

Everyone who thinks of Hawaii, thinks of paradise. They think of a beautiful little island chain with clear water beaches, never ending sunshine, lush green mountains, and laxed little beach towns. Despite the fact that all of this is true, under the surface a problem is stirring, and that problem is homelessness. Thousands of people know Hawaii as their home, their childhood, yet many people can't afford the high costs of living to provide shelter for themselves.

Regardless of this seemingly monumental issue, we can encompass the compassionate and philanthropic spirit that Clarence T.C. Ching possessed, and tackle this problem with aloha!

One root factor of homelessness lies within our economic system alone. A single-family house in Hawaii costs almost one million dollars, an all record high as of 2019, according to realhawaii.co. Considering that the minimum wage is \$10.80, there's no way that this house can be afforded by a working citizen. This creates a wealth gap, separating the rich from the poor. The rising prices in real estate and the static minimum wage don't coincide with each other, making it a very hard struggle to get by in Hawaii with the bare minimum. Many people with average jobs are already struggling to get by with the outrageously high costs of living in Hawaii. It doesn't help with the increasing influx of foreign buyers that are increasing the demand of bigger luxurious homes that many native residents can't afford. This economic gap between middle-class and wealthy keeps increasing at a rapid rate making it virtually impossible for the average family to keep up with bills. The economic issue has only worsened with the introduction of Covid-19 where many Hawaii residents became unemployed due to our restrictions placed on tourism, the foundation of Hawaii's economy. Without jobs to pay the bills or a steady flow of income, homelessness has become more prominent than ever.

I've always been concerned with the homeless issue in Hawaii and Covid-19 has increased my worry. I've always felt empathy for those that are less fortunate than myself. Recently, I had an encounter that opened my eyes to the power of giving, and made me realize how fortunate I actually am. It all happened after I finished the closing shift at work and was walking back to my car, when I noticed a man crying. He didn't have much besides a cardboard sign and a few simple possessions as he sat on the side of the road. Normally when I'm walking alone at night, I usually try to avoid eye contact with people, yet my bleeding heart wouldn't let me. I approached the man and gave him \$10 and offered to get him food, and his reaction is one that will stick with me forever. The way he looked at me with such gratitude, such happiness,

filled my own heart with joy. He said and I quote, "God bless you. You were the only person to help me out today," and just repeatedly thanked me. Looking at him from my privileged position, made me realize that anyone could be him. If my mom were to lose her job, that would be me on the side of the street. Coming to this realization, that we are all just as vulnerable, strengthened my desire to spread kindness in my community. I can't put into words the feeling I felt knowing that even the smallest gesture could brighten someone's day, that the smallest act of compassion could go a long way, that I possibly just gave someone the slightest bit of hope that life does get better, and that humanity does still exist in this world.

To make it even a bit more personal, Clarence T.C. Ching's pride and joy (according to his foundation's website) was Kukui Gardens which provided apartments for low-income residents, which my immigrant grandparents raised my father in. My grandparents brought their children to America from Taiwan searching for a better life and new opportunities. If it wasn't for Clarence T.C. Ching's project, my grandparents could very well have been on the streets in a similar position to the man I helped. Giving back to the community, giving my grandparents hope and a chance to start a new life with an affordable place to live, they were able to save up enough money to get a place of their own. Without Clarence T.C. Ching's generosity and motivation to help those desperately in need, none of this would be possible. I would not be sitting here today with 2 parents in a well paying job, grandparents comfortably retired, and me being able to pursue a higher education to follow in their footsteps. The dedication to giving back to his community has inspired me to do the same. Quite literally being one of his success stories, made me realize that the happiest moments in life come from making others happy so that everyone can rejoice with unity.

This story brings me to my solution of replacing police patrol of homeless with social workers to help get them back on their feet. Relocating someone with nowhere to go does not solve the problem, it only hides it temporarily. Homelessness is a social issue, it is not a crime issue. Working together with social workers, people can look for jobs, affordable housing, food plans, welfare, and counseling, which would steer them on the right path to get back on their feet. Working with social workers is way more effective than getting arrested for sleeping on a public walkway with nowhere else to go. Instead of letting the police handle the homeless situations, social workers should be the ones present on scene to offer the support and information that would benefit them to stabilize their lives and get their homes back.

In essence, homelessness is a looming issue at the moment, but can be tackled with the right steps in providing help. We should take pride in our community so much so that we're willing to give back to the less fortunate and help them thrive as well. Humanity runs way deeper than a dollar bill and we should start valuing human life over money. Clarence T.C. Ching would be proud to know that not only did his project breathe a new life into my grandparents, but his sympathy for the less fortunate has inspired me to take action in any way possible to give back to my community. Despite whatever obstacles may come dealing with this issue, I will try my best to carry on his philanthropic legacy by putting others first and to show that his virtues of charity live on in my generation.