

# **Housing Retention, Human Services and Poverty:**

What we don't know may be embedded  
in people's stories

Presented by  
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**LET ME BEGIN BY  
SAYING THAT I AM  
NOT AN EXPERT...  
ON ANYTHING.**

As a demeaned outsider,  
**the “Other”**  
can become an easy target, blamed  
for the problems that society  
cannot or will not solve.

increasingly the poor are being  
scapegoated for causing poverty in  
the United States. Belenky, 1997,  
p.3.

**Number of people served: 61**

**Male: 22**

**Female: 39**

**Income source** (\* please note that some have more than one source):

**Social security: 45**

**Reach Up: 11**

**Employment: 8**

**GA: 1**

**No Income: 2**

**Housing Status:**

**Saved: 36**

**Housing obtained: 16**

**Housing lost: 11**

\* note there is some overlap as some included voucher preservation and then a move

**Contributing challenges** faced by those served:

Substance abuse issues: **26**

Mental health issue: **56**

Co-occurring disorder: **23** \*which for this report would include only those who had a substance abuse and a mental health issue. Please note that only **3** people had only substance abuse issues... **23** fit the criteria for co-occurring disorder.

Persistent medical issue: **32**

Documented or suspected trauma/victim issue (sexual violence, domestic violence, PTSD): **30**

**Family structure:**

Single parent female: **16**

Single parent male: **3**

Two parent families: **3**

Single individuals: **39**

**Number of people who needed financial assistance: 20**

an ounce of prevention may actually be worth a pound of cure. It is often less expensive to help a person or family avoid homelessness than it is to let them become homeless and then provide them with emergency shelter, other homelessness services, and help getting out of homelessness. Moreover, while people living in near-homeless situations face a wide range of basic problems and challenges, preventing them from becoming homeless can keep the existing problems from escalating and can block a host of new ones (thereby avoiding a corresponding increase in the need and demand for costly public and private assistance). Lindblom, 1991, p.958.

And in the Burlington area there is also no place to go. Vacancies are at all time low, landlords are revamping their housing stock to appeal to college students and young, white collar professionals.

Loss of housing means needing to find new housing – potentially with a negative landlord reference as extra baggage  
Essentially my/our goal is to try and keep people where they are

The actual doing of the work is varied: housing retention can involve cleaning one's home, dealing with hoarding issues, referrals to services beyond my scope of expertise, sitting in on treatment teams, working with landlords, public housing authorities and law enforcement agencies, referrals to financial assistance agencies, transporting people to appointments and to go shopping. *Almost always it involves me going to them as opposed to them coming to me.*

**It is in a sense a catch all for people whose housing is on the edge.**



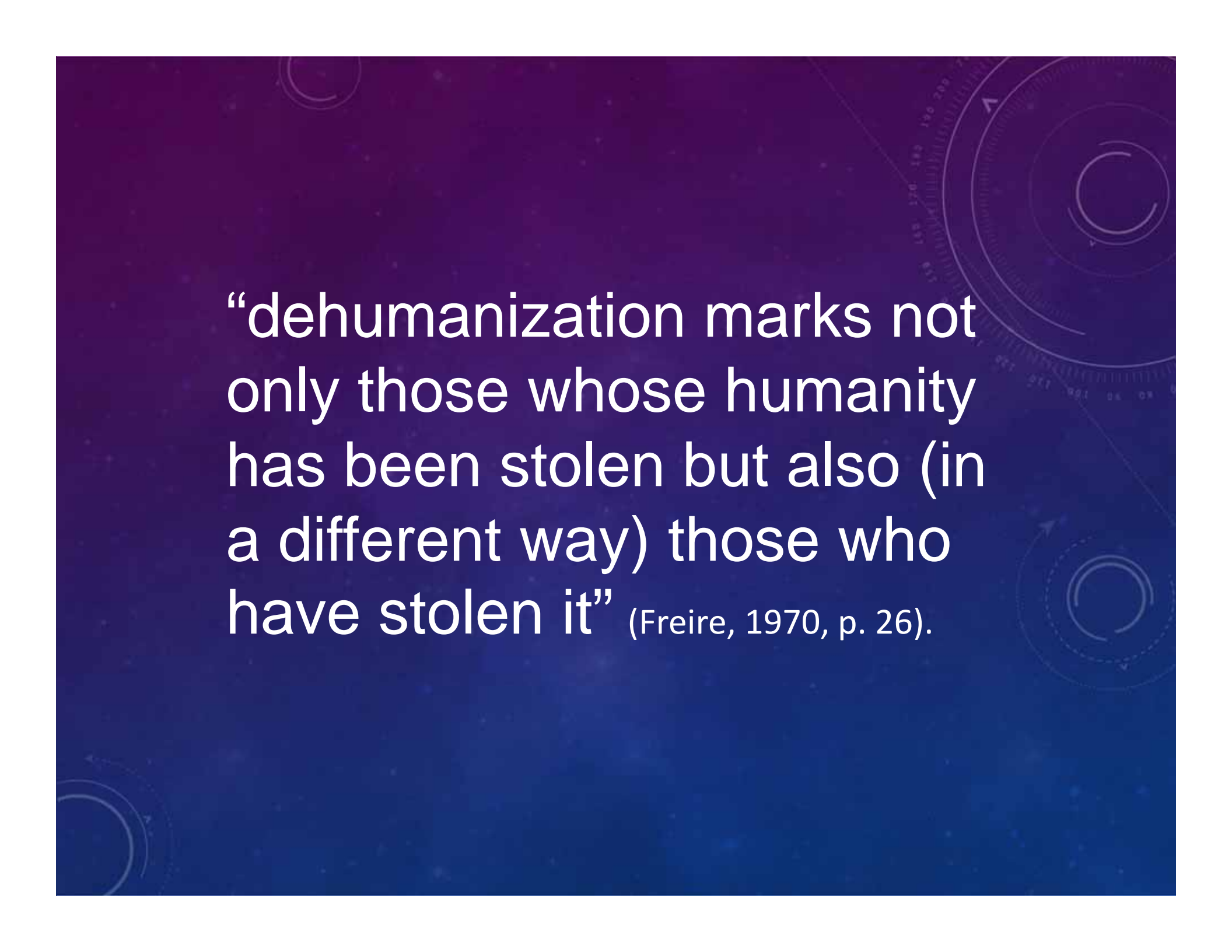
Professor: *David Shiman*

Class:

*Social Processes  
and Institutional Change*

Assignment:

*Non-traditional Expressive Act*

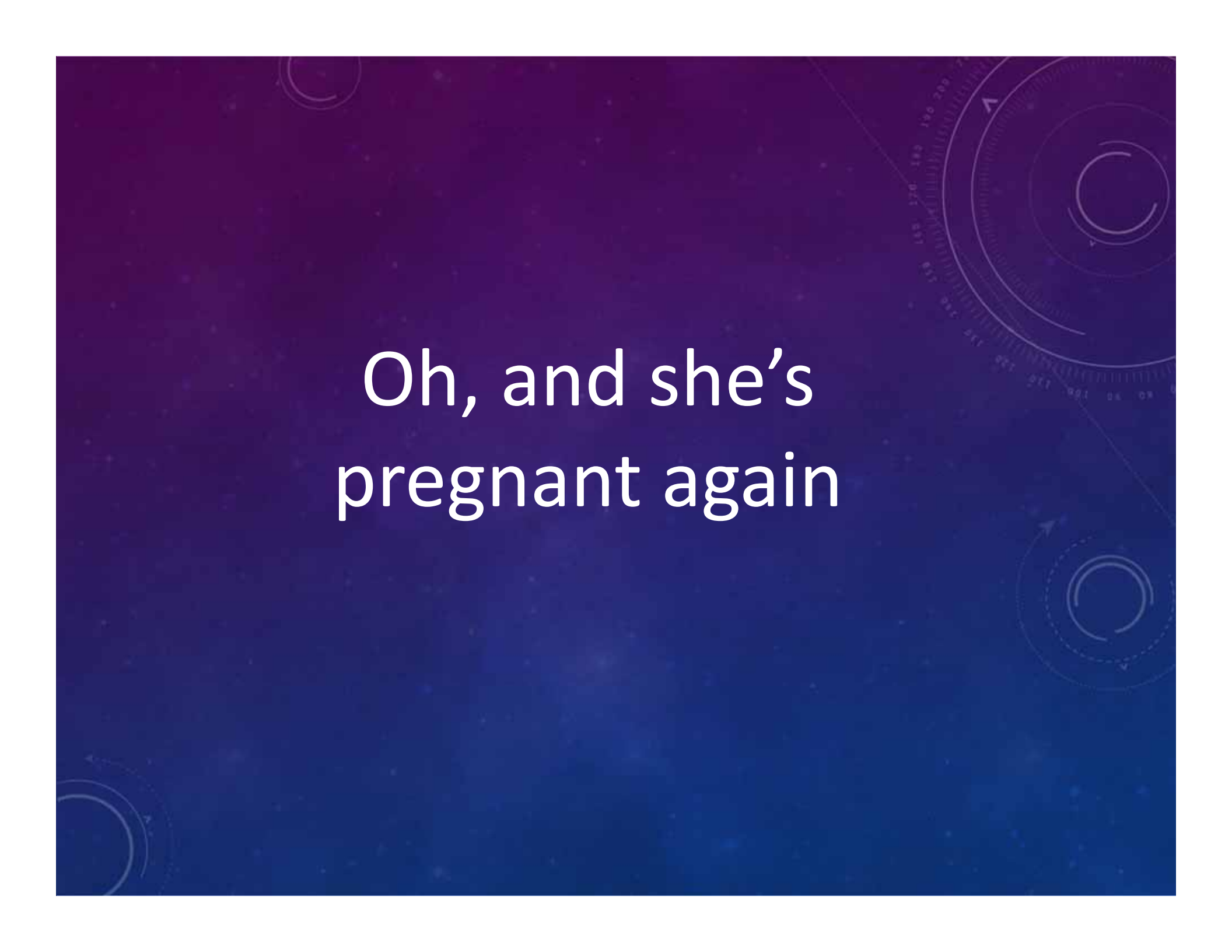
The background is a dark blue gradient with a starry space pattern. On the right side, there are several faint, technical diagrams resembling circular gauges or control panels with various lines and numbers. On the left side, there are some faint, curved lines and arrows, possibly representing orbits or paths.

“dehumanization marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen but also (in a different way) those who have stolen it” (Freire, 1970, p. 26).

One day a young man was ejected from the soup kitchen for a rule infraction. He shouted back at me from the curb, “You know if it wasn’t for *me*, *you* wouldn’t have a job.” Tull

## *The short story:*

- Drug addict mother who has lost three of the four children (each with a different father) she bore due to her caring more about being high than her kids.
- She has lost housing, lost housing vouchers, gone to jail, bombed out of treatment settings
- Reluctant to go a family treatment program
- I have heard exasperated social workers say simply that she is an addict and she has had her chance.



Oh, and she's  
pregnant again

## *The longer story*

I am going to read what I wrote in advocacy for her for this first story...

## *To recap....*

- She is clean for over a year
- She did go to the live-in treatment program with her child and grew to ask for the toughest programs/counselors they had there
- She is homeless but making it work on her \$300 grant; this includes \$30 a month to Vermont DMV so she can get her license
- She is getting her high school diploma
- She is speaking to classes about her life

***And now as of less than a month ago:***

- She did get the housing voucher
- She found an apartment
- She continues with all programming  
Is open and accepting to the team we  
have set up to help guide her
- She is realistic about her progress
- I asked her if I could read this story. She  
was excited that I would want to



## *The short story*

- A pedophile who took advantage of 3 adolescents who all were in foster homes
- He spent over ten years in jail for his crimes, the last two years simply because he had no residence to go to.

***More to the story (if you're willing to hear it)***

- Corrections refused to approve many appropriate residences although he was deemed low risk (he had completed the sex offense treatment program-part 1)
- He was abused as a child (although he never offers that up as an excuse)
- The children he abused were already “sexualized” although he would ***never*** offer that up as an excuse

## ***More to the story (please listen)***

- Was a role model in sex offense treatment programs, both while incarcerated and in the community. Has written extensively; still does.
- Has never reoffended, never had a probation violation (he is now maxed out) since being out for more than 7 years;
- Has spoken to over 10 college classes about his life-never once does he make an excuse
- He is active in the American Legion – and contributes to his community
- He knows he is sick and although he knows he will never offend again, he realizes he needs to continue to work even though no longer formally in program

*Is it fair? (and I'm not saying it is-just asking)*

- He has been denied for every subsidized housing program he has applied for (even though he is eligible -10 year registry). It's important to note that people who have committed murder have been accepted into these same programs.

- He does not complain, understands why people hate him-on some days hates himself

- He spends 70% of his SSDI income on housing and has saved enough to buy a car

- thankfully he is an excellent cook

## *The short story*

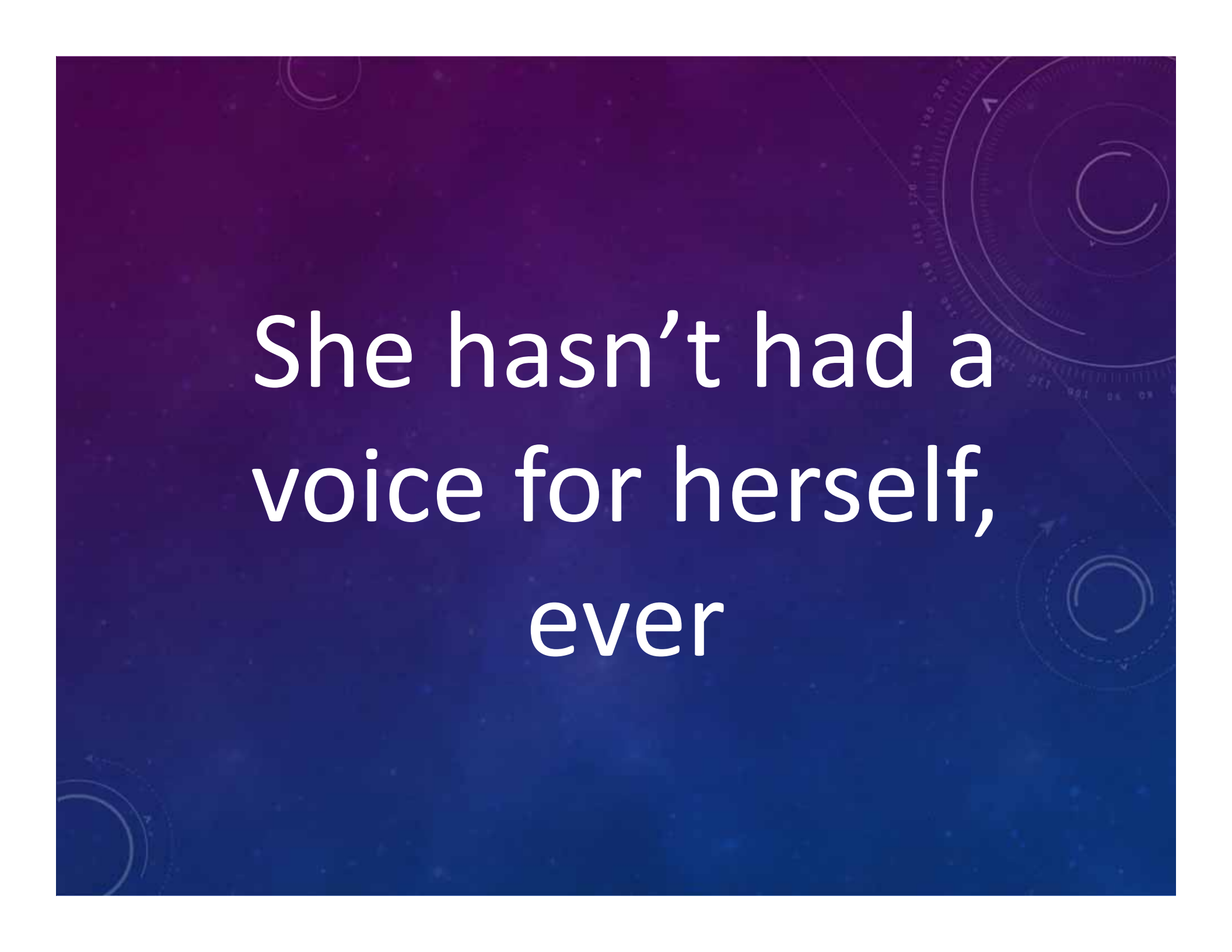
- He lives in a 3 bedroom apartment by himself. He does not give the landlord any money.
- He does not pay his utilities.
- He refuses to leave
- He will not cooperate with service providers
- is dismissive with landlord when confronted with the situation

## *The longer story*

- He lived in the same house for 40 years with his mother who died last year
- He has significant cognitive or mental health challenges which then kept him in his mother's home, and now ironically keep him from seeking the help he needs. yet he is not so disabled that he could be determined unable to care for himself
- He likes to take pictures
- He can't understand (comprehend) why he has to leave, he has lived there almost all of his life.
- He misses his mother, who always took care of him

## *Short story*

- She has a long list of criminal charges and convictions
- She has used drugs
- She can't hold a job
- She can't hold down an apartment



She hasn't had a  
voice for herself,  
ever



## *More to the story*

- She is a product of foster care
- She has experienced significant trauma from family and domestic partners
- She has lost her own children
- All of the criminal charges were retail theft, false pretenses, disturbing the peace.....



And had to do with trying to survive

- She has lived in a van with her partner for three years
- He works hard but had an accident while working and spent a year in the hospital- his medical wounds are healing; he goes to Labor Ready but he has a TBI: its tough
- He likes to draw and is quite good at it

## *More about her*

- She is in Mental Health court, doing very well
  - She goes to counseling and group meetings which she really enjoys
  - She'd like to try and go to work
  - She is very thoughtful of others
- And then there is this:

She was just assessed by Developmental Services and now in her 40's has found out she has had an Intellectual/ Developmental Disability her entire life

Please make a list. List all of the people, family, loved ones, role models, mentors, colleagues, good friends that have positively influenced and/or continue to influence, inspire, guide you in your daily life.

You don't have to turn this in or share...

# “Empathetic Witness”

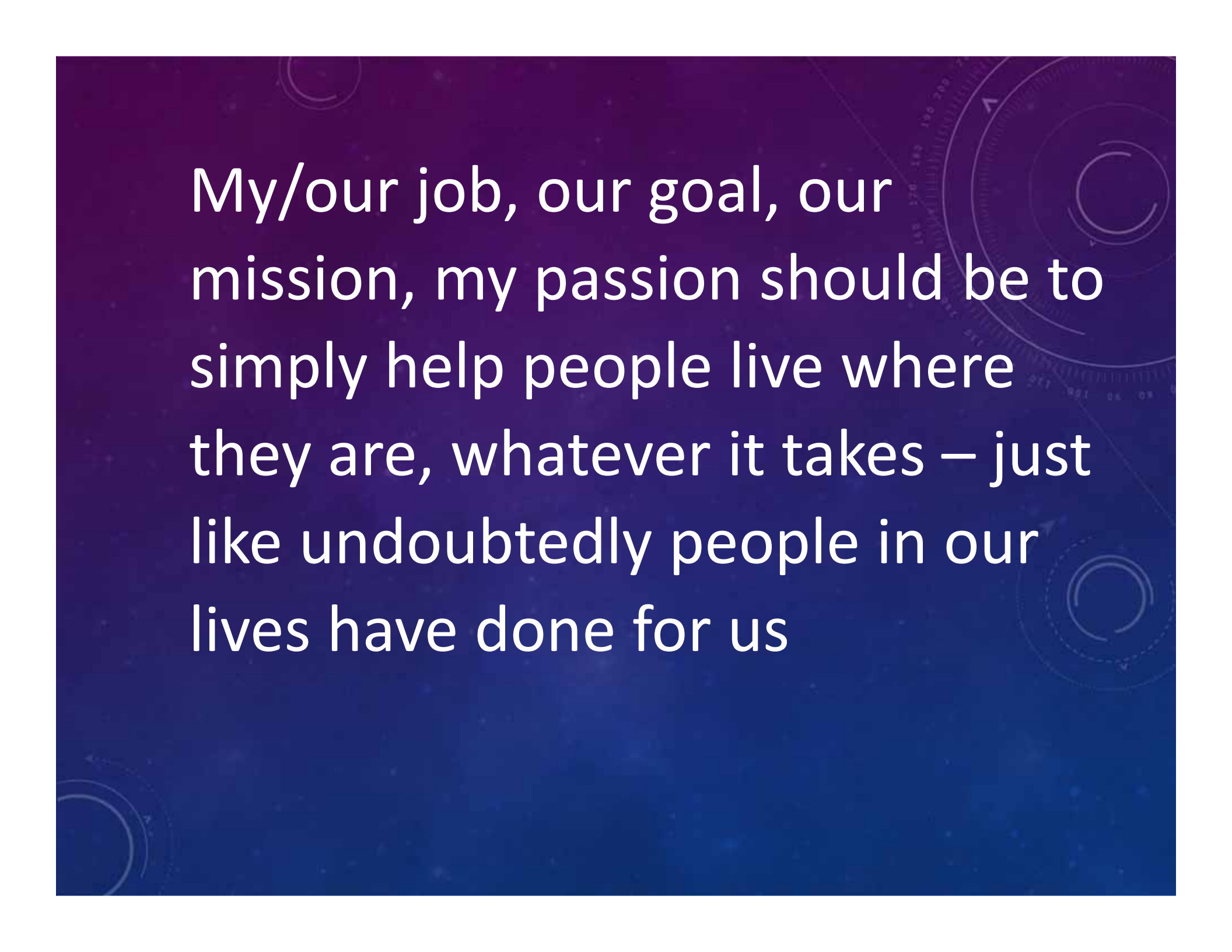
known as the presence of a  
compassionate community

Gabor Mate

*My self-assessment is that I wish I had enough time to actually stick with people who need me; its triage and move on, with many of the people's problems resurfacing over time. My failures are glaring while any successes are murky and/or gray at best. What is left is what I mention in the beginning: people with housing challenges are worthy of our time and attention and support. In my opinion more support than myself and others are currently giving them*



*With dwindling housing vacancies and rising rental prices, I don't think we can afford to merely focus our resources and attention on those who meet some definition of homelessness. And as my report showed retention is not always a financial issue. People who have a home are sometimes just having problems living*



My/our job, our goal, our mission, my passion should be to simply help people live where they are, whatever it takes – just like undoubtedly people in our lives have done for us