

#HOMELESSAZTECS

Homeless Aztecs find little aid on campus

LEONARDO CASTANEDA
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Social work senior David Armstrong's passion for helping people living in homelessness began when he was in the Navy in the early 2000s.

While preaching the gospel, he noticed large groups of people living on the streets.

"There was a need, so I started getting food and clothing and giving it to them," Armstrong said. "I desired more and more to help people, to help the poor, and really my faith; again, it was a passion."

In 2009, he moved to San Diego, and by 2011 he was attending San Diego State. By that time Armstrong had separated from his wife and was living far from his family in Texas. He had left school for a semester, and most of the people he knew in the social work program had graduated.

"Structure (had) kind of fallen by the wayside," Armstrong said.

When Fall 2013 started, he was commuting from the South Bay to school and his internship at the Salvation Army. He was struggling with some debt and was relying on the GI Bill. The financial and

mental strain of the daily commute slowly wore him down, and not long into the semester, Armstrong was living in his car.

"I am technically homeless by choice, even though I don't want to be," he said.

Armstrong, now 31, had gone from helping those struggling with homelessness to living with it.

"It's funny; the thing that I've struggled with in this time period is the same thing that I want to help people with," he said.

Like many other students struggling with housing, Armstrong eventually met Rev. Darin Johnson of the Agape House, an Episcopal-Lutheran campus ministry center near SDSU. The center is one of a number of religious houses near campus. Johnson said, students living in homelessness will stop by, out of curiosity or desperation for a place to rest, as well as for the weekly free meals the center offers on Wednesdays.

Because of that, Johnson has become something of an informal leader in the small but growing movement at SDSU to better identify students struggling with housing and food insecurity and provide more services to help them.

Johnson has seen students from all

academic backgrounds and grade levels struggle with homelessness and food insecurity.

Sometimes efforts to attract potential students can place them under enormous strains if there isn't enough financial assistance and follow-through, Johnson said.

"We know there's some really good programs to get people into SDSU," Johnson said. "But once they're here, housing and food is a real pinch for a lot of people."

The SDSU Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships estimates the cost of attendance for the nine-month academic period of a student living in university housing to be \$25,068. That includes tuition and fees, rent, food, books, transportation and personal expenses. Living in off-campus housing is cheaper, \$22,728 for the academic year. Still, a student working a minimum wage job would have to work 355 eight-hour workdays to afford that. And that wouldn't begin to cover rent and food expenses during the three months of summer break not included in the cost of attendance.

SEE HOMELESS, P4

Cost of Attendance

How many hours, days and weeks would it take to pay a year's attendance at SDSU with a minimum wage job?



2,841 hours



355 8-hour days

M T W Th F

71 40-hour workweeks

THIS IS A PAID ADVERTISEMENT

ATTENTION: ALL SDSU STUDENTS

All SDSU students are invited to attend advisory open forums to solicit student input on the following proposed increase in campus mandatory student fees:

Shall a new mandatory Student Success Fee be established effective Fall 2014? The proposed fee level per semester, if this fee is approved, will be determined through a series of public forums and consultations with interested regularly-enrolled students at San Diego State University, except those exclusively attending Imperial Valley Campus.

OPEN FORUM TIMES

DATE	TIME	LOCATION	HOST ORGANIZATION
Monday, Feb. 3	11:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	Associated Engineering Student Council
Monday, Feb. 3	3:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	SDSU Ambassadors & Undeclared Student Council Student Athletes
Monday, Feb. 3	6:00 pm	Fowler Athletic Center Auditorium	College of Sciences Student Council
Tuesday, Feb. 4	12:30 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Tuesday, Feb. 4	4:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Wednesday, Feb. 5	1:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Wednesday, Feb. 5	4:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Thursday, Feb. 6	8:30 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Thursday, Feb. 6	12:30 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Friday, Feb. 7	11:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Monday, Feb. 10	10:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	College of Arts & Letters Student Council
Monday, Feb. 10	6:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	African Student Union
Tuesday, Feb. 11	8:30 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Tuesday, Feb. 11	4:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Wednesday, Feb. 12	9:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Wednesday, Feb. 12	3:00 pm	Fowler Athletic Center Auditorium	Associated Students
Thursday, Feb. 13	12:30 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Thursday, Feb. 13	4:00 pm	Theatre, Aztec Student Union	Graduate Student Association
Friday, Feb. 14	10:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Monday, Feb. 17	10:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	College of Health & Human Services Student Council
Monday, Feb. 17	1:00pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	College of Professional Studies & Fine Arts Student Council
Tuesday, Feb. 18	10:00 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Tuesday, Feb. 18	1:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	Associated Business Students Council
Wednesday, Feb. 19	12:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Wednesday, Feb. 19	4:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	Honors Council
Thursday, Feb. 20	8:30 am	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	
Thursday, Feb. 20	4:00 pm	Theatre, Aztec Student Union	College of Education Student Council
Friday, Feb. 21	12:00 pm	Templo Mayor, Aztec Student Union	

Please attend one of the scheduled open forums to learn about the proposed fee increase, ask questions and have your voice heard.

Please bring your current SDSU Card ID to the forum of your choosing.

To review additional information about the proposed fee increase, visit <http://studentsuccessfee.sdsu.edu>. Forum dates, times and locations are subject to change.

FAVOR
Favipiravir research

Do you have symptoms of the flu?
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Most of the time, nothing good comes from having the flu. Except now. If you get the flu, OR have the flu already, you can help evaluate an investigational medication that may help end flu symptoms more quickly.

Local doctors are currently conducting the FAVOR medical research study to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of an investigational flu medication for its ability to manage symptoms of the flu.

To pre-qualify for the FAVOR study, you must:

- Be between 18 and 80 years of age
- Have a fever of at least 100.4°F (if over 65 years of age, at least 100.0°F)
- Have 2 or more of the following symptoms:
 - Cough, sore throat, headache, nasal congestion, body aches and pains, or fatigue

All study-related care is provided at no cost and payment for your time and travel will be provided.

To learn more about the FAVOR study, please visit www.favorflustudy.com or contact:

1-877-500-3788

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HOMELESS, CONTINUED FROM P3

Johnson has seen students of all ages—straight out of high school to returning veterans—slowly go down the same spiral. First, he said, they would struggle to pay rent, eventually ending up living in their cars. Then they would be forced to sell their car, opting to live in the 24/7 study area of the library and shower at the gym.

“Imagine the impact of that on your mental health, if this is your hope to escape poverty and you’re seeing it just slip away right before your eyes,” Johnson said. “I don’t want to watch that happen anymore.”

Johnson said he felt incentivized to help and reached out to Irma Murphy, communication resource specialist at SDSU’s Student Health Services. Together with Justice Overcoming Boundaries, an organization that trains community leaders to address social issues, and several religious groups near campus, Johnson and Murphy organized a task force.

The first step, Murphy said, is to know the scope of the problem.

“It’s kind of like this silent epidemic, if you will,” she said. “Now, I don’t know how wide this problem is, but I feel like the numbers are growing.”

Murphy isn’t alone; little is known about how many students struggle with homelessness during college. Murphy said they can be hard to track because, they don’t fit the profile for most organizations aimed at helping those living in homelessness. Many of them live in their cars or couch surf, and it’s not uncommon for their homelessness to be temporary—a few weeks or months.

In 2011, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid began asking students if they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. According to CNN Money, documents obtained by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth stated more than 58,000 FAFSA applicants answered that they were homeless in the 2012-13 academic year. That was an 8 percent increase from the year before.

The economic recession continues to affect students and their families, Murphy said. Many students can’t ask their parents



Few services are available for San Diego State students living in homelessness. Some may resort to sleeping in their cars. KEVIN SERRANO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

for help, especially when they are already struggling to pay their son or daughter’s tuition.

It can also be hard for students to support themselves financially. In December 2013, the unemployment rate for 20 to 24 year olds was 10.2 percent, the same as 2008 when the financial downturn first began. However, since then tuition and fees at SDSU have increased \$1,506.

Not a lot of services are available, Murphy said. When a student is referred to her, she tries to determine what resources they do have. Then she gives them information about local food banks, although students aren’t always eligible for aid.

“For me the biggest challenge is finding shelter, and I cringe because I know there’s not a lot available,” Murphy said.

The Aztec called the SDSU Office of Housing Administration for a comment on this story. It said OHA doesn’t deal with student homelessness, and referred the call to the SDSU Police Department instead.

Once Murphy and Johnson’s new task force identifies the size of the problem and any services available, Murphy said it plans to approach members of the

university administration with a full picture.

“I think the biggest problem is that the university is unaware of the numbers and how these numbers are increasing,” Murphy said.

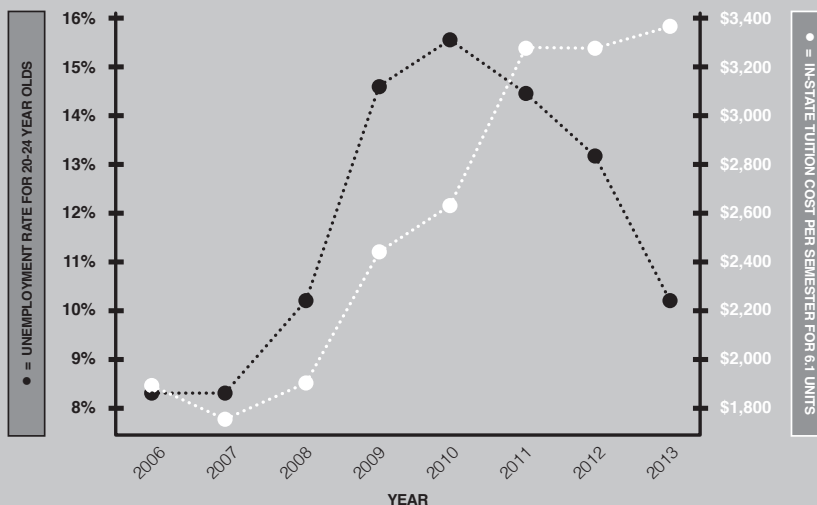
One of the biggest challenges, however, might be overcoming the stigma surrounding homelessness. Murphy said counselors or professors direct students to her, or they come for medical referrals. It’s only after talking with the students that she finds out they might not have a place to live and have been couch surfing for weeks.

Johnson has had similar experiences. “One-on-one, I start hearing truth. Once you’re with people and they realize you’re not going to judge them, they tell you what they’re really dealing with,” he said.

Meanwhile, Armstrong hopes to move to a house in City Heights soon. It’s closer to campus than his previous home, and his debt load is finally under control. But what he wants most is to develop a true sense of community.

“I don’t want compassion,” he said. “I want understanding.”

The Ups and Downs of Unemployment vs. Tuition



STATISTICS PROVIDED BY SDSU DIVISION OF BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS AND U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

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