

*"Who are we as human beings if we ignore the suffering of others." - Anonymous*

*This is a question I think about often when I see homelessness and people suffering from addiction and mental illness. The amount of neglect they receive is upsetting and uncalled for. This is my testimony.*

*I am Hispanic and the age of twenty-three, in my short life I have experienced what seems to be two lifetimes of suffering and misfortune. As many others, I have been through some rough times that either hindered me from success or prevented me from enjoying certain aspects this life has to offer. I was lucky enough to grow up in a small community which has a lot of support and aid, for example, the Plumas Crisis Intervention Center.*

*This organization is perfect for people and families to get aid and resources that they may not have access to otherwise. Its mission, as stated; "The mission of Plumas Crisis Intervention and Resource Center is to offer individuals and families the opportunity to live to their own potential, and to be treated with dignity and respect."*

*This very mission is the foundation that people need to build upon in order to reduce homelessness and the bad stigma of mental illness and addiction. Plumas County alone suffers from an ample amount of substance abuse, and quite frankly, homelessness. This issue may not be as obvious as it is in larger cities simply because of the fact people who are homeless choose not to live in boxes on the sidewalk. In fact, many people live with a friend or relative, but to me this constitutes being homeless, because they often have no choice but to stay there. Rather, it's lack of housing, the strict requirements or simply because someone can't keep their mental illness and addiction under control. One thing is certain: homelessness is prominent in Plumas County and it needs to be stopped. The Ohana House is the perfect place to start and here is why.*

First, let me begin by telling you how convenient it is that the Ohana House is located in Quincy; this location is the heart and center of Plumas County and aids people in finding work or obtaining the help they need. If they have appointments or need to get groceries, they simply walk. ... If you live in Greenville, ... you have to travel thirty minutes just to get food for your family at a decent price to fit your budget. Or say you got a job but it's in Chester, well now you have to account for the time it takes to get there. You can imagine how hard it is to do these everyday activities if you don't have a home, or are dealing with mental illness or an addiction.

Other than the location, the Ohana House offers classes one takes based off of an intake process that classifies you as having certain needs. For example, I am to attend Grief Counseling, this was determined because of my inability to let go of the

past. With many other programs provided by Ohana, there are no shortcomings or excuses why a resident can't succeed here. The house has helped many others in the past and it is even helping me. Here is why.

In March 2020, I was homeless. I had gotten a new job at Sav-Mor Foods, and was to begin right away. Sadly, at the same time, (not a day later) my uncle had decided to kick me out, based on reasons driven by his meth use and mental illness himself. I was staying between my sister's house and friends trying to maintain a job that required me to be there at twelve in the morning (midnight). As you can imagine, it was very difficult to maintain a job and couch surf at the same time. I suffer from mental illness and my friend kicked me out because, "Your anxiety is making my anxiety to come out" is what she said to me. I took it upon myself to try and turn myself into the cops for a lack of housing, being in violation of parole. However, they did not take me in. Instead I had stayed at the park in Greenville and was not able to go to work or call in. These actions caused me to be fired for a no show/no call.

Although it was my fault and my fault alone, it could have been prevented if I had known about the Ohana House. I then proceeded to stay in a tent located in the woods while I received unemployment and looked for a place and a job. Even parole, which I remind you is required to find housing for parolees so they won't resort back to crime could not help me. I was losing all hope, but I had come in contact with Cathy Rahmeyer via the Wellness Center. Cathy that very day did an intake and got me into the house. As of the month of May, I was no longer homeless. Within weeks I applied at North Eastern College, got a job at Safeway and as of now attend a Grief class.

Just in less than a month, I feel I am on the right track to succeeding, and very content with myself. Ohana has given me the opportunity to strive and become the person I need to be in order to achieve my life goals. Some of these aspirations include finishing college and keeping my mental illness under control. I made up a projection date based off of unemployment, work, and the stimulus, that I will be able to have my own place, a vehicle and enough money to enroll in college all by July. This could not be possible if it wasn't for Ohana and its impressive outlooks and programs in place. Due to the programming, my Parole Agent told me I will be off parole in six months as of November 2020. All is well in the Ohana House, and if there was more publicity, there could be more funding and even more resources for people to have access to.

As Robert Downey Jr. once stated, "Worrying is like praying for success." With the abundance of addiction use, mental illness and homeless, one can very much relate to this and in this case, everyone is faithful. This is why the Ohana House works for me. – JM