



Is Giving Tuesday part of the problem?

Giving Tuesday started in 2012, and I have watched for the last decade as organizations have leaned into a day marketed as one of “radical philanthropy,” an attempt to take advantage of the spending proclivities of Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

I have also watched during the last decade as homelessness has spun out of control and as the number of people who cannot live for a sustained period of time without assistance has risen to **82 million Americans**.

We don’t need a special day of philanthropy, no matter how seductive it appears to those of us in the nonprofit sector. We don’t need another example of the “contribution paradigm.”

What we need – what your neighbors need – is our commitment.

The contributory approach to poverty in the United States has resulted in a management of it – and an inefficient one at that. It has brought exorbitant spending – your tax dollars supporting government programs and your charitable donations supporting nonprofit initiatives – with minimal progress made on behalf of those living in poverty. The evidence is everywhere, in almost every urban, suburban, and rural area.

Since the United States declared an “*unconditional*” **War on Poverty** in 1964, here is a look at the total number of Americans unable to live for a sustained period of time without assistance:

Number of Americans living in need of financial assistance (in millions)



1964:
33 million



2023:
82 million

What we are doing – what you are spending your money on – is not working. We have gone from 17% of the population living with economic instability to 24%. Yet we continue to do the same thing about it, year after year.

Every little bit DOES NOT help . . .

To contribute to a problem that requires a commitment is a recipe for failure. Making an online donation seems helpful, but what if that actually lulls you into thinking you have done your part? What if each of us accepts clichés that don't apply when it comes to the poverty of our neighbors, such as "every little bit helps."

It hasn't helped yet, not nearly to the level that we have the potential to help. Sixty years after we said the issue was so serious that we needed a war to address it, conditions are far worse. As one of my colleagues says, everyone "doing their part" has led to no one doing enough.

. . . but a commitment to our neighbors is a path to success.

This may be as simple as advocating for more transportation access (e.g., an increased number of bus routes) from lower-income areas to economic hubs – and not stopping your advocacy until your neighbors in those areas have that access.

It may be creating new initiatives that directly **solve problems**, such as having your faith community partner with local businesses to create child care options for their employees who cannot afford to pay for their child care. The licensure, accreditations, and relationships required to do this are steps that solve economic issues more than provide band-aids to them.

Making a commitment may mean partnering your business with a local public school – a school where more than 90% of the children are **not proficient** in

reading or math. Find that school; unfortunately they are everywhere in this country. Give your time and energy there. Don't send an employee or two to mentor there; don't make a donation to an activity there. Ask to meet with staff, listen, and then involve your whole organization in doing **whatever it takes** to flip those statistics, at the least.

If you want to make a difference, [make a commitment](#).

The impact will be far greater than an online donation you make on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving.

At The Shared Humanity Project, we hope you will click on our [National Plan to End Poverty](#) more than on our donation page.

We all know that nonprofits rely on donations – ours is no different in that respect – but on this day, to show that we understand the purpose behind it all, we hope you will find a way to transition from contributing to committing, from seeing poverty as someone else's problem "over there" to seeing it as your immediate concern.

You won't have to look far from the place you call home to find people living in deep or even extreme poverty. And you don't have to look hard to find actions that you can take to be part of the solution. We have more than 300 of them [right here](#).

It's time for a new approach, and we look forward to partnering with you in the effort -



Mark Bergel, Co-founder

The Shared
Humanity Project



National Plan to
End Poverty

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