Problem Pitch Interview Reflection

On Tuesday, April 2nd, my Problem Pitch group drove down to the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition for an interview with Director of Education, Dr. Mark Mussman. Located on the outskirts of the rejuvenated, hipster hub of downtown Cincinnati, Over-the-Rhine, the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition is a social action agency that strives to eradicate homelessness. As Over-the-Rhine residents' apartment complexes have recently been turned into trendy restaurants and breweries, hundreds of families have been displaced from their homes. As a result, the rate of homelessness in Cincinnati has skyrocketed. The Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition is one local agency which advocates for the rights of those who have had everything taken away from them.

During my discussion with Dr. Mark, I learned about the leading cause of homelessness in Cincinnati and how college students can become advocates for the homeless population. In our conversation, Dr. Mark said that the reason why homelessness is so pervasive in Cincinnati is the lack of affordable housing. Especially in neighborhoods such as Over-the-Rhine where displacement has become the norm, many families have been evicted from their residences and do not have the means to move to another home. The lack of affordable housing options force families to become separated and lead to a riff in the community. Dr. Mark felt that the most impactful way to solve the affordable housing crisis was to go straight to the source and petition for more affordable housing. While the median income in in our city is approximately $70,000 per year, there are thousands of citizens who earn incomes well below the median income. As a result, the majority of homes in Cincinnati only accommodate those who earn an annual income of $70,000 or higher. In turn, the individuals whose income do not meet this standard are forced to live on the streets. Dr. Mark also noted that a person who makes minimum wage would not be able to afford the housing in Cincinnati. He believes that if our city leaders raised the minimum wage in Cincinnati that less individuals would struggle to afford housing.

On average, the age of a homeless person living in the United States is nine years old. In addition, close to 10% of the children living in Cincinnati will experience homelessness in their life. The physical and psychological detriments to being homeless can lead to an array of problems later in a child’s life. Many people believe that the homeless situation could be easily solved in the homeless individuals got jobs. However, this is not an accurate solution because the majority of homeless individuals are children.

The Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition has established different member organizations, such as their alternative newspaper *Streetvibes*. *Streetvibes* is a social justice news outlet that allows members to write articles and distribute the newspaper across the city. Distributors then receive the proceeds they earn. This system allows the homeless population to have their voices heard. As college students, Dr. Mark suggested that we write to our local and state representatives about the lack of affordable housing options in the Cincinnati area. By spreading the word, Dr. Mark hopes that the city leaders will find better solutions to the affordable housing crisis. Dr. Mark also suggested that citizens who want to help solve the homeless crisis get involve in the Homeless Coalition’s partner organizations, such as Affordable Housing Advocates and Tender Mercies. As an affordable housing advocates, you would have the opportunity to meet with city leaders and initiate support plans to ensure safe and affordable housing for homeless individuals. Tender Mercies is a non-profit that offers homeless individuals a second chance on life. As a volunteer, you would have the opportunity to meet with homeless individuals and share your talents to make a difference in another person’s life.