

Habitat for Humanity®

Yuba/Sutter

Our Vision at *Habitat for Humanity Yuba/Sutter (HFHYS)* is to inspire everyone to make a Habit of learning the Humanity of those experiencing homelessness by sharing their stories with the community, as well as the traumas and capacity to succeed on their own using the tools most were born with.

HFHYS has a mission to end homelessness and substandard housing in a fiscally, and socially responsible manner. Yet, there is no ending an issue if we cannot source where it begins. If nothing else, we can enlighten those understandably disenchanted by the issues caused by homelessness that the string of humanity connecting us all is not severed to those living in our river bottoms, and on our streets.

How did they get there?

Why is this issue growing?

If we endeavor to understand the cause, we are better apt to find sustainable solutions, prevention, and produce outcomes for the betterment of the entire community.

Our internal biases to those experiencing homelessness vary as wildly as the story of the person holding a sign asking for help.

This story is the string leading to Robert. Robert has been chronically homeless and one of our Yuba County



panhandlers for fifteen of his 49 years of life. It is essential to understand why Robert was experiencing homelessness and learn if low-income housing is the correct solution to prevent him from returning to our streets, begging to get by. Habitat and our community partners are not only wanting to ensure we find solutions for those like Robert, but we also want solutions that make sense for our entire community. As the tide rises, we want to know those able to travel high seas can flourish, while ensuring we do not leave others to sink as they scoop buckets of water from their troubled vessels.

Robert was adopted at 5 years old after confiding the abuse he experienced at home to his kindergarten teacher. A few years later, Robert was diagnosed with a rare childhood bone cancer at nine years old. While undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments, Robert was pronounced clinically deceased on three occasions.



Robert survived; however, it came at the cost of severe brain damage from the toxins of the treatments. He has had a lifetime of seizures ranging from petit to grand mal, which occur with no warning or predictable patterns. One seizure experienced in his early twenties was so sudden that when he collapsed, the force in which he hit his head forever impacted his short-term memory.

Robert moved back to California in the Yuba/Sutter area in his early 20's after living in Minnesota with his adoptive family. Due to memory loss, he misses meetings for supportive services and financial aid that would have granted him disability pay, and instead resorted to panhandling. Robert did not have the capacity to understand that there was another option, or to remember he was told of just exactly what was needed to get help. Over the 15 years of being chronically homeless,

Robert stated that he rarely spoke, and when he did, he said, "God Bless you" if a stranger would give him their change or something to eat.

Robert has a true childlike innocence and has never consumed alcohol or experimented with drugs. Often, we hear someone is clean, or that drugs are not the issue, and it can often be debatable. There is no debate here. Jesus is the only high Robert has been on since he was 9 years old and met God in a dream, as he states. Robert was isolated with no one to socialize

with, not even a pet, due to his fear of harming an animal during a seizure. Hence, he leaned into faith and his "dream". His dream was experienced during one of his near-death experiences as a child, where God promised him a home full of people to love him where he could be safe.

Robert tells a story of when he met Jesus at nine years old in great detail, though each time the details change.

Robert was housed in hotels, and 14 Forward over the years, however, due to his wandering spirit and inability to remember crucial appointments for services, he would seemingly disappear for substantial amounts of time. He returned into the Yuba County HHS system during COVID-19 after receiving food and educational tools at the Life Building Center. Robert finally had access to disability funds, thanks to CRLA and HDAP, but due to COVID restrictions, accessing housing was more difficult than ever.

Robert was eventually placed at Hotel Rio, where the owners took to him and his kindness; they even helped move his belongings when Robert was identified as a candidate to be housed at Prosperity Village. Prosperity Village is a permanent housing facility with on-site supportive services made possible by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), the California Department of Housing and Community Development, (HCD) and an incredible partnership and support with Yuba County.

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Since moving in Robert has been one of our biggest personalities, openly sharing his story while most always trying to encourage everyone he meets. His story is only told in part here. He gave permission to share his life in full, but we cannot do so in good faith, as he often forgets and changes his mind on various subjects.

The day he moved into Prosperity Village he states that he knew he reached the home God had promised him in his "dream". However, his journey to housing was not an easy one, nor is maintaining his ability to stay housed, as you will see.

Robert proudly shared one day with HFHYS staff on-site at Prosperity Village that he had numerous people from his Church tell him they saw him on the Habitat Facebook page and how proud they were of him. After the HFHYS Admin team heard how excited Robert was, we decided to start our interview by sharing comments of encouragement and love left below his picture on Facebook. Robert seemed surprised to hear he was online as we spoke; this was new news to him, yet was just as happy to hear about it as he had been initially at his Church. Later in the conversation Robert recalled friends at church saying something to him, then explained his brain injury makes it hard to remember many things.

Robert read the comments left on his picture aloud with such pride, he was an inspirational and well-loved famous

person now, not the overlooked homeless man he had been for so many years.

Roberts voice suddenly reached an octave only pure joy brings while reading one of the comments. His eyes flooded with tears as he exclaimed, *"That's my sister! That is my sister, Pamela! Oh my, that is her name! And those are my parents in her picture!"* He then became even more so emotional, stating he had not seen them in over 20 years, not even in a picture.



The emotional shift in Robert ended our conversation for the day, but it also inspired Habitat staff to print and frame the picture of his parents from his sisters Facebook page for our next visit.

Our next visit with Robert was equally emotional when he was given the picture, but not a joyful emotion. In that moment Robert had thought he no longer had disability income due to a lack of understanding with his case worker, causing him to disengage from care.

The picture of his parents now triggered the abuse experienced by his father, causing Robert to become even more so agitated with staff and his neighbors.

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This upset followed Robert for weeks. He had multiple outbursts, staff that he once greeted with a smile he now glared and yelled at. Other residents that he was so driven to share God's love with were now a nuisance to him. He wanted them to move out, then he wanted to move out himself. Robert was struggling, and in his angst multiple calls to Yuba County Sheriff's Department were made. Thankfully, one of the officers responding on one of the calls, as well as HFHYS visiting Prosperity were well versed in trauma informed care, and their approach that day with Robert helped him get engaged with his HHS worker, understanding he still had an income, and back to being the loveable guy that many had been missing.

Robert does not have the same capacity to reason with his emotions, memories, and circumstances that many of us do. Robert is not an anomaly struggling with a debilitating disease and inability to function within the same blueprint many of us do. He is most always pure and smiles despite his hurdles.

With access to permanent housing with on-site supportive services, he has access to his disability payments, on-site case workers and his church and

shopping he can walk to. Permanent housing has not cured Robert of the causes that led to his chronic homelessness, but it has changed his quality of life with access to resources and informed staff to help keep him housed. Robert's story is still writing itself, and no story ends with, "...happily ever after"

We can say with confidence that he will continue to live happily, even after another trigger that without the supportive services, would surely lead him back to homelessness.

Robert
may
forget you
shortly
after
meeting,
but you
surely
cannot
forget
Robert



We are not housing people in need; we are reminding individuals that they are needed and have value to contribute. Access to safe and affordable housing, with services gives rise to measurable outcomes for the betterment of our entire community. Our tide will lift all ships willing to sail into a better future