

Why Do I Call the Transitional Structure in Dignity Village “My House?”

First, I am a contracted member of the corporation of Dignity Village, and therefore I am a shareholder of this corporation. As such, I am an owner of all assets, including the transitional structures...but enough of the legalistic nonsense. Simply put, “my house” is mine. As each and every one of us has participated in the design and building of the structures we occupy, they have indeed become our own.

We are no different from anyone else. Each of us personalizes the structure we live in, thereby taking personal ownership of our homes.

Dignity Village realizes that institutionalization doesn't work for everyone. By warehousing human beings in a sterile environment owned and operated by someone else, the opportunity for personal pride and pride of ownership is abandoned. It is the purpose of the Village to reinforce self-worth, pride and a sense of ownership in all products of the Village, tangible and intangible.

Many homeless people believe they are incapable of personal achievement, self-worth, pride and accomplishment. Dignity Village assures each and every one of us that this is simply untrue. Every person living in the Village is capable of something, and each member of our community is required to work at least 10 hours per week in the Village to pay their rent – we call this sweat equity. Through our good labor, we build and maintain the Village for the future.

Today, my house is mine because I designed it to reflect my personality. I participated in the physical building of the structure. I pounded the nails to make it stand and I decorated it, inside and out, to suit my taste and needs. I live in it. To me, this is no transitional structure, no more than any other apartment I might rent or any other home I might own. This is my house. I continue to pay sweat equity to live in it. Ownership is everything here. We take ownership of our lives, actions, duties, and the future of the Village. That's how community is made and how it succeeds, thrives, and grows.

So now that I have this home, will I stay here forever? No. The Village is my home until I am able to move on with my life, and soon, I hope. The average stay in Dignity Village is 18 months. Many stay for less, and a few stay longer. For now, this is the only home we know.

Someday, my house will belong to someone else. I hope they have as much pride of place as I do. I pray they can make it as much of a home as I did, until the day they leave it as a legacy to the next owner, our future Villagers.

Respectfully,

The residents of Dignity Village