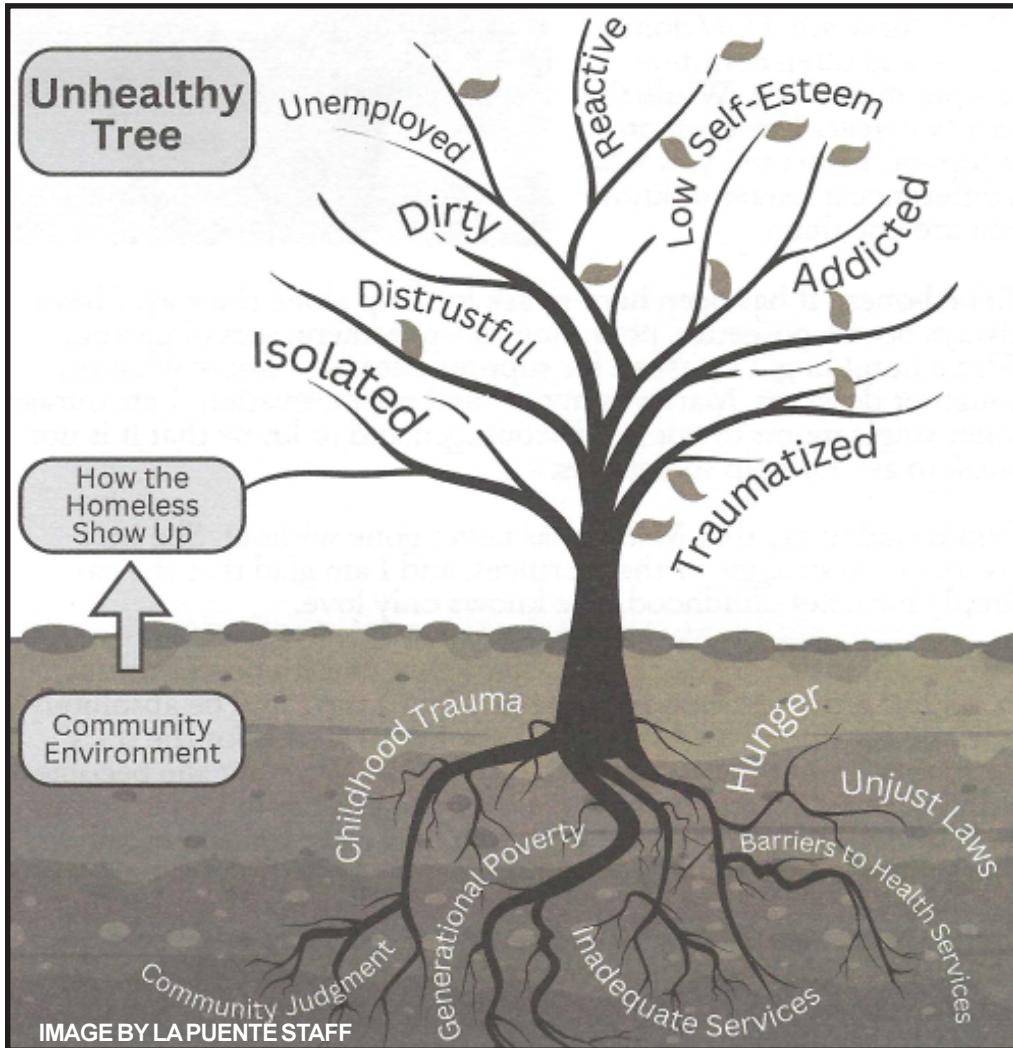


What is in the Soil?



“When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don’t blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce.” -Thich Nhat Hanh

by Lance Cheslock

This first “homeless tree” is unhealthy. Its dying branches and leaves represent characteristics we see in the homeless who are in their worst state. What might we learn when looking at the Unhealthy Tree?

We would likely see withering leaves that denote trauma and mental illness. We might see sickly branches of people who have health issues such as chronic pain, infections, injury or hardened skin from exposure to the elements. We would notice missing branches, representing the lack of a working phone to communicate or adequate job skills to get work. We would see the withered leaves of exhaustion from the daily struggle to find food, water, a bathroom and a safe place to sleep.

The Unhealthy Tree is likely fearful for how it will continue to survive. It may resort to unhealthy behaviors to hide from the self-loathing and pain of emotional trauma. Untrusting of others, this tree feels

looked down upon and judged as unworthy, lazy and sometimes dangerous. The tree feels blamed for the mental illness, trauma, lack of trust and the unhealthy behaviors that afflict it.

Observers might conclude, “It’s the tree’s fault.”

Now, instead of blaming the tree, let’s explore what’s in the soil; the environment of the community that feeds this tree. Let’s ask “What unhealthy community conditions contributed to such unhealthy outcomes?”

The soil for this unhealthy tree might be full of judgment from others in the community who look at the homeless and limit “them” from being included in the community. This may be through a policy that restricts homeless access to public showers and bathrooms, sending the message that “they” are not welcome, deepening mistrust and isolation. The soil might make it difficult to access mental and physical health systems, requiring insurance and

lengthy timelines, or it may have providers lacking skills with vulnerable populations, further worsening the mental and physical health issues of our tree.

This soil may not offer affordable housing, or options for those experiencing homelessness to safely bed down with warm cover from the elements with protection for their few personal belongings.

The Unhealthy Tree illustrates the relationship between harmful community environments—the soil in which the lives of the homeless are rooted—and the adverse stressful and traumatic experiences of the unhoused. This paints a pretty bleak picture, and in reality, it often is.

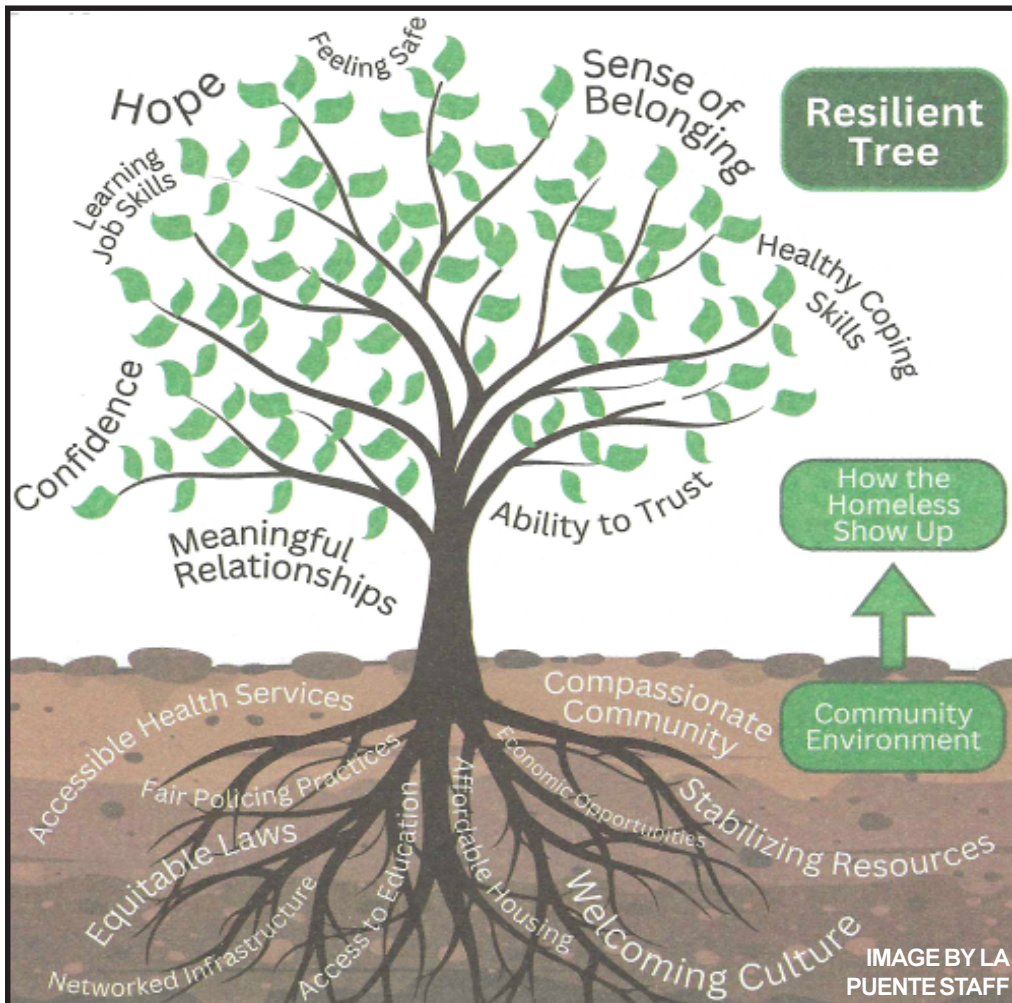
But what if we enrich the soil of our community’s environment?

The soil of the Resilient Tree should be nurtured and cultivated with essential nutrients that yield positive outcomes for people both at-risk of and experiencing homelessness. What nutrients are needed to provide a supportive environment for the tree to be healthy and strong enough to overcome the adversity that befalls it?

People are the soil’s primary ingredients! It is the collective culture of the community that can be welcoming or fearful, engaging or withdrawn, supportive or apathetic, seeking connection or seeking division. Two principles, 1) meeting people where they are at and 2) believing in the intrinsic value of others, makes for rich soil. When manifested, the community moves from “us/them” to “we.”

Rich, healthy soil has community sectors working together to understand and respond to community needs. Social services and healthcare are integrated and diligent to assure access to everyone, and with humility, learn their blind spots to authentically understand and engage with vulnerable populations. Education and job training are available to those who seek to grow. Institutions network, making sure that those farthest away from resources have a way of meeting their needs and everyone celebrates successes together.

Healthy soil within civic leadership engages all populations and institutions with an even hand, and studies problems to understand and respond, not just react. It provides resources and infrastructure for safe, affordable housing and ensures the community has fair policing practices and restorative justice developed with community input and oversight. Healthy economic *(continued on back page)*



“The use of nuclear weapons, as well as their mere possession, is immoral.”
The Pope warns, too, of the dangers of nuclear weapons being used as a form of “blackmail that should be repugnant to all consciences of humanity.”



- Pope Francis
 Vatican News, June 21, 2022

Nuclear Stations of the Cross

April 18, Good Friday, noon
 At the Mercury Gate of the
 NNSS (Nevada Nuclear
 Weapons Test Site) presented by
 the Las Vegas Catholic Worker,
 call (702) 647-0728 for more info
 and directions.

Sacred Peace Walk

April 13 - 18
 Pilgrimage during Holy Week
 65-mile walk from Las Vegas to
 NNSS (Nevada Nuclear
 Weapons Test Site)
 (773) 853-1886
 NevadaDesertExperience.org

Volunteer Scheduling

(702) 647-0728
 or mail@lvcw.org

- Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.**
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker
- Thurs.-Sat., 6:15 a.m.** Over 300 "To-go" hot meals served to the poor and homeless (6:15 a.m.: meal assembly, 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.: meal distribution)
- Thursday, 11:30 a.m.**
50 lunches taken to the homeless prepared by Our Lady of Wisdom Italo-Greek Byzantine Catholic Church
- Thursdays (two monthly) 8 a.m. - noon** Hope Christian Medical Outreach mobile clinic.
- Friday, 8-10 a.m.** Clean the World Foundation shower trailer in our empty lot, up to 40 showers given. We provide clean clothing and hygiene supplies, Touro University students offer a monthly medical clinic
- Second Sat. of the month** Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast for the homeless
- We are a Participating Member of Nevadans for the Common Good**

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(continued from front page)
 development keeps an eye on supporting living wages and economic opportunity for all. With transparency, leadership ensures the equitable use of resources, including tax dollars.

The Resilient Tree illustrates a supportive community environment with a culture and services that can prevent many instances of homelessness as well as stabilize and nurture positive outcomes.

When the community is supportive, meaning the soil is healthy, vulnerable community members have a chance to overcome adversity, strengthen and thrive. After creating the vision of healthy soil for

our tree, we find the leaves and branches reflect positive traits: self-worth, trust in people and institutions, confidence and motivation, renewed spirit, and the yearning to give back or pay it forward.

What is in your community's soil? What could you do this week? This month? This year? – To enrich the soil in your community and support healthy outcomes for even the most vulnerable among your community’s “trees?”

Edited and reprinted from *The Voice of La Puente*, Winter 2024. The trees drew inspiration from the Center for Community Resilience.

A Benefit for Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG) THIRD ANNUAL CHILI COOK-OFF

Sample Ten Chilis! Dine on a bowl of Chili plus toppings, corn bread, drinks and desserts.

Saturday, April 26, 2025
 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Admission: Adults: \$25 (\$30 at door)
 Children: \$15 (12 and under)

Cast your Vote for your favorite Chili!
 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

1811 Pueblo Vista Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89128

We will have an entrant in the Chili Cook-off, Last year’s winner, Frank, our Friday morning volunteer, will be entering the contest for the Catholic Worker. For tickets:

nevadansforthecommongood.org/chili-2025

