerned about are joining the Marines are going to turn me down, because I'm supposed to be shipped off here in two weeks. To dock for basic training, in two weeks and I got a corrupt disk in my back. And I'm just wondering if it's going to stop me from going in there, or. Other than that I'm healthy. As healthy as a whistle. And whistles are not very clean, well, healthier than a clean whistle.

15.

H: My teeth and probably no insurance and yeah no money... I mean I know that's my fault and stuff but when I had money I never went to dentists and now it's like my teeth are breaking off and I'm just like breaking them off. Like I didn't think about it the other day, but I was breaking off my tooth and my wife was like, "Hey you better watch and like stop doing that." And I was like it seems like nothing to me. It's like my body seems like it wants me to fucking get rid of this so I am busting them off. I guess like

moneywise, like money and insurance and I guess being a little scared too. Like scared of the dentist and shots in the mouth and all that stuff. But I mean I'm not really sure honestly. I guess I'd say the money, the money is the biggest thing. The money.

16.

H: I have medications, high blood pressure, obtaining medications is the hardest part. The loop holes and the things you have to do to obtain medication. If you're lucky you might get an appointment at that variety care after a month. It is not about me, but I made it about me, because it took so long. I'd go to the ER to get the doses of 7-10 days to the ER. I don't prefer the ER, but I had to be.

What is the most challenging thing you face in your life?

17.

H: Mmmm, I hadn't really thought about it, about- actually all I do really is just worry about is my kids being healthy and happy, I don't really care much about myself. When you are young like you, I always thought I was bulletproof, till uh my appendix ruptured last year, and it made me realize how you're not bulletproof like you think you are.

18.

H: Face in my life?

S: Yeah.

H: Umm... Keeping a positive attitude.

S: Okay. What sort of things make it difficult to keep a positive attitude?

H: Umm... negative situations.

S: Negative situations?

H: That's pretty self-explanatory when you look around here!
(laughter)

19.

H: Well, being homeless. It is the most challenging thing I have ever faced. It is the worst thing ever. My mind started to drift in ways-

- I don't mind telling you-- I had thoughts that I didn't go through with, but it was no different than what any homeless person's thoughts are.

H: Most challenging thing. Hmm.

S: There are so many.

H: It's like- Shit! Now my brain is rattled.

(laughing)

H: Think, brain. Think. um Mine would have to be my um suicidal tendencies. I've tried to take my own life since I was 12. Uhm. I did the whole cutting crap. I have 460 scars on my arms.

S: oh man.

H: Both of them. Um sometimes I would hold the scissors to my neck and really really really contemplate it. I never did it for attention I did it because I was punishing myself for my dad's hatred

S: yeah

H: You know, I was like- Well, he hates me. So I must be horrible and that was the thought that was planted in my brain for years and I didn't stop until I was 24. I've had a couple relapses but nothing as bad as a couple Sundays ago when John and I were about to get a divorce and I lost it again

S: Yeah, I mean really-

H: That was the last time I went to Griffin [Memorial Hospital]. I had slashes all down my arm so-

S: Oh man, that's so hard.

H: That's one of my most challenging- would be torn confidence. I really don't have any social confidence.

S: Yeah.

H: I haven't in a while. Uhm, I guess I have doormat written on my forehead or something. I get targeted a lot by really mean cruel people.

S: Oh my gosh.

H: And that's part of why I've turned slightly feral being on the street. I'm like one of those cats that climbed up a tree and said, "I dare you to try and get me down, mother fucker!"

S: Seriously like- Oh my gosh, that's so ...

H: I'm a cat in a tree, throwing sticks at people. I will eat your soul.

S: Seriously, I mean- I would be like that.

H: Yeah.

S: I mean for real.

H: That's kinda how I am. Poor James. He's trying so hard to get me out of that but-

S: I'm sure I can't even imagine like- um so 5 years from now, what would you like to see in your life?

H: (sigh) Our own place, steady job. uh Or either way- um more independence and better friends. I need nicer friends. I really do.

S: Preach right-

H: Yeah.

(laughing)

Five years from now, where would you like to be in your life?

20.

H: My girl by my side still, a couple of kids, living in a house, having a car. A good life, having a good job, no drugs. So that's my- what I go by. Live, love and learn. Peace, love, and happiness.

S: What do you think it would take you to get there?

H: Listening to my girl, listening to my family, and staying away from the bad things. (pacing back and forth and looking around to avoid eye contact) My girl just got me off it, I'm twenty days sober now. She just got me off doing that dope. Even know I was living in tweaker house. So I'm trying to like get her from that house, I'm trying to get an apartment, she doesn't do it, she's clean too. All she does is pot, and there's nothing with that. You do too, you do too.

S: (laughs)

H: And I just don't want her to be tempted to try it, or get talked into trying it, and then getting hooked.

S: Has she never?

H: No she's never done it. And I'm proud of her. Because of her, I quit dope. You don't find girls like that. Cause I tried myself, I tried the hardest. I went to rehab, I to all sorts of stuff, and I just came back and bought some and just went off the walls. I gained my muscles back, and stuff like that so. That's why you need a girl in your life, bro, keep you on the straight path. You got to find those girls.

21.

H: Me and my wife have a plan of being married and having whatever little crappy house or whatever we can get. Me and her want to start our own taco truck. We're both Indian, and we love to cook, and we're both experienced cooks. She was a dietary chef for retirement homes for a while, and I've been going to Job Corps and cooking my whole life. I grew up doing construction and stuff though but I like seeing people's faces whenever you give them a good meal. I'd like to do something like that around here for like football games and basketball games and stuff and then be able to come over here [to Food and Shelter] and give people the opportunity to have a job and also eat for free.

22.

H: Well I wouldn't like to be homeless, I'd like to have me a little garden spot, and a little house, like nothing fancy, I don't need no mansion or no speed boats and you know.

23.

H: Five years from now, as a matter of fact, my plans are in the next 3 months. I'm gonna have a ring on her finger. And go ahead and say she's going to say "yes" to marriage. Five years from now, I'm gonna have another company started probably; I can't never get another CDL license because of the strokes and seizures. They say I have some brain damage stuff like that. I can get a CDL but I can't get a –they call it a DOT card, department of transportation

because you have to pass a physical. What I'm thinking about doing is I wanna get into writing. It's always been one of my dreams and passions. And I never really had a chance to pursue that and now I wanna be a writer. Really the first thing I wanna do—I'm a funny guy, and I can make people laugh and I really, really enjoy that.

24.

H: Well, if I'm here...you know what? That's a good question. I don't know how to, uh-I just don't know. Hopefully I'm alive and, you know, be able to do something. Maybe try to go back to work. I mean, regularly. Guess I need to take care of all of my medical stuff, really. Especially the blood pressure because I can tell I get headaches but...Just hopefully I'm alive. Hopefully I got, you know, sti-still in good health.

25.

H: What would I like to see in my life?

S: Where would you like to be in 5 years?

H: I don't know

S: Like what do you want in 5 years, you get a job, an apartment, where do you want to be?

H: Just stable with some kind of decent job that I like and I'm good at.

S: What do you like to do?

H: I don't know

S: What's your dream job?

H: I don't want to say.

S: You have to!

H: I like to write. But you know- I don't know that I could.

S: Well, even if you can't, you still write.

H: No, I shouldn't.

S: Yeah, you should. Well what can you do to help yourself get to where you want to be?

H: Well, I don't know how to get a good job. I'm going to have to get a bad job.

S: Yeah, but it's just a stepping stone.

26.

H: House, car, jobs, American dream!

If you could talk to OU students, what would you like them to know?

27.

H: Oh. Uh, that were not all lazy and this wasn't what I was supposed to be either. I was supposed to be a med flight tech. And it's just due to circumstances and trials and tribulations of people's lives. Or [those that are homeless] by choice like the doctors and lawyers I've met they just couldn't stand the rat race, it was too stressful and they needed to get back to something like this. Don't underestimate a person. You know, just don't.

S: Yeah.

H: Yeah, don't underestimate, you never know. Ask them their story before you judge them. Like that song ever last. Then you might really know what it's like, you know. Ask the story if you walk a mile in that persons shoes you don't really know. I've meet some of the smartest people, the most talented people out here.

S: Just intelligent.

H: Yeah.

S: And smart.

H: Yeah, musicians. There's a tree line back here and on a nice day we'll all get together and go back there on the tree line and about three of have guitars and a couple of drummers and a lot of-

S: That's really nice though.

H: Sing. Yeah and that's how we spend our time because music is life. You know they can never take the music away from you. I don't care.

S: Yeah.

H: How poor you are. Can't take the music out of your heart. And we sit back there and you know, yeah, it's good stuff. I said we're all one community, we watch out for each other.

28.

H: Well my struggles I faced were- like I say, usually just losing myself and having to find myself, and uhm the biggest struggle I faced was forgiving people. [...] and any of the struggles I faced, uhh ignoring people calling me a bum, looked at me as homeless. They think I'm homeless, or a druggie or an alcoholic, or a sexual deviant or anything like that. That's a big struggle when people look at you like that and you're not that. And you can't react or you would be that.

S: Right.

H: And that's a struggle to be able to look at someone who you would really really like to unscrew their head and take a dump down their neck, smile at 'em and say "I'm not homeless right now." Because I'm really not homeless. I'm just waiting for my apartment to get done.

29.

H: I would like them to know never lose touch with yourself. And it's okay to be emotional and have feelings for other people

30.

H: What I would want them to know... First of all, I would like them to know how proud I am of my children. I got one college graduate, my daughter, she's the one who went the married route, I think she's kind of got the lazy syndrome going on, and my oldest son, he's got that attitude to where "I don't need school, I gotta work" and the kid's alright, don't get me wrong. But he doesn't think he needs to learn anything. He thinks he already knows everything and he threw his college career away. I mean he just started and quit the first semester. He didn't even make it the first half of the year. And it was a little bit too tough because ya know, when you get to college, it's not like high school, you're not coming home and having dad sit there saying,

“Boy, you will get that homework done and bringing it to me to check.” In college, you have to be responsible, and mature enough to where, you know. You’re not gonna be in class all day long but you gotta study and you have to learn. It’s all on you. You know.

31.

H: (chuckles) As a big group?

S: Yeah. Or like maybe our class. We have like, I think, thirty people in our class.

H: Really?

S: If you were to talk with us.

H: (sigh) I don’t know.

S: What about yourself? Would you like us to know?

H: Well there ain’t really nothing to say. (mumbles) (sighs) Life ain’t really, uh, it ain’t really-there ain’t nothing to really say about myself. Not unless...no. Just somebody-I just existing basically (laughs). I know that, that ain’t what you want to hear. I’m sorry.

S: No! It’s your story. Would you ever want to share your story with other people?

H: Probably not.

S: Probably not?

H: It’s not a very good story. No. But I can say maybe in a few years-that’s another thing I’m-one of these days I might try to find a girlfriend. Really settle down with [*her*]. That’s something I ain’t never really did before.

S: Mhm.

H: So that’s another thing in the future I can maybe think about doing.

32.

H: Really, nothing. You, nothing anybody can do about all of this. This is just something that happens. Like these people, these people been living around this building. Now I don’t, I don’t like a

lot of them, but if it weren't the chief of police, it'd be someone else doing it. So it's not going to stop.

33.

H: That I have had a good life a very productive life. That I've owned two homes you know and I drove semi for seventeen years made a good living and then I lost my family fourteen years ago, all in the same year. And that's when my symptoms of my PTSD really kicked in and I wasn't able to manage as well as I had once did so that's when I lost everything over a course of that fourteen years. And that's how I ended up here.

34.

S: If you could talk to OU students, what would you like them to know about yourself?

H: I don't know. I'm a pretty decent guy, I'm kind of a joker, kind of a clown once I get to know you anyway. I like telling jokes and I like having fun. That no matter how bad life can be, life is always worth living. Even if it can seem pretty bad at the moment, I've had some pretty tough times. Never once tried to do myself in or anything. That's not an option. That's- that's quitting.

S: Um what would you like them to know about the struggles that you face?

H: It's been a rough road. It's been really really really rough. People have no idea. They think we're just a bunch of bums sitting around, getting drunk. But it's hard. Nowhere to sleep and no one wants to hire you. You can't have good hygiene use and they don't want to be around that and they don't want to hire you. They think we're stupid and lazy. And they don't know what it's like until they've slept on this shit right here (pounds on concrete). Until they do that, they have no idea what it's like. The people sleeping in their beds, they have no idea what it's like to wake up on the concrete (laughs) with a pair of shoes for a pillow, if you have that. Don't judge a book by its cover. That pretty much sums it up, yeah.

2. Giving Voice to the Voiceless

Here are a series of stories written or narrated by the homeless at Norman, Oklahoma. The undergraduate students invited their contribution to this book, providing a space to let their voices heard and unfiltered.

Here are the narratives provided by our local homeless communities. Each author/narrator decided on whether and how s/he want to share their identities, such as using real names, street names, or pseudonyms. We honored their decisions.

How I Became Homeless: Kaysi Hope

On June 1st their year we moved from Ardmore, OK to Norman, OK. We stayed a couple days with my Aunt and Uncle and their two little boys. Next, we stayed at the Salvation Army for five days then we got a two week extension. Then, we had a house picked out and we could only afford it with another roommate sorta thing. The landlord wasn't very understandable if you know what I mean. He didn't give us enough time to get the first pay ready to go. So, he rented it to someone else. So, back to square one again. The roommate that was going to rent with us was also a family of four. Her kids were my friends. Her daughter and me and my sister were gonna share the big bedroom. Her son and my little brother were gonna share a room too. So anyways, we continued to stay with that family. All the sudden they decided they were moving, but didn't bother to tell us until three days before they actually left. So, we went back to our uncle's apartment. After about 2 months went by my Aunt and Uncle left for Texas. This is where my tears came in. Those boys meant so much to me to let them go hurt. What hurt even more is that they moved the day after my birthday. What a great birthday present right?! Well, that's just about it. Before they left they were telling me how they wanted to take me with them. Right then and there I wanted to say okay, I wanted to. I really would go stay with them, but my mom's feelings would be really hurt....I think....I am pretty sure. Anyways, that's my story.

-Kaysi Hope, Age 13

Mom's Story: Teri Ingram

On June 1st, 2014 my family and I left Ardmore, Ok and moved to Norman because we had become homeless. We drove in the middle of the night and stayed in a hotel for a week. After that week we stayed a few days with our aunt and uncle, but then two bedroom apartment wasn't gonna cut it for my family of five and their family of four. So my husband moved into a sober house and my kids and I went to the Salvation Army. We stayed our five days there and then got a two week extension. During this time two of my children went to Arkansas to visit their father and our car was impounded. Being separated from my kids was not easy, nor being away from my husband. It drove a wedge in between us. He became distant and cranky. He turned to other women instead of me. It is an issue we are still working through. After the Salvation Army we went back to my aunt and uncle's where we stayed for a week. Right after we paid half the rent, the manager of the apartment we were at found out we were staying there and threatened to evict my aunt and uncle, so they kicked us out. They really felt bad, but didn't have a choice. From that point we moved in with a Porto Rican family, my husband used drugs and was kicked out of the sober house, the kids caught head lice, and the husband of the family we were living with was arrested by the cops. She moved out after we paid our rent money. That is when we found out she hadn't paid her rent in two months. UGH. Story of my life. Something I left out...my husband was working during all this and now lost his job. So, once again we moved back in with our aunt and uncle. They were the whole reason we decided to settle in Norman. Originally we were from the OKC area. My aunt and uncle have two babies...they are three and eleven months old. I am 32 by the way. My husband is 25 and I have three kids. The girls are 13 and 11 and my son is 10. My husband is a great step dad to the kids. We have been together four years. My uncle lost his job almost two months ago. We all tried everything we could to pay bills and rent. We were down to the last \$300 or so left that we were behind on rent when the apartment gave us a move out date of November 3rd eviction and notice of being sued. They waited until Halloween night, very late and our Uncle said "We are moving to Texas in three days and I am going to need to know that you have somewhere to go." I cried my eyes out

because I knew he serious and we have such a bond with them and the boys it broke my heart. Three days later we moved everything we owned to storage and went to the Salvation Army. Upon arriving there we were told we could only stay five days with no possibility of getting an extension because there were other families waiting on the family room and they only have one family room.

After our five days were up we decided to go to the Warning Station which is by Food and Shelter. However it was cold outside and we asked a man at dinner if we could hang out past 6 so my children were not out in the cold for two hours. He said no and then let a lady stay that had already used her five days. I have seen this happen a lot in the past few weeks and I am going to say he picks favorites and kids are not one of them. Let me also say that even now since I have left there, there has not been ANY families stay in the family room. They made me feel as if they thought we were worthless trash. We are not the favorites and I feel so discriminated against by the Salvation Army. If I knew a good discrimination attorney I would sue them and donate my money to truly helping the homeless in Norman. Even the Food and Shelter. They have been my blessing. A friend of ours walked with our oldest daughter back to the Salvation Army to get her backpack and sisters hoodie which we forgot. After an hour they were not back and I started to panic. People I did not know even went out looking for her. A very good friend of mine found her. It was a huge relief. She was clearly upset and would not tell me why other than the friend had gotten her lost and walked her all over town. The next day I finally got the truth. The friend, a he, put his arm around her and freaked her out. Needless to say he had gotten up and left town. Food and Shelter put us up at the OU Motel for a week. Following that week Church on Fire put us at the Super 8 for three days. The third day was yesterday. Our New Church friends and family put us up at their house. In our own room and have been more than nice. It is only until we get approved for a place. We have been working and seeking.

My Story: Kristina Mayo

I will never forget August 13th, 2012. This is the day my mother dropped dead of a massive heart attack. This changed my life as I knew it.. Being

the matriarch and safety of our family, her death left me and my children homeless. My son carried on as men do, but my daughter and grandchildren were on the streets. Since I moved to Oklahoma in 1988, I had gone to Food and Shelter for lunch and/or supplies. I would visit people I knew every once and a while. Now that my family is down and out, I know that Food and Shelter is the organization that can help.

My daughter and grandkids were helped by the Salvation Army and I thank Jesus for the help they provided. The end result for me though was that I was on the streets and this changed my life. When you become homeless the rules, conditions, and thought for yourself change. The first to do what you want, when you want. Life becomes a list. You sleep when they tell you to sleep, it doesn't matter if you are tired or not. You shower when your name is next on the list, doesn't matter if there is hot water. You wear hand me downs, doesn't matter if it's your style.

Homelessness becomes a way of life as opposed to just a "rut" in a person's life. The federally funded organizations become our wardens and we're in our own personal prison.

I wish my story could be longer but my name is next on the list.....

Sincerely,

Granddaughter of a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, Daughter of a Police Chief, and former Paramedic myself. t thing a person has to get used to is the inability

Homeless Stories: Michelle Heater and Steve Cody

It all started last spring when things got really bad. My husband is a drug addict and I am an alcoholic. I was trying to keep all his friends away that was trying to use my house as a place to get high. Pretty soon it got so bad he forgot me and the kid. He just pushed us aside and took all my money for rent, food, and other things we needed to live. That is when I started to drink more and more to forget all the things he did to me and

the children. This is when DHS came and said so many wrong things that weren't true and I lost my kids. They want me to go to rehab which I am trying so hard to do. I want to get my kids back. My husband is in jail. I am on the streets all alone trying to find a way to get into rehab so I can get my kids back. This is killing me every day that I don't have my kids and even my husband. I have been with him for fourteen years and he is the love of my life and soulmate, I would die for him. I would die to help him and myself as well. I will not stop until I have my family back together, because no matter what you have to stick together. No one will help you if you cannot help yourself. Your family always comes first and that's that.

Homeless: Aaron Ash

a.k.a. "Squirrel" the man who allegedly killed Fat Albert

I started my journey in 2011 when I first became homeless. It started in 2008 when my mother died. I went to "crack"ville and stayed there a while, and spent five thousand dollars in two months. Then I went to "meth"ville to get out of "crack"ville, so I traded one drug for another. In 2011, after 21 days straight no sleep, no eating, just smoking meth "the devil's candy", I came to Norman to get off drugs. I stayed behind N.o.g. "Norman original group" a drug and alcoholics anonymous (A.A. for short). So I stayed behind the car wash and chilled out, went to meetings, cold turkey not pleasant. Went to work with an A.A. buddy. Lived in Slaughterville. Worked for rent.

Everything was going good until I started back on meth. Everything went haywire. Went on a merry-go-round. Ended up in Red Rock and got out 15 days later and ended up at Salvation Army. Worked as a bell ringer and actually like it and stayed at the "Sally" (we call the Salvation Army that). Got a job waving for Liberty tax and I actually hated that. Very degrading. Someone actually threw a coke can at me, so not very cool.

The homeless always get labeled, and some of the coolest people are homeless. We have a group of friends and we always call each other family. We love, respect, and look out for one another always. It's not easy being homeless, but I'm sure there are worse things than being homeless. I have the attitude that things can always get worse. Or

someone has it worse than I do, I mean they do. My motto is never give up, which is hard out here but a good attitude always helps keep it real. And look out for each other. I have only a little bit of time on this Earth, and that saying that things can always get worse really seems true in my case. It's a constant battle watching my "family" watch me die. Everybody loves me at the shelter and everybody looks out for me. It's hard on everybody but I know everything is going to be okay. Some of my friends get sick of me saying that, but it's true. My family will go on when my journey here is done and my spiritual journey begins. They may think they won't, but as I say all the time "Everything is going to be okay, never give up! Especially out here."

P.S. I used to not be as sensitive to the homelessness when I wasn't part of it. I mean, I would give a dollar here, or a dollar there, but now that I am a part of it I know a lot more about it and have a respect for them. I mean, I slept in a chimney in the park to say out of the wind and it still got to me. You can't hide from the elements, and it's hard to live outside especially in the cold. Better in summer. There are wonderful people out here and I am glad you give everybody a chance to write about it because it is real. Good luck on your book and I hope a lot of people buy it and it becomes a best seller. Thank you for letting me write this.

My Story: James Philemore

Hi my name is James Philemore*

I became homeless because of a really bad divorce. I was married for ten years and she slept with the pastor who had married us. I have been divorced since 2007. One of my friends, who is a taxi driver, let me sleep in one of his taxi's for a couple of nights. I have slept in the park but was run off by the police and beat up from some of the OU students in 2013. What the community doesn't understand about why we are on the street is that we try to get a job, but they can't hire us because we don't have a phone, address, or reliable transportation and as soon as they know we are homeless, they say "sorry, we can't help you". Sleeping one night behind Food and Shelter for Friends, I got an idea. I know how to play guitar so I said to myself, "if they don't want to hire me, I will play music." So they had an open mic night at Second Wind Coffee Shop

on Campus Corner, so I asked the manager if I could play and he told me to come at 7:00, and I could play for 30 minutes. So I came back that night and started playing my own songs since I have 120 songs that I wrote. They loved my songs. They told me to continue playing so I played for 45 minutes and then went home. The very next day, I saw Michelangelo's was having open mic night on Thursday so I put my name on the list. I started playing for 30 minutes and I said to myself, "Okay, this is it. I will play music from now on". So I started playing at Sergio's Italian Bistro and the owner liked it and so he hired me for four nights in a row. So I'm hired as a musician for Sergios, and November 3rd, Food and Shelter for Friends asked me to play music for their fundraiser to end homelessness because they have a goal to end homelessness in Norman, Oklahoma by 2016. So I play there for a very rich crown, and by the end of the night I was paid \$150 and a lady from a sorority invited me to play for three different parties for four hours each. I thought, "wow, I can do this for a living". Zack from Food and Shelter, told me about a class in the library hosted by people from Food and Shelter for Friends that was about how to get a job, and dress properly. I told Zack I wanted to play music and he connected me with mentors from the Plaza Mayor. On November 8th, I met Roberto Ruiz, a studio engineer and he told me to play something, so I played a cover of Pueblo Mio, a Jose Feliciano song. He liked it and asked if I could play for 20,000 people at Plaza Mayor and I said yes. So I came the very next Saturday and played and was amazed by the response. The people loved it. I played Mexican music and some flamenco music because my grandparents were from Spain. My boss, Roberto told me after the event that he wanted me to play for the Plaza Mayor every Saturday and teach music. I said yes, and was hired. Roberto said we would start promoting my first demo. November 22nd, I began recording of my first CD with my own songs that I've written. When I came back I was thanking God because all my life, all I've wanted to do is be on stage and sing for lots of people. The most important thing is that I wrote song songs for my kids and I want to record them and sing it so people can hear my kid's songs, and one day, my kids could hear them on the radio. What I learned about all this is that you need to have some faith that whatever dream you have it will come true, and never, never give up. I found a door that really opened for me and that I am going to go

forward remembering sleeping outside. Now I can say I have a home because on December 1st 2014, I got my own house, my own furniture. I can celebrate the holidays with family members and the next year will be even better with blessings and a better living so I can really help other people that were like me by being a mentor and giving good advice. One more thing, I forgot to mention is that this Christmas, I will meet George Lopez and Jack Black. That has always been my dream to meet celebrities that I admire and that I can get advice and they can help me in my career with music. Thank you for letting me tell my story about how I became homeless and how I coming along these days.

Thanks Again,

James Philmemore*

*False name to protect identity

Life of Homeless, Me: Ronald Bullcoming

Where does life begin and life end? When does help come and when does help stay away?

Well help comes when I least expect it. Help stays away until I go get it.

I would say it all began with my mother and father. They were alcoholics. When I lived with them life became complicated.

I really don't recall how many times we moved from home to home, or even, state to state. I just remember there were a lot of places.

In high school I was popular. I was very good at cross-country, track and field, and basketball.

High school was the longest time in my life that I have had a stable life.

I have had many jobs. I have been a landscaper, electrician's apprentice, laborer, assistant manager, dishwasher, and painter.

Between occupations, my alcoholism began. My drinking caused me to lose jobs, homes, and cars. Through my drinking, I followed the same path of my parents.

All of the decisions I've made when it comes to alcoholism has caused me a great loss.

I have been homeless off and on for twelve years. I have been homeless through snowstorms in Colorado with just a jacket. I have been homeless in San Diego. I have been homeless in ice storms in Oklahoma City. I have starved for days at time.

I have been broke and alone for two years now.

I search for jobs, but I can't find resources or funding. I lived in California where I was surrounded by so much money. But the homeless are not that important. We are not on the main list of priorities.

I know how it feels to wake up outside in the rain with no coat. I know how it feels to wake up covered in snow. I know how it feels to walk by a restaurant window and be starving while people are eating.

Surviving on the streets is my way of getting help. If I didn't want help then I would just die.

Winters come and go. Summers pass us by.

It is very important to me that the homeless help each other. If it weren't for my homeless community, I would have frozen sleeping outside. I would not have blankets, food, or direction to where I can get immediate help at shelters.

Some homeless people steal from other homeless people. That's just how some are—surviving. I don't steal though.

If I were not homeless I would not have such an appreciation for life or homeless shelters as I do now.

Being homeless I have lost my family—my kids. I have lost good jobs. I have lost weight.

I hope and pray I find a home in Norman because I like this town. I was born in New Mexico, but grew up here in Oklahoma.

Being homeless to me means no one is too good to realize how important life is. Being alive and able to eat can be a very meaningful thing.

I lost my sister to homelessness. She passed away at the age of 29. While she was living on the streets she was beaten, stabbed, and was ran over by a car. She lived through all of that for a bit.

She told me before her death, “Ronald, I’m so homeless that there is no way I am making it off the streets.”

A couple of months later she drank herself into cirrhosis and passed away.

I mean yes, I miss and love her, but it does not change the fact that she put herself there.

I regret not listening to her. I regret not trying to help her get sober or helping her get a job.

When I think about how she lived her life and how I am living my life on the streets, I realize it is almost the same. This motivates me to get back on my feet and give back to the homeless in America.

With every new city it’s like taking five steps forward and ten back. Being homeless is not new but it takes time getting back on track—at least for me.

Being out on the streets is a test of oneself. It is how I choose to look at it. How bad do I want my life to be better? When I stop caring is when I end up out here.

I am grateful for the churches, the food shelters, and the people who help when I am hungry, need work, or need food and clothing. I like it when they look at me or talk to me like I am still a person.

It’s hard trying to find faith in others and myself when there are a lot of homeless in the world and it does not seem to be getting better.

Being Homeless, written by Steven Graham

Edited by: John McLoughlin

It all started around 1999. I lost my job and put all my belongings at a friend’s house. I headed down to the city rescue mission, and when I got down there everybody was drinking, doing drugs, and fighting. Then, my girlfriend and I went down to her dad’s house. He was a bad alcoholic and had gone to prison for killing a man. He got about five years, and when he got out he was still drinking. Sometime around 2000, me, my girlfriend, and our four kids (two of them were my step-kids) went to Los Angeles, California. We were new to California, and ended up in

Santa Monica. We wanted to see the Pacific Ocean, but when we got back to the car it had been towed. It was left in a no park zone. We had no choice because the brakes had gone out and we had to leave it like that. We caught the bus to downtown and ended up in what is known as Skid Row. It is full of cocaine, and everybody there gets high. Everybody was drinking, and there were lots of drug dealers. We saw LAPD arresting them and taking them to jail and prison. I had to sleep on the ground at Skid Row, and some people slept in tents. My girlfriend and kids were at the union rescue mission and then went to DHS to get welfare and food stamps. The next day we went to Venice Beach and saw all kinds of people and all walks of life. I saw dolphins, eels, stingrays, and while watching everybody fish out on the pier, I saw fish, sharks, and catfish. There was a big painting of Jim Morrison, who played for The Doors from about 1965-1970, on a wall. There were people skating, riding bikes, surfing, and skateboarding. One man was even playing his guitar while roller-skating by; he was in some famous movies. Me and my girlfriend had a fight over why she was in a shelter. I was homeless in LA waiting in homeless food lines, wanting to get something to eat. Hundreds of homeless people try to get something to eat, too. I disappeared in LA going to bars. One bar called King Eddie's in downtown LA is the only bar you can smoke in, it is very busy. I was in LA for a while, but came back to Oklahoma. I went to Lake Thunderbird in Norman and was homeless there for a while, then moved into a trailer in Oklahoma City. Then I moved to Midwest City, Oklahoma, into an apartment. Then I moved to Norman. I panhandle; some people turn me down, and some people give me money. Now I'm down at the shelter at Korean Baptist Church and homeless again. I am going to get section eight and get an apartment.

My Story: Melvin

The years on the streets have been hectic but necessary. Issues with alcohol, drugs, and depression. It's no life out here, living in fear at times, trouble with the law, dealing with other people with similar issues. Survival is the key. Don't give up! I'm improving now – life is getting better.

Street Experience: Brian Hill

I am thankful for my experience. I am a member of the Baha'i Faith and because I was "alone" and in need I was drawn closer to God and strengthened in my faith. I learned to be resourceful and to be grateful for what I had. I continue to carry this gratitude and appreciate my current living situation. I now live in a one bedroom apartment with little furniture, but having slept on the streets and in parks I don't mind sleeping on a carpeted floor with heating and air! In my time I made friends with other "street people" and have found them to be great people for the most part. Not necessarily the "crooks and hoods" that the stereotype presents. My story is unique (as is everyone's) and would take volumes to tell.

Only Part of My Life Story: Mark Anthony Anderson

I guess you can almost say that homelessness for me started when I was about maybe ten years old because I can remember never really feeling like part of my family. I don't remember any birthday parties for me when I was growing up and I didn't really have any friends...just one.

I got turned on to drugs at about nineteen years old and even though I finished high school my life still seemed like it was going nowhere. I got kicked out of my mom's house at the age of twenty years old and thought that maybe the service was for me so I joined the Air Force Reserves. But I got kicked out after about a year. I wanted attention so I told them that I was going to kill myself.

They kicked me out. I've tried that with my family also and they didn't even seem to care...but that's another story.

When I came back from the Air Force I don't really recall what happened. I just started hanging out in the projects by our house and the drugs and alcohol became a way of life for me. At the age of twenty-six years old I was introduced to crack, which has been my downfall. I went to prison at the age of twenty-six because of my drug use. When I got out I had nowhere to go because my mom didn't want me around her, along with the rest of my family. They didn't think that I had changed and, to my surprise, I really hadn't. I was still on crack.

I left Spencer, Oklahoma and ended up in Oklahoma City, where my life just got worse. I went to prison a few more times, never being able to beat my addiction. I came to Norman running from a drug dealer that I owed money. I came here in 2012 and was homeless here until recently.

Someday I'd like to tell my whole life story because of the things I've done. You wouldn't think a person like me would do those kinds of things. Anyway, that's part of my story. I've been homeless for about a total of thirty-two years on and off. Since the age of nineteen, the only time I've had a place to stay was when I was in prison.

I'm 51 years now and have a good job and my own apartment thanks to God and Food and Shelter.

P.S. I would like to sit down and talk to one of you and maybe see if I can trust you with the darkness of my life. I don't think that I'm any worse than any other person and some people have done things much worse than I have, but the things I did eat me up inside. Anyways, you can call me sometime and we can go from there.

My Story: Jewell Marcus Maxwell

My name is Jewell Marcus Maxwell. I first became homeless 11/1/14. I have 28 kids and 18 baby mothers. The reason I'm here is because at the beginning of the year I was arrested for a nickel bag of weed. They gave me five years of probation. They also made me move from OKC to Norman, that's why I'm homeless. I stayed at the Salvation Army for ten days before I got a job at OU at nights. I couldn't stay during the day, so I slept in the student library on campus until the church on Webster and Main opened up, that's when I started staying there. I've slept on the street. Life will get better.

3. Listening to Homelessness as a Transformative Process

In Fall 2014, students of an upper division undergraduate class in communication dedicated their time and energy on the issues of homelessness. When I first designed the class, I wanted students to conduct field activities to help address problems faced by marginalized populations in our local community. I was not convinced that the students' one-shot campaign could change much about the lives of homeless people in Norman. I doubted my students would remember the lectures I gave in the class ten years down the line, either. Nevertheless, it felt like the right thing to do.

They participated in literature search and organized research presentations, examining the various individual, sociocultural, and sociopolitical factors that contribute to the homelessness. We learned about the complexity and diversity of people who are homeless. As part of the course requirements, we took a field trip. Each student conducted a semi-structured interview with a person who relied on a local homeless shelter for everyday resources (for interview guide, see Appendix A). They spent time talking to a homeless person, asking questions about their life experiences and life histories. More importantly, they asked what the homeless person would like to teach them about homeless life, and themselves. It was a great success. The students cannot wait to share their experiences and conversations with their friends and family members.

Aaron Ripkowski, 2014 winner Oklahoma's Don Key Award -- the highest honor an OU football player can receive while playing for the Sooners, emailed me the following note after his interview:

At one point in the interview I asked a certain question that made the man begin to slightly cry and my initial instinct was to say, "I know some of these questions are dumb and I am sorry." I did not know what to say to comfort him so the words just came out. I assure you that was not what I meant but instead what I was

trying to get across was an apology for the questions touching a rough area to the individual. I apologize if I in any way shape or form offended you or somehow flawed the data that I collected.

I was speechless. I don't believe anyone's life can remain the same after such an interaction and self-awareness. I knew the interviews had jolted my students from their comfortable existence.

I cannot say that this is a course in which all students walked away happy and proud of what they have accomplished. Nevertheless, I know many of the students continue to devote their time and energy in helping invisible people in our local communities long after the class has ended. We are not idealists. But we do what we can.

Here are their reflections about this transformative experience.

Every Person Has a Story

By Erin E. McFall

This experience feels more like finality than it does an eye opening experience. Not in the sense that I feel that my time with the homeless is coming to a close, but that I am finally able to do something with the passion I have built up for the issue of homeless. For the last seven years, my heart has broken for the people I have met on the streets that have hit hard times and unfortunate circumstances. My free time in high school revolved around my youth group helping those who were deemed as “less fortunate” than us. I always somehow ended up sitting down and talking with those “less fortunate” individuals, instead of sorting groceries, or painting walls with the other volunteers. I quickly learned that they were not so unfortunate after all. Many of the people I talked to gave me inspiration and hope, that even in what the world would see as hard times, it was always possible to see the light. While they were in much more difficult situations than I could ever imagine, they didn't seem “less fortunate” to me, the less fortunate ones were the ones who had it all, but were never as faithful or positive that life could be good.

I grew to learn the complex issues surrounding poverty and homeless. I studied the government systems, volunteered at shelters, and picked up

trash around town as an excuse to speak to those who were living on the streets. I was lucky enough to be taken around and into homeless camps around Oklahoma City and meet those who choose to live on the streets. I sat and talked to those who were so overcome by addictions that they would rather live in a sleeping bag under the bridge than seek help from a shelter that demanded that they stay sober. I volunteered at a shelter that had a program for those that were overcoming addictions and putting their lives back together. At this shelter I met a woman named Mary, and her seven children. This family was escaping domestic abuse and Mary was doing everything possible to make a better life for her family. Here I also met Mike, who was going through the program to overcome his addictions in order to mend relations with his family. There are so many people in the homeless community who are like Mike and Mary, trying their absolute best to achieve a better life for themselves and their families. I am passionate about finding a way to help these people and I believe that to do this, we need to change the way the general public see the homeless.

I was not expecting for a class project to align with exactly what I needed. This project has reignited my passion to help the homeless population. I spoke with a man named George while interviewing for this project. George was on the fringe of homeless. He had been homeless, but was working with Food and Shelter to get an apartment with his soon-to-be fiancé. George was well spoken, had a supportive family, grown children who had attended college at the University of Oklahoma, new grandbabies, and a full life. George admitted to making some mistakes in his past, going through some health issues, and being too prideful to ask for help sometimes. George was making it through, and doing pretty well. While talking to George I was hit with the memory of my friend Mike from before. Neither of these men were who you might imagine as your typical homeless person, but that's exactly why the face of homeless needs to change.

There is still so much discrimination and stigma attached to this group of people. There are still so many people who are taken advantage of just because they don't live the same way as the majority. There are so many issues that come along with homelessness. The cycles of poverty that people get into, the hurt of mental illness, the stress of surviving

every day, are just some of the things this group struggles with every day. As a society, we are so quick to buy into the stereotypes and not allow anyone the opportunity to change our minds. Any homeless person can tell you that the stereotype of the homeless man addicted to drugs and alcohol, living off the government, taking advantage of kind people and resources, is a reality in many circumstances. But the truth of the matter is that they are not all the same. The truth is that, yes, there are those stereotypical homeless people, but there are also the homeless people like George, who are working toward a better life. There are mothers working multiple minimum wage jobs that are still homeless because it takes so much to feed their families. There are people with disabilities that cannot physically work a job that pays enough to afford rent. There cannot just be one face of homelessness.

My hope is that with this book, homelessness can be seen as the multi-faceted issue that it is. My hope is that stories can be told, and the public can be encouraged to get to know your local homeless population and see if there is some way that you can help. Sometimes that just means bringing a hot cup of coffee to the panhandler and sitting down for a little while, letting them tell you about their day. Too often people act like the homeless aren't there, like they are invisible. Sometimes people just want to know that they are seen and heard. I hope this book can let them know we are listening.

Every person has a story, even if they don't have a home.

This Matters, Because People Matter

By Shelbie E. Coombes

Continually I have been told that homeless people are to blame for their life choices, they are the problem with society- to never give them money because they will attack you. This project could not have changed my mind more, the epidemic is shelter and the victims are people. Yes, people make mistakes but a lifetime of living on the streets is not valid payment for a year or two of wrong doing. With the *Forgotten Ones: Norman project* I have seen and heard what the Norman homeless population have heard, seen and lived through. These are people, who have dreams, and desires but through untimely

circumstances are walking the streets of Norman, Oklahoma wondering if they will survive the winter, or if they will make it in time for the next meal. A lesson *from Horton Hears A Who* is that 'A person is a person, no matter how small.' We are all people, living breathing individuals that should have the simple things in life, like a shelter and hot food.

My name is Shelbie Coombes, and I am a senior Communication major with a double minor in Sociology and History at the University of Oklahoma. I grew up in a suburb of Oklahoma, and got mad growing up if my parents' did not buy me the clothes that were in style; I was a blessed with a life that did not face many financial hardships. Growing up I had many medical problems, and was continually in and out of hospitals all throughout high school and still today. I have faced a different kind of hardship, but through all of that I still had my family and a roof over my head. The Norman Homeless population is facing a conic problem, and they do not know where or if they can find a solution. Their hardship is seen as self-inducing and stigmatized, but though hearing stories some of them were just at the wrong place, at the wrong time. I have faced hardship, and pain, but I cannot imagine the hardship and pain these people go through on a daily basis. The homeless population is continually facing the unknown, and trying to deal with their problems anyway they know how.

My experience through this project has been one-of-a-kind that will remain with me throughout my years of life. The group of people I am working with have hearts for changing lives, a rare quality in people today at our ages. I have seen firsthand the struggles of the Norman homeless population, read and heard their stories. This book is a way for us to show the people that others are hurting; if you ignore them they do not go away. This is a problem for our city, and many around the world, and we need a solution. This class, Health Communication, has shown me the problem and allowed me, and my other classmates, to make an impact on real people who need help. We have taken theories and pages in a book and made them come to life, to really make a change in our part of the world. This is a learning experience that I have learned from and will use in my life, unlike in other classes with theories I will forget the names to or lectures that I did not pay attention to. This

class is making things practical and real, putting faces and stories to the theories we are learning.

I have changed in this experience because I can no longer just ignore these people. I have gone my whole life staring straight ahead so the homeless people do not come and ask me for money or attack me on the street, but now I have seen they are real people who need real help. They are stuck and are just looking for a hand of help. Yes, I am still cautious, and know not all of the people who are homeless are nice people who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, no matter their walk in life they are still people who need real help. Some of that help, we are hoping, can be provided through the campaigns we are doing in our class. This class is changing students' perspectives of homeless people and is creating a worthwhile impact on the city of Norman. I could not be happier with a class project. This book will hopefully impact lives; even one life would make all of this work worth it.

My personal experience in this class is one that I will carry with me into my old age. This matters, because people matter. Everyone, you, me, come from different walks of life, and we have all experienced something different. The Norman Homeless population is no different; they are people who have experienced some awful hardships. A roof over your head, and a place to call home can be taken for granted, but what if it was stripped away....how would you want to be treated? Stigmas on groups of people are detrimental to the individuals who break the mold, but are still stuck because no one will believe them. This book, I hope, will open your eyes to these people. They need help, not handouts, and buying this book is a way to help. My experience has been nothing but positive in my life, it has helped me put theories into reality and help people who are in need. Helping someone is a great gift to both individuals, one that can be shared everyday if we keep in constant thought everyone around us has feeling and situations that makes life that much more difficult.

My Prayer

By Matthew "Bear" McAfee

Four months ago I walked into my first day of classes for the fall semester of my junior year, attending the University of Oklahoma. The man you would have seen standing in front of you was a very different from the person writing this story. On the outside you would have seen a "well put together young man." However what was to be viewed on the outside was a skewed view of the true inner being. I was selfish. I was quick to view the state that others were in and attribute poor character qualities due to the situation they were in. If you were not making good grades, then it was because of your lack of discipline to study. If you were overweight it was because of your lack of ability to motivate yourself to live healthy. If you were homeless it was because of your slothful attitude and inability to be hard working.

A poor view of others to say the least. I was not open about my judgment, but simply quietly condemning others for their actions and condition. While there is some truth to taking personal accountability. I also realize the importance of looking to the factors behind an individual's situation. Some people are naturally more intelligent. Others are blessed with fast metabolisms. And for some homelessness was placed upon them.

Through the last four months I have had the privilege of going to Food and Shelter in Norman, Oklahoma and hearing testimonies of the homeless community. Countless stories ranging from depression, addiction, mental illness, a loss of a job or the family they were raised in leading to people's situation. Some, just children, about how their parents couldn't afford medical bills along with a house to keep their family under for an extended period of time. I thought to myself "what of their character qualities led these innocent children to be homeless." A sobering realization for any.

I gained an appreciation for my own upbringing in that my family provided in incredible ways for me, and we were not the most privileged family growing up, however we were always comfortable. I saw children in single parent homes and the father or the mother have left and the other spouse is fighting and giving all they have to insure the children

will be provided for. Parents desperate to keep a job, or jobs, in order to provide a comfortable life for their children. Not drug addicts who had no control over their own wants or desires.

All the while I have made memories and can recall stories where I felt a little strange to say the least. I have heard stories of people's "lives" that have a tendency to seem more like movies. From wrestling dingos in Australia at the age of 6 to flying planes. I would like to think I have just about heard it all. All the while I could not help but wonder why these stories have been created in their minds. I have come to the conclusion that their current situation has spiraled so out of control that they feel a need to construct their own story as to why they are in this current state.

Also, I have made friends. I have watched people take ownership of their lives and seen how this book has given them a sense of purpose. Over and over again I have heard the phrase "the only people who help the homeless, are the homeless." It has been sad to see how true that has rang in Norman. Tanya, has made a profound impact on my life. Her desire to get her life together has been such a blessing to see her begin to take ownership of where she is in life. Tanya's passion for the book is a lot of what spurred me on to continue to meet deadlines and go to the shelter. She told me once that "this book has given me a sense of power and made me feel my story is important."

The process has not always been easy and fun to say the least. Junior year can be a stressful time and you have deadlines, papers, tests and a social life to consider. On top of that it was not always a welcoming experience at the shelter. Often times people would see these "OU students" and have their own preconceived ideas of what our group's ideas are. However, as we continued to invest not only in their lives, but in the book I believe they began to open up and have become more and more welcoming. I do not know the outcome or impact that this book will make, however to hear them say I hope it becomes a New York Times Best Seller and comments like that have warmed my heart.

A challenge not faced was keeping the book in perspective. Anytime I began to have self pity or an undeserved sense of pride I had the opportunity to look around at my own ignorance. I was surrounded by

people that have real world problems that were taking time to become vulnerable and put down their own stories on to paper. These people were willing to take time out of their day to day lives so that they could benefit themselves as well as change the outlook others have on the homeless community. This book has given me the opportunity to keep my own life and thoughts in perspective.

The last thing I wanted to comment on was how thankful I have been for this process as a whole. The group of people I have been paired with, my classmates, Dr. Hsieh and my new found friends at the shelter have all made a significant impact on my life. The boy that began this class is much different than the man leaving it. Today I would like to think that I have an ability to show empathy for others. I have seen how a small vision is never impossible and how at times our culture can be so uninviting. My prayer is this book would have a similar impact on you.

My Temporary Peace

By Powell C. Fitzgerald

Prior to this course, I have to admit that the view I held towards homeless individuals was anything but accurate, and unfortunately anything but rare. Like many others, aside from the occasional change I so righteously gave away to someone on a street corner, I never truly contemplated or cared about the causes, effects, and struggles that come with homelessness. I was raised in an ethical juxtaposition in which my role models stressed faith, which inarguably instructed treating others as you would want to be treated and to care for the poor, but all the while they insinuated through their words and actions that there were exceptions to this commandment; that there were some that were somehow undeserving of this grace. Countless times I can recall feeling the urge to give away whatever we had in the car to an individual asking for resources on a street corner. This was in fact the Christian thing to do, right? This was our chance. Excitedly I would say, "Mom slow down! We could give him something. Let's take him lunch!" To my dismay, I received the same line of responses every time; "No, honey, don't roll down your window! You have to be careful. He's fine. There are places he could go if he really needed help. You never know what he is going to use that money for." These words initially surprised

and confused me and yet are now the very words I find myself using to answer the same request of the big innocent eyed children I babysit. So what is one to do with this antithesis of ideals? I hoped that through this class I would find the truth of the matter for myself.

This class began with an in depth exploration of the causes, effects, struggles, and health issues associated with homelessness. The portion I found most insightful was the research on the causes of homelessness. This section was particularly important to me because it opened my eyes to the numerous circumstances that can lead to homelessness and convicted me of the ignorant stereotype I previously held which attributed homelessness to only poor choices, stubbornness, and addiction. These limiting attributions served as a major barrier to solving the contrasting moralities I felt tugged by. If I did not know the truth about the cause of homelessness how could I ever expect to know the truth regarding how I should respond to it? In addition to this research, the field interviews conducted by our class served to further illuminate the diverse and commonly overlooked causes of homelessness. These interviews revealed that, although there are certainly many cases where homeless individuals made poor life decisions that brought them to their current state, there are just as many homeless individuals who were simply dealt cards in life that were almost impossible to overcome or escape. When asked what he would like the students in our class to know about the struggles he faces, the homeless gentleman I personally interviewed made a profound point as he simply pointed out to me that, "Everybody can go through it. Just because I'm here now don't mean that they couldn't be here in the future. And I could be there talking to them ya' know." This statement again convicted me of my 'greater than though' subconscious, which somehow had the audacity to assume that the homeless did something to deserve the fate they faced and that I would never make such a mistake. Additionally, the gentlemen added that he "hoped the best for them [students]." Again, such a simple statement tore me to pieces. Here was this man sitting in torn clothes, leaning against a brick wall in down town Norman, clearly emaciated, with bandaged hands, and nothing to his name and he was hoping the best for *me*. It was at that moment that I realized how much more compassion this man had than I ever have. He wasn't holding our past

and our privilege against us so how dare I hold his past and oppression against him? Even if someone had made mistakes that led them to become homeless, who I am to justify ignoring the morals of my faith because of their past? If my sins are not held against me, and they are many, how dare I hold them against another? Realizing just how insensitive and ignorant I have been my entire life humbled me more than I could have anticipated.

Now that I realize that it is absolutely my duty to have compassion, to give assistance in every situation, whether “deserved” or “undeserved” I find that I am at a loss as to how exactly to go about this. I want to empower and equip the homeless of Norman so that they may experience life transformation and flourish into the people they are capable of being. In some cases, this can occur from monetary or material support. In other cases, habits must be broken and new ones formed. It is these cases that I feel most discouraged and defeated. That is because I know that in order for genuine transformation to occur the individual himself must realize a desire for transformation. In other words, I cannot change a person, only they have the power to do that. Moving forward, my mind is racing to discover what it is that can ignite that desire for change in these individuals. I still do not have an answer and it pains me to feel as if I am still doing nothing to help.

For now, I find temporary peace through the project we have conducted for this course. By creating a book about the homeless of Norman, which includes reflections from fellow students as well as writing from homeless individuals, we aim to break the master narrative concerning the homeless by illuminating the various circumstances that brought these individuals to the state they are currently in. In addition to altering perspectives of the community, I believe this project will empower the homeless individuals who participated because they will experience a sense of purpose and achievement.

Making a Difference

By Rachel Minson

Taking this class transformed the way that I think about homelessness. Before the semester began, homelessness seemed to me like such a

complex and overwhelming issue that it was difficult to contemplate how to help people who are homeless in a significant way. While I had participated in food drives and served food at homeless shelters, I thought that simply providing a meal made no meaningful impact on anyone's life. This class helped me shift my perspective from feeling helpless in my inability to cause change, to feeling empowered by my ability to make a difference in the homeless community. By learning about the root causes and the struggles associated with homelessness, and talking to members of the homeless community, I realized that the biggest way I could make a difference was to try to help those who are homeless to share their stories which will increase understanding of the issue in the community.

My shift in understanding started during the process of conducting an interview with a man who is homeless. On my way to the interview I was full of anxiety. I worried that I would say something insensitive, come across as naïve, or otherwise expose my lack of knowledge of what it is like to be homeless. I was anxious that it might be impossible for me to relate to the man I was interviewing, and imagined that he would distrust me and the rest of the students who came down for the morning to collect interviews. What I encountered during our discussion was something far different from what I expected. There was no resentment on his part, and he had no desire to make me feel guilty for everything that I have been given in life.

He told me, "Not everyone looks at the guy who drives a BMW as a bad guy, you know? Most of us want to be that person, they just don't know how." He spoke of his desire for a nine-to-five job, and the simple ability to come home, pay bills, and then watch some television. Because of his personal history, and the societal stigma against homelessness, he never learned how to achieve this dream. His parents kicked him out of the house when he was sixteen, and he spent the long Oklahoma winters sleeping in a cardboard carrier. When job applications ask for an address, he does not have a place to call home.

Throughout the interview I realized that the man I was talking to was so much like myself. He had many of the same dreams and aspirations that I do, but he had received none of the same opportunities. Contrary to

what I feared, I found it very easy to connect with him during the interview. Despite our vastly different experiences, we were able to build a mutual understanding. When I was concluding the interview I asked what he would like University of Oklahoma students to know. He replied, “How good they have it, even though I know that they busted their ass to get where they are right now and not everything was given to them. But to please try to make a difference and a change with the opportunity that they’ve been given.”

During subsequent class sessions and discussions, several of my classmates and I decided that the best way to make a difference for the people we met would be to help them share their individual stories. I realized that I should not think of someone who is homeless exclusively as a “homeless person” but simply as a person just like everyone else. Each person has a unique story to tell. There are a multitude of situations that can lead to homelessness, and each person’s experience while homeless can vary in so many different ways. There is no one size fits all solution to helping a homeless person get back on their feet. However, one thing that can help every person is the ability to reclaim their voice, throw off the stigma of homelessness, and feel empowered in the community.

We decided to put together a book sharing the stories of the homeless community in Norman. Everyone that we interviewed was different. Some struggle with addiction, while others do not. Some have a plan and strive each day to change their lives, while some enjoy living in the homeless community and are comfortable with the lives that they have built there. Everyone’s story is different but they all deserve to be told. With the book, we want to change the master narrative of homelessness. We are trying our best to make a small difference with the opportunity that we have been given.

Book Project

By Alexa Hodges

When I enrolled in Health Communication I was honestly a little annoyed with myself, I have two semesters left of college and I was about to commit to three days a week (one being a Friday) to a class

where I would learn about issues in health communication. I never missed class physically, but wouldn't call myself the most mentally present in the group. We were allowed to use laptops, and I sat in the back.

I have always enjoyed things that are driven by heart. I like school, but I like reading the newspaper and watching the news a little more; I find a sense of heart within it. I like projects, because they require a sense of heart. This is all simply from my point of view, heart can be found in anything, and more easily put into anything you desire. These are just things I find heart in. So, I hadn't found a lot of heart in this class yet (also hadn't given myself the chance too).

I liked our teacher, she was funny but took no BS from anyone. She had some spunk to her, really appealing dry personality. One day she told us how she had gone to school for years to be an international translator, the type where you can only work for about four hours at a time because your brain is working so hard. In this profession, most people make six figures. One day she was translating for a wife who was on her death bed, to her husband. The woman didn't think her husband loved her, long story short through the translating, Elaine was able to bring the family back together. This is where she found a sense of heart in health communication, quite her translating career and became a professor and health communication specialist.

I will never forget that class. I never looked at my laptop again. I had the up most respect for my teacher, and understood that my definition of health communication was not even close to correct. When it came time that Elaine was going to have each of us students go to the Homeless shelter and conduct an interview in exchange for a \$10 gift card, I was pretty excited and nervous. I was assigned to a girl with bright pink hair, named Tanya. She was about six foot two, and pretty built. She took me over to the side of a building and we sat by her two dogs. She plopped down right beside me, kind of on top of me. I became entirely certain she would kill me if I asked the wrong question when a cop drove by and stared at her; she flipped him off.

The whole 52 minutes I was interviewing Tanya she was completely honest, and extremely level headed. She was not bitter toward her

situation and was not bitter toward the students who lived around her, and often make fun of her. Yes, she had a series of unfortunate events that led her to where she is today, and she chokes up talking about them. But she is happy being alive today and thankful for each day. Tanya didn't do the interview for the gift card, she did the interview because she was at the Shelter that day so she figured she might as well talk to a student.

After our interviews, a group of us decided to write a book on the lives of the people at the Shelter. Tanya told me she liked to write, so I called the Shelter and set up a time to meet with her. On that Tuesday when I arrived at the Shelter I walked in and didn't see her. In my mind I thought she probably had no interest in writing a book about why her and her friends were homeless, but I figured I might as well show up. But she wasn't there, so that was fine. As I was walking out of doors I saw a girl with purple hair looking down but her eyes were looking up at me and she was smirking.... "Please tell me you didn't use that gift card to buy hair dye" I asked her. "Of course I did!". This is when I knew I liked Tanya. She was all smiles and all on board for helping us with a book.

Tanya wrote her story, and then rounded up about thirteen others to write theirs. She kept a clip board with everyone's names and stories in it, making me smile every time I went to pick them up. She was the perfect person for the job, not to mention everyone from the Shelter respected her as a person. She had the reputation as the "good heart and will always have your back, but do not piss her off." I started going to the Shelter about three times a week to collect stories from people and hangout with them. I loved it.

Tanya has never asked me for anything, and she has never missed a meeting we had. She has called me plenty of times to tell me "you said you would come to the shelter today and I don't see you here". I learned she is a woman of her word, and you better be one too if you want to get along with her. I liked her style. She was dedicated to the book, and she was good at it too. Every step of the way she was my motivation.

I will never forget the time she looked at me and said “I guess with people like you, I learn anything is possible.” Before I could reply she had walked off. This is when I realized, she might have thought she needed me, but in fact I was the one who needed her. Without her none of this would be possible. The whole time she just wanted us to understand how they live, she didn't want help; she just wanted our book to have pure intentions and accurately report the lives of the people she loved.

I am more thankful for this project than I can put into words. I am a senior in college and my life is changed forever. You can't put a price on relationships with people. Most of my friends have met Tanya, and they have been greeted with a hug. Tanya is a perfect representation of the Food and Shelter population of Norman; a product of unfortunate events, smart, and full of heart.

I understand that I cannot speak for the homeless population of Oklahoma, but I know I can speak for the people of the people who have stories in this book. It is great for them to share their stories, but the real gift is the opportunity to read them.

Failure to Connect

By John McLoughlin

Not too long ago, I had a complete misperception of millions of people across the United States. I was misinformed and misguided for the majority of my life. Then, three short months ago, classes began as usual, here at the University of Oklahoma. It was the middle of August, and I had just recently moved back down to Norman, Oklahoma. This year was supposed to be just like any other year, full of class, football, and long nights of studying. To my surprise, this semester has been crucially different. No, I was not awarded some big scholarship. No, I did not walk on to the men's basketball team. While those two instances would have been great accomplishments, I actually learned something much more important than financial security or appreciation for my “undervalued” athleticism. What I learned made me a better person, and what I learned has changed my life.

As a kid, I remember visiting cities like Philadelphia and New York City and always seeing people with scraggly facial hair, sleeping in cardboard boxes. This has always saddened me, but I never fully understood why these people were living like this, and why they were treated so different. Growing up, these images were engraved into my mind. I became numb to this issue, and in turn, felt less sympathetic towards this group of people. I thought that homelessness was just a part of life, inevitable and necessary. Then, many years later in August of 2014, I learned the key to understanding this saddening phenomenon.

Homelessness is by no means acceptable. We must give as much as we can to not only prevent homelessness, but to help those already living with this horrible injustice. Many people use excuses to validate homelessness, but no matter how much they believe them, they are not true. Go ahead and tell yourself, “oh, he’s a drug addict” or “he has always been lazy and it finally caught up to him.” Yes, that is easy to say. It can make the problem seem unavoidable, but the truth is that homelessness is a sad circumstance that can be placed upon anybody.

I have never learned so many life lessons in a classroom. It is a strange feeling to finally be in a course where I find myself applying every fact and term being taught to the real world. I have never before sat in a classroom and change my ideals and values. I have learned many great things from various professors over my first three years at the university, but I have never been moved morally and emotionally until this course.

Did you know that not all homeless people are lazy? Did you know they are not all drug addicts, gamblers, or uneducated? When you walk down the street, the man begging you for a dollar was a former police officer, or a veteran, or a loving wife who lost her husband. Now, there are some truths to the stereotypes. Yes, there are drunks, druggies, and lazy homeless persons. These people have not helped themselves, and some of them have buried their own hole and continue to keep digging deeper. They need our help too, but it is the unlucky and unfortunate homeless people that I can really connect with. Coming from a middle class family, I had a very comfortable childhood. I have never had to worry about the economy taking away my family’s lifestyle, or taking

away my parents' jobs. These things never crossed my mind, but now I can see that they should have.

All over the United States, there are people who were given the news they never expected to hear: you have been laid off. Those words are tough to swallow, and it can be even tougher to get back on your feet. Then come the health issues, the medical bills, and the lack of insurance. It all snowballs, and soon enough you are left with no money and no hope. It is much too easy to take what you have for granted, because everyone thinks there is no possibility of this happening to them. Unfortunately, this does occur to a small amount of people every day. These unlucky citizens were hard workers, and undeserving of homelessness. Instantly, they are judged and mistreated. As a country, we must do a much better job with stereotyping the homeless. Our beliefs towards the homeless are negative and prevent bringing about help to the situation. Ignorance towards this group of people is what causes this cycle to never die off.

Once somebody transitions to the lifestyle of homelessness, they are at an extreme disadvantage. You have lost your pride, hope, and find yourself being judged by others who do not know your story. This mistreatment can bring about mental illnesses, and delay the rehabilitation of this unfortunate being. Mental illness is the leading cause of homelessness, but what most people do not know, homelessness causes mental illness. This is a dangerous cycle, and we must be more respectful of the homeless and let them know we value their lives' as well.

Through talking to the homeless firsthand, I learned a lot about myself. My mind is now more open to new ideas and different perspectives. From the first time I stepped into the classroom on that hot August day, my ideals and morals have been completely transformed. The homeless are people, and they deserve to be treated with respect. With the misfortunes they have already faced, the last thing they deserve is to be unfairly treated by the general population. We must take a stand to understand, and help rehabilitate their lives emotionally, mentally, and physically. The first step to doing this is to understand and empathize, and that is what this course has taught me to do.

The Forgotten Ones

By Reid Corbin

My first memory of homelessness was when my family went on vacation to San Francisco when I was nine-years-old. I remember we got there the first night and we were on our way to a restaurant to get dinner.

We passed by this guy who had long greasy hair and a scraggly beard. He had a big wet stain on the front of his pants and he smelled like urine. I remember seeing him walk up to the trashcan that was right in front of him. He dug around for a minute and then walked away sipping from a McDonald's cup.

This is my first memory of being heart-broken for someone I had never met. I was a small kid, but I knew that the trash—especially in the middle of a big city—was not the place to get something to drink.

Since then the homeless community has stood out to me.

Not too long after that, I remember getting something to eat with a few relatives in Dallas, where I am from. We had just left a nice Mexican food restaurant and were walking around when a man approached us.

He said, "Excuse me, I am sorry to bother you, but I am like \$2 away from a taco. If you could spare any change I would really appreciate it."

In that moment I expected my older relatives—who were employed—to at least give this man a dollar or something, but no one budged.

As he sorrowfully walked away the conversation shifted to how he was probably going to use the money he got for alcohol or drugs.

My view on homeless people changed again that day and my curiosity grew.

Since then I have been fortunate enough to visit cities such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Seattle where there is a large population of homeless. Being from Dallas there is also a large population. I also had the opportunity to work with people on the streets in Denver with a portion of my summer in 2014.

My understanding on homeless people has grown with every encounter I have with them.

The first thing I have come to understand it homeless people are just that: people.

They are human beings. They get hungry, tired, lonely, happy, and everything else that everyone else does. Through my experience with the homeless people it is easy to dehumanize them. That way it is easier to go to sleep at night listening to the rain hit the roof without the guilt that someone else is sleeping and getting wet.

The second thing I have learned is not every homeless person is an addict.

It is an assumption that all homeless people are on the streets because they are addicted to drugs or alcohol. This might be the case for a big population of homeless people, but definitely not everyone.

Some people just have bad luck. They might have lost their job and cannot find another. They might have had family issues that caused them to be on the street. There are numerous amounts of possibilities, but we cannot treat them all like they are burnouts.

The third thing I learned is it is better to teach a man how to fish then it is to give them a fish.

The crux of the homelessness is that there are so many issues—all stemming from money—that needs to be fixed so a person may get off the streets. For instance they need an income. So they need a job. In order to get a job they need to be clean, have a place to stay, have nice clothes for an interview, and a résumé. On and on the problems keep adding up to where it seems hopeless.

The fourth thing is that homeless people have become such a normal part of society that they almost seem invisible.

I remember coming to Norman when I was 18-years-old to attend the University of Oklahoma. It was early in my first semester and I was walking down Main St to explore the city.

What I discovered was a rather large homeless population. I was floored; to me Norman was not big enough for there to have a homeless population.

Thousands of students attend the University of Oklahoma and even more live in Norman. Yet they live each day without realizing that there are people right around the corner suffering.

This is what this book is all about.

We compiled this book to give a voice to the voiceless. To share with the readers what it is like to be homeless in Norman, Oklahoma through the perspective of the homeless.

Hopefully this will open the eyes of the public to bring our community together as one and help these people who are in need.

These are the forgotten ones.

Who We Are

This is a result of an undergraduate course project. After learning about the diverse processes that can lead to homelessness and talking to homeless people in Norman, we believe that it is essential to create a self-sustaining resource that can continue to grow and build on the local communities in Norman.

A group of students from Dr. Elaine Hsieh's COMM 4413 Issues in Health Communication class created this book. We welcome you to join our journey to:

- Listen to the voices and stories of these invisible people in our community
- Learn about the different pathways and perspectives of homelessness
- Find ways to support these invisible people in our community.

Contact Us

If you are interested to purchase the book (\$10), please contact Dr. Elaine Hsieh, Associate Professor of the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma. All proceeds will be used to benefit the local communities in Norman, Oklahoma.

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