

From: Marla Simpson

Sent: Saturday, January 30, 2021 10:06 AM

Subject: "Housing is Healthcare" presentation

Dear House Committee:

I am very honored to be speaking with you all on 2/3/21. It's always so exciting to do public speaking & to have great conversations, that benefit humanity!

The following is my presentation (I'm also open to Q&A):

"HOUSING IS HEALTHCARE"

Housing **IS** Healthcare! I have extensive experience with housing, going back to when I was 17 years old, emancipated (legally) from all of my parents. I've always had to find my own housing since that age. From age zero, to the year 2004, I moved **36** times! Egad! I really disliked that gypsy way of moving all the time, by necessity.....the worst tragedy was after my divorce, at age 28. A year later, I found myself with about \$4. left, total. I had a wonderful female cat, and a lovely apartment in Rochester, VT. But NO money! Nada!

Let me back-track: I'd been diagnosed with a bi-polar I disorder when I was 24 years old. I'd had a traumatic, terrifying, & awfully scary break from reality (manic-psychosis). After that time I was involuntarily & also voluntarily hospitalized so many times in psych. wards. I had no choice. I was totally unable to work, to really function. I'd also developed serious addictions (marijuana & alcohol).

So after I lost all my money, my cat, everything, I immediately moved into Safe Haven Homeless Shelter in Randolph, VT. I was lucky I didn't actually have to spend any nights on the street. I lived at Safe Haven for 15 months. During that time I'd also developed a cocaine habit (I didn't ever buy it; I was in a relationship & around people where it was available). During the Safe Haven period, I had a major drug over-dose, but did not go to the hospital. Luckily, I survived, intact.

My point in sharing this is that after the Shelter, I became quite an advocate. I'd received the Shelter Plus Care Voucher, & was able to finally move into my own apartment. Keep in mind that I was also a prestigious college graduate (after receiving a full scholarship to Middlebury College, graduating in 1995). In my teen years I also won scholarship pageants & had been a fashion & print model. I was #6 in my h.s. class, the top-10 academically.....but I digress.

The 15 months of homelessness, plus all of the other traumas, made me decide that I would dedicate my life to serving people, helping, providing support: **ADVOCACY.**

The Clara Martin Center in Randolph has been amazing to me, for nearly 2 decades now. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have had *any* place to live, to receive therapy, see a psychiatrist, get medical insurance. CMC is truly outstanding!

So, ever since approximately 2002-2003, I've been working in the field of health. I was the first "guest" from Safe Haven ever to be hired to work there (in fact I worked there 3 different times over the decades).

And to advocate for others, well, I do A LOT. I've helped many people obtain the Shelter Plus Care Voucher. I've also seen my step-son through his own chronic homelessness, & for about 3 or 4 years now, he has had his own apartment. He did live on the street, camped in the woods.

Also, at my job at the Pathways VT Support Line, I've provided connection, support, warmth, to thousands of people all over the country. (The first 3 years of the VT Support Line we served people, over 18, from all over the U.S.A.) I was the first Operator to be hired, before VSL opened, in March, 2013.

I've come close to nervous breakdowns in recent years, and even after Safe Haven there were involuntary psych. hospitalizations for manic-psychosis. So I am not cured, but, I am, in remission. I've also been to thousands of AA meetings over the years, trying to stay sober, "one day at a time."

The best news is that since 2004, my gypsy moving stopped. I've been housed, in the same cozy apartment, since '04. I love my home. It is my sanctuary. My own "safe haven." Also for the past 7.5 years I've been in a very loving friendship/romance with a Chef in Randolph. He is my very best friend. We have a 3 1/2 year old therapy cat, who is just amazing!

My housing keeps me clean, sober, off of any street drugs, allows me to go to AA meetings over the phone (zoom). My housing allows me to shower, stay clean, stay warm.

Every single week I sign about 40 petitions to help save Mother Earth; the animals; social justice issues; equality issues; & yes, I'm very involved in politics, too.

In 2016 I received the Clara Martin Center Community Service Advocate Award (the first client ever to receive this award, in their 50 year history!).....Also in 2019 I was so humbled & honored to be awarded the Community Advocate Award at the Statehouse in Montpelier, VT.

I am just so lucky to be alive. There were so many times I came close to the "grim reaper" in my life (accidents, close-calls, etc.).

Life is a blessing. Housing is Healthcare!

God Bless; Stay Safe; Stay Strong!

I'm open to any questions the Senate Committee might have for me.....by the way, I lost my Shelter Plus Care Voucher over 10 years ago, because I worked full-time for 1 year. In recent years, the Clara Martin Center assists some every month with my housing rent, for which I am ever grateful.

I pay it forward to others, these blessings & lived experiences, every single day of my life.

Thank you for listening. My hope & prayer is that all have safe & clean housing.....let us all work together to end homelessness for good! Peace.

Sincerely & respectfully:

MSS, M.A.

Randolph, VT, USA