

## Our Future

Poverty has been a major issue in the state of Hawaii for many years and continues to be a force that is especially cruel to those born into disadvantaged backgrounds. If we do not help those who are in rough conditions, our homeless situation in Hawaii will only worsen and continue to tarnish the work Mr. Clarence T. C. Ching did to assist those in need. To fix the homeless problems flooding our streets, we need to take an approach that harkens back to Mr. Ching's recipe for success in the Damon Tract and Kukui Gardens housing projects by taking a problem that targets the disadvantaged and flipping it around to provide them a better life.

Clarence T.C. Ching didn't ask to have a life of fame and luxury. With his real estate finesse, Mr. Ching could've developed a fortune large enough so that he would never have to work another day in his life. He could've asked to have been remembered as the grand architect of the Chinese Cultural Plaza yet he refused, choosing instead to build the Plaza as a monument for the entire Chinese culture. Mr. Ching made it his mission to lift up those who were most in need and he worked very hard to make the islands a better place for all people. As residents of the islands he loved, we don't have the right to try any less than he did. We can start trying by looking around us, particularly at the Chinese Cultural Plaza today. Today, the streets surrounding the structure intended as a utopia for all the Chinese on Oahu now appears to be in shambles, with the homeless roaming the streets and setting up camps along the bridges nearby. Chinatown is falling victim to an epidemic targeting those who are most in need. If we don't act now - in fifty years - the rest of Hawaii will share a fate similar to Chinatown's - if not worse.

Why is the homeless population experiencing a rapid increase in our islands? In many cases, poverty strikes early during a vital chapter of one's life: the educational period. Those

born into impoverished families struggle during the earliest parts of their lives to balance their education and the work they do to support their loved ones. Many are forced to drop out of school altogether to focus on the financial needs of their family. Who can blame them? It's very hard to feed several mouths while spending seven hours at school each day. With this in mind, it is clear that our solution must tackle the problem before it becomes one.

What can be done to reshape lives before poverty strikes? An increase in afterschool programs in public schools may be the answer. Though a small increase in public taxation will be necessary for such a change, the benefits will largely outweigh the price in the long run. In these afterschool programs, students from low-income houses can learn practical work skills necessary to become a productive member of society, and with these skills, they can easily make the transition to the workforce with the experience they will gain. They could also be paid to do some work around their school. These students will be able to learn skills applicable to fields such as construction or fishing that can't be learned in an Algebra class. With these programs, students will be prepared for anything they choose to take on, whether it be to move on to college or to head straight to the workforce. We could call this program the "Kela'apopo Program." *Kela'apopo* is the Hawaiian word for "future" and by giving these kids the chance to learn what they need to survive, we are providing them just that: a fighting chance for a better tomorrow.

For those homeless adults who have already passed their high school years, I propose a similar solution. Homeless adults could reenter society by renovating the state's homeless shelters around the islands into rehabs of sorts for impoverished adults. In these new shelters, adults and any accompanying children will be provided meals, showers, clothing, and a place to

sleep while also training skills to be used in a work environment. Work experience gained at the shelter would be added to each person's professional resume so that, once ready to reenter the workforce, they have a strong and well-grounded foundation that will get them a job. This solution, however, will require each person in the shelter to participate in these skill-building workshops in order to earn a bed in the shelter. By choosing to make full use of the opportunities that these shelters provide, individuals will be able to build a better future for themselves while also contributing to the betterment of their communities. These shelters will also take in a huge portion of the homeless that I haven't acknowledged yet - the mentally ill. For them, I suggest another potential answer: installing wings dedicated to the mentally ill in the homeless shelters. This would benefit those without the needed life savings to be admitted into a traditional care home/ hospital. In these wings, the patients would receive showers, clothes, meals, and psychiatric help. These programs will also require some tax increase and donations to run but, again, I believe the resulting benefits will far outweigh the price.

Clarence T.C. Ching took on the responsibility of making Hawaii a better place, and although he was only one man, he used his ability to motivate others to accomplish wonders by maintaining his vision for a better future and persisting even in the face of large adversity. We should appreciate his life's work by carrying on his mission of letting people of all social classes enjoy the beauty of the islands. By working together as one force, we can lift up our disadvantaged *ohana* and pass on the Hawaii we love for generations to come.