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Housing First to Address Homelessness (2019-2020)

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“Housing First to Address Homelessness”

Caitlyn Gonzales (argument example)

Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

Homelessness is a noteworthy problem in the US, especially in certain areas of the country. In her argumentative essay, Caitlyn Gonzales proposes one possible remedy to the issue – one that has been tried out in other parts of the world and in specific regions of the United States. As you read this essay, consider:

- Gonzales begins her essay with a clear statement of her argument. How does this introduction work to lay out the stakes of her topic? How else might she have begun the essay?
- When discussing the specifics of the homeless population in the US, Gonzales works to contextualize the statistics with both numbers and narrative information. How effective is this strategy? To what extent does she rely on emotional evidence? Statistical evidence? Her personal experience? What specific examples do you find most compelling/convincing? Why?
- Although Gonzales doesn't have a specific section of her essay that directly addresses counterarguments, she does seem to anticipate and respond to possible objections to her claim. How does she do this? How might you write your argument in a way that acknowledges objections even if it doesn't explicitly call out and refute them?

Housing First to Address Homelessness by Caitlyn Gonzales

The homeless population is growing dramatically but so are the amount of vacant homes that could be easily used to house our homeless population. We should be using these homes, located all across the continental United States, to house those who have no roof over their head and no bed to sleep in at night. If every abandoned and vacant house was repurposed by non for profit organizations or by the government itself, we could help solve the homelessness crisis in America.

Housing is basic human right and need. The vacant houses in the United States are at a six to one ratio with the average homeless person. By providing a home with running water and a good place to sleep that person can gain some self confidence back and go out and get a job. That job can then lead to greater steps towards bettering their life practices by giving them purpose. Having responsibilities such as rent and buying meals for themselves and others they live with while receiving help from the government or non for profit organizations can easily help put them back on their feet and into the regular social construction of society again. With the Housing first program started in Utah we have a real life example of how giving someone a place to sleep impacts their lives and our economy effectively. It costs more for our government if people are living on the streets than it does for us to house them. This is due to emergency room visits and jail time from multiple trespassing offenses in parks, on church steps and many other places one may go to get some sleep for the night (McEvers).

Being homeless and knowing there are several vacant homes across the United States is an unacceptable realization. Many people will justify the six to one ratio with the statistic that only one percent of the population is homeless. That one percent is roughly over a million people in the United States alone. I go into New York City very frequently during the year. Just walking ten blocks from Penn Station I pass by maybe twenty to thirty homeless people on the streets asking for food money and other resources they would need to make it through another day. On the cold days in the winter to the hottest days of the summer they are there, waiting for an opportunity to get a job or make some cash to buy food. If the state of New York adopted a similar program our homeless population could drastically decrease over the next five years. The dangers that face the homeless population daily are detrimental to mental stability. Vacant homes can be transformed into a livable residence within a few days. Not all the vacant homes are broken down or need major improvements. The female homeless population faces extreme dangers. Being alone and a women on the streets is a scary thing. Having the male population be so much greater leads to more incidences of domestic and sexual violence and can lead to a higher fatality rate. If just one vacant home was taken in by the government or nonprofit organizations the safety issues of homeless women would drastically decrease.

As of 2011 approximately three and half million people in the U.S are homeless and there are eighteen and half million vacant homes in the country (McEvers). The vacant housing vs homeless ratio is absurd and should be dealt with in a more productive and effective major. That is why in Utah they have started a "Housing First" program put in place to help their growing homeless population find shelter and a warm place to sleep at night. . In 2015 Utah dropped its chronic homelessness population by ninety one percent (McEvers). They began to use the vacant homes by transforming them into state houses for the homeless. Having people live on the streets is a death sentence especially in the frigid winter months. Giving someone a second chance and a glimmer of hope is not as complicated as one might think.

The person who wants to live in a "Housing First" program home has to be sober and clean from all drugs. They must prove this or risk not being housed and possibly spending another winter on the streets. Although the government does pay for them to live there they have to pay rent of either fifty dollars or thirty percent of their income if they do have a job when they arrive. Whichever amount is greater is the amount they will have to pay to live there. The people who are part of the program have access to services that provide them with assistance to finding a job. Evaluations to see if said person can work, access to clothing and transportation for a job interview while also providing resume and job application techniques. The first steps to helping someone get back on their feet and stay off the streets is giving them the proper tools to get the job if they do not already have one. This program is also used to provide ongoing housing and has some access to the National Housing Trust fund.

The National Housing Trust fund is used to provide ongoing, permanent, dedicated, and sufficient sources of revenue to build, rehabilitate, and preserve vacant units of housing for the lowest-income families (National Alliance to End Homelessness). Although this fund is not solely used to help the chronically homeless it is greater step in providing housing to those with the lowest income rates and the ones who need it the most to help prevent homelessness. The fund can be used to help those already in homes with the Housing First program to provide the ongoing resources and dedication needed to house those in the program. Some houses have been foreclosed on or the previous owners could not afford to pay their bills. The vacant homes can be bought using the trust fund and repurposed using the programs or organizations money. We

cannot just put someone else in a home who cannot afford to pay the monthly rates just to have them back on the streets four weeks later. No one benefits from an empty house (Human Rights Now).

This program is a great start to battling the homeless and vacant housing crisis we are facing in America. I was homeless for a year of my life bouncing from friend's house to friend's house. It was a hard time balancing school social life and other adult like responsibilities. If I had had a stable place to live with access to my own room and outside resources to help us get back on track to a new home I would have been less stressful and had a better year. Families like mine are part of the partially homeless population and many others are chronically homeless spending weeks, months and even years consistent on the streets. If more states adopted this law while utilizing the vacant homes in their state and made adjustments as necessary our homeless population can diminish greatly and stay that way. Many other countries such as Australia, France and Finland have adopted different forms of this program the house their homeless population while not having to build new houses and utilizing the vacant ones.

Australia has adopted the Common Ground Adelaide which is a government run program started in 2006 by building high quality apartments with different activities to help the rough sleeping homeless get back on their feet. France and Finland both have great programs like the United States and Australia. Homelessness is being combated all over the world by utilizing the vacant houses in each country and transforming them into nicer and safer places for people to live and take a hot shower on a cold winter's day. Having a roof over your head to protect you from all the elements while providing activities and programs within these programs helps people get off the street and stay off the street. They are bettering their lives while receiving help from the government and non for profit organizations. Although some may say the vacant housing epidemic and homeless population ratio could be steeper. They claim that it is all the persons fault and decisions in life that led them to the streets. That may be true but everyone deserves a second chance and a place to sleep at night.

We do not only need to be providing homes for the homeless through these vacant homes but we should be helping the people get back on their feet. We as a country and a world should be advocating for the vacant homes across the country and world to be refurbished or transformed into new fresh starts for the homeless population.

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