

Advocating within the Civic Discourse Community: Serving our Shelters

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When it comes to human rights and equality in our communities, I believe the homeless people forced to live in shelters are truly underserved. Whether it is on a one-time basis or a continual basis, certain needs are ignored. A lot of people experiencing homelessness face both mental and physical challenges making it difficult to get back on their feet. While there are a number of community and government services and goods to help with the mostly physical aspects within this civil discourse, I would like to focus on the emotional aspect, in addition to some physical benefits, that can be offered to shelters to help these people while they are being cared for. As a local performer myself, I believe providing free entertainment to inspire, uplift, entertain and encourage those who are sad, depressed, hungry, lonely, scared, fearful and homeless is a great way to show humanity within our local communities. I feel we sometimes lose sight of the fact that those less fortunate in these shelters and situations don't deserve or need such entertaining outlets.

According to HomelessAssistance.us, many organizations and non-profit organizations assist the homeless with emergency shelters, food assistance programs, social services, housing assistance programs, churches and medical assistance programs. Performing art programs would be a great addition to this list. In a time of increased mental health issues, providing live entertainment would prove to be an ideal benefit for a little enjoyment. "Music has been scientifically proven to have a powerful effect on the brain. Recent research shows that music reduces stress, lessens anxiety, eases pain and improves memory. While the effects of music on people are not fully understood, studies have shown that listening to music releases a chemical

called dopamine that can have a positive effect on our health.” (“The Healing Power of Entertainment”).

My contribution to help in the civic discourse surrounding community shelter residents is to present a proposal to my mentor, founder and instructor at Hurrah Players, Inc., a renowned family performing 501©3 not-for-profit organization committed to uniting and advancing communities through accessible, quality, family-friendly performances, and education. The proposal would be to dedicate a set time of appearances, especially during the holidays, to visit and perform for free to share our talents and volunteer our time on a regular basis with the various shelters and organizations within the Hampton Roads community. The goal is to promote joy and well being to those who are struggling either because of homelessness, domestic violence, etc.

“A 2016 study published in the Journal of Public Health found that seeing live music can reduce levels of cortisol and cortisone, stress hormones released by the body’s adrenal glands. Lower levels of those stress hormones mean less stress. Another study found that engaging in music with others, for example at a concert or by dancing, has a notably positive effect on the way people feel.” (“Research Says Experiencing Live Music Can Help You Live a Longer, Happier Life”). While providing entertainment to enrich the lives of others does not resolve any long-term resolutions for those in shelters, I believe that from a humanitarian aspect, it can certainly produce positive feelings and results even if for a short period.

During my research, it appears that psychology and sociology researchers are increasingly interested in the impact of the arts on health and, more specifically, the impact on physical health. As mentioned, there are mental benefits and some physical benefits associated with live performances and/or music. Concert goers, for example, seem to experience an

overwhelming sense of well-being thru social interaction. There seems to be a neurochemical connection between music and mental health with hugely positive impacts. I'm sure we all can attest to feeling a certain way after attending a live concert or performance. Unfortunately, those in shelters are not privy to such benefits. So, I'd like to bring the entertainment to them. Our performances include music, dancing, singing and acting. It may also include audience engagement. Those living in shelters are probably without hope, they're stressed, they're depressed and they're lonely. Our mission would be to bring just a little joy to their world.

“A 2013 study in the Journal of Positive Psychology found that people who listened to upbeat music could improve their moods and boost their happiness in just two weeks.” (Boothby, 2017). Performing for these residents leads to an overall well-being with hopefully interaction and participation from them and a sense of inclusion during hard times. Some are not fortunate to have financial security, to have a family to turn to or who may simply be escaping from a domestic situation. The opportunity to bring a smile or laughter to these faces out in the audience would be very fulfilling for only me but my entire Hurrah family because we love entertaining and sharing our talents.

In conclusion, performing is a special form of self-expression and fulfillment. The ability for performers to share these talents with our local community shelters would be a privilege in which to serve. I would work diligently with my mentor, my peers, the instructors and the various surrounding shelters to put forth a plan securing a schedule that would accommodate all involved. Performing to spread joy that will provide mental and physical benefits to those in need would be a great contribution to our community shelters that are sometimes ignored.

Works Cited

Healthmatters.wphospital.org; “The Healing Power of Entertainment” White Plains Hospital,
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Bhg.com; “Research Says Experiencing Live Music Can Help You Live a Longer, Happier Life”
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Boothby, Suzanne, “Does Music Affect Your Mood?”, April 13, 2017,
<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/mental-listening-to-music-lifts-or-reinforces-moods-051713>

Reflections

I decided to choose human rights as my topic of discussion. When I was a young child, I recall my grandmother being in a nursing home. I remember the activity room at the nursing home where the patients could go to be entertained or to play games. On one occasion, I recall a group of individuals performing and entertaining the patients. The patients seem to be enjoying themselves and that made me feel good, so I know they felt good. I constructed my essay based on these recollections. If entertainment is provided at nursing homes, etc., then why not shelters. I am a performer and I love looking out into my audience to see the various reactions. I feel this same energy and love can be shared with those who have less or going through hard times. Often times, people in our shelters are forgotten. Offering entertainment brings joy, smiles, laughter and social engagement. All these factors promote good mental and physical health.