

CITIES

Homes for Homeless

by Dennis Takeshita



Urban areas across the United States are struggling to provide resources for homeless populations. Students in USC architecture program have partnered with a local NGO to provide a solution, creating the space for new initiatives to provide homes for the homeless. Read more about the innovative potential for cities to address homelessness.

✔ **INSIGHT** | NOTE 14 Apr 2017

As homeless populations in large urban centers increase, governments must come up with innovative ideas to provide living spaces for people to live. San Francisco currently ranks second to New York in homeless populations, with 795 and 887 homeless people per 100,000 residents. Cities struggling with this significant problem could benefit from

architecture students at the University of Southern California who have worked with the city and non-profit organizations to build innovative shelters to alleviate the growing population of homeless people in the city and county of Los Angeles.

USC's Innovative Students

Los Angeles has seen its homeless population increase in recent years, causing a crisis for city government officials. While New York and San Francisco lead in homeless populations, Los Angeles ranks number one in “unsheltered” homeless people. However, the students at USC are currently working on ways to alleviate the population living on the streets within the city. Through the Madworkshop Homeless Studio, operated in conjunction with the USC School of Architecture, architecture students had an opportunity to learn creative and innovative ways to build temporary shelters for homeless individuals. One of their recent projects includes working with the Hope of the Valley non-profit organization to provide prefabricated units for a 30-bed women’s shelter. In directly aiding the city with its homelessness issue, these students are gaining valuable experience that can help combat similar problems in urban areas across the country.

The Shelters

Their workshop was divided into three separate components to focus on different types of shelters to build. Mobile shelters were oriented toward street living and are easily transportable. For example, this design includes one of a shopping cart that transforms into a bed. The second project focused on small scale houses, in which they used materials scavenged from around the city in order to construct miniature homes that meet some basic needs of homeless individuals. Their third component concentrated on prefabricated units that are easily mass-produced and transportable to under-used plots of land across LA. This third type of shelter was the students’ contribution to the Hope of the Valley organization. In order to provide housing to a growing population, the students prioritized structures that could be easily transported and assembled. Overall, this design requires

minimal resources and labor to improve existing under-utilized plots of land, rather than building costly new permanent shelters. These are integral details of the housing issue that cities need to consider.

Funding

Madworkshop, an organization founded by two USC alumni, funded the workshop course in coordination with the USC School of Architecture. The organization is looking for donors to help build these temporary shelters that are estimated to cost \$25,000 each. Contrast this with the spending venture of \$1.2 billion recently approved by LA voters to build 10,000 new homeless and low-income housing units for the city. Looking forward, LA County, which also receives funding from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, should consider working with USC and other universities to expand on the project innovated by these students.

Conclusion

Homelessness is a concern for nearly every major urban center. USC's students of the School of Architecture have produced cost-effective and efficient models to provide relief shelter for some of the expanding homeless population within Los Angeles. Innovative programs like this provide sustainable solutions for cities to deal with widespread homelessness at low interference and low costs.



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