

The  
Matthew 25:40  
Project

Love God. Love Your Neighbor.

## The Right Thing

By Mike Bencheck CEO Matthew 25:40 Project

A couple of weeks ago I began thinking about something. We have a homeless crisis in this country. In the suburb I live and work in, we have an emergency warming station when the weather is dangerously cold. 67 men, women, and children came in from the cold the last night we were open. These people are all homeless. Some sleep outside in camps. Some sleep in their cars. Some sleep on buses and trains. If they are lucky, they get enough money to spend a night in a motel. For \$55 they get a room with a bed, shower, bed bugs, and roaches. It can seem like the Taj Mahal to my friends when you compare it to sleeping outside.

So how do we solve this crisis? As a country, we've tried many things. Some have helped and others have been complete failures. As I think about this it seems that there is a simple solution to solving the homeless crisis in our country. All we need to do is put people into apartments and houses. If someone doesn't have a place to live, give them one. This is called housing first. The idea is that people who are homeless need a place to live before any of their other problems can be addressed. Housing first started in the Northwest and is spreading around the country. The homeless are placed in housing and in many cases their lives are changed.

Housing first differs from the traditional shelter system. Shelters provide a place to sleep and maybe a meal but in the morning people are back outside. To get a place in a shelter, you often have to get there around 4PM to begin the check in process. That makes working difficult. Most jobs don't end that early. Shelters are not really places to live, they are places to sleep. It's a cot to lay down on overnight but not a permanent place to stay.

The biggest question I hear about housing first is if we rewarding people with housing who are living lives filled with substance abuse and other bad habits? It is a valid question. In the past, people had to get sober before they could get into housing programs. That is a real challenge. Some in the homeless population have issues with substance abuse. Some suffer from mental illness. Some use substances such as alcohol or drugs to self-medicate to survive their mental illnesses. Getting sober while homeless is not just hard, it is almost impossible.

Housing is a basic human right that no one should be denied. If someone cannot afford a place to live, we should provide them with one. It is the right thing to do.