



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

### **For Immediate Release**

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### **From Homeless to Advocate: Formerly Homeless Angelenos Graduate from CSH Speak Up Program**

*CSH Speak Up teaches formerly homeless residents the skills needed to become advocates for others living in homelessness*

**WHAT:** On Tuesday, October 10, a group of formerly homeless Los Angeles residents will graduate from the Speak Up program, a strategic initiative of CSH that shares the stories of how each overcame their struggle with homelessness.

CSH Speak Up is a unique effort that empowers formerly homeless individuals to be advocates and spokespeople on issues affecting individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Through the program, participants learn to effectively engage elected and government officials, corporate and philanthropic leaders, news media and the broader public, and provide them with first-hand and personal accounts of what is necessary to break the cycle of homelessness.

Now in its fourth year, CSH Speak Up graduates are sharing their stories across the nation with lawmakers in Los Angeles, Sacramento and Washington, DC, helping to drive critical public policy change. While visiting Capitol Hill to promote education and awareness around ending homelessness, Speak Up graduates have met with several members of Congress including local U.S. Representatives Maxine Waters and Judy Chu.

In the past year alone, graduates contributed to the successful passage of Proposition HHH to create more affordable housing in the City of Los Angeles and Measure H, the Los Angeles County ballot initiative that uses funds from sales tax to help pay for homeless services.

### **WHO:**

Speak Up is a strategic initiative of CSH, a national leader in financing, consulting, training and advocacy for supportive housing.

### **WHEN & WHERE:**

Tuesday, October 10, 2017, 4:00 p.m. – media are encouraged to arrive by 3:45 p.m.

1150 South Olive Street, 30<sup>th</sup> Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90015

**WHY:** Homelessness in Los Angeles County is at an all-time high, jumping 23 percent over the last year to nearly 58,000 people. The City and County have adopted comprehensive plans (including two local ballot measures – Proposition HHH and Measure H) to address the issue by dedicating funding to supportive housing and critical support services. Hearing from people with lived experience of homelessness, who can speak personally about the importance of supportive housing, helps raise awareness of long-term solutions such as these that are needed to end the cycle of homelessness in Los Angeles and nationwide.

**VISUALS:** Personal testimonies from 11 individuals who overcame homelessness. Below is a brief description of three of the program graduates who are available for interviews:

Larae:

*As the daughter of a gang member and drug dealer father, Larae's childhood was extremely turbulent. She and her brothers and sisters moved frequently and her father, a leader in his gang, encouraged Larae and her siblings to behave violently. She eventually succumbed to her father's influence and joined a gang. The violence in Larae's life was not limited to the gang. As she grew older, she found herself in violent relationships with men. Larae moved to Las Vegas with her controlling and abusive partner, who frequently spent weeks away from their family. During one such absence, Larae was shocked when out of the blue, the sheriff evicted Larae and her children from their home. She ended up alone and on the streets with her children for over ten years. Larae has since received the help she needs to secure housing and to take care of her mental health. She has been in her own home for four years and plans to use her new skills to teach housing providers how to interact with survivors of domestic violence and families experiencing homelessness.*

Jeff:

*At eight-years-old, Jeff found himself alone as a ward of the state and without parents to take care of him. His father and stepmother relinquished custody of him and he hasn't heard from them since. Throughout his adult life, Jeff served time in prison for various non-violent crimes. When he was released in 2004, he had no friends or family to call and no skills, resources or support to make a legitimate living. Rather than risk returning to prison as he had so many times before, he decided to live in a park. A kind stranger encouraged Jeff to go to Skid Row to receive assistance. Though he was initially suspicious, he eventually secured permanent supportive housing and has been living in his home for 11 years. His goal is to become a truck driver and to travel the country. For the foreseeable future he plans to continue advocating for supportive housing for the thousands of individuals cycling through the criminal justice system without the support to reintegrate into their communities.*

Hector:

*Hector's journey into homelessness began with a back injury he suffered while working as an office manager. He eventually became addicted to the pain killers he was prescribed and found it increasingly difficult to function at work. After a job loss, Hector fell into a depression that left him unable to do the tasks necessary to find employment. For a time he lived out of his Ford Explorer, but eventually found himself on the streets. Too embarrassed to confide his*

*predicament to his family or friends, Hector learned to find out of the way corners nestled under freeway overpasses, where he could hide from the world. A homeless friend finally convinced Hector to seek mental health treatment and from there he was referred to supportive housing. He has been in his home, at Skid Row Housing Trust for over a year now. He plans to open his own printing business in the near future and intends to use the skills he learned in CSH Speak Up to advocate for senior citizens who are experiencing homelessness.*

**ABOUT CSH:**

CSH is the leader in supportive housing, investing over \$650 million to demonstrate its ability to improve the lives of very vulnerable individuals and families. Through our financing, consulting, training and advocacy, CSH has helped communities and local providers create over 200,000 stable, permanent homes for those once homeless or confined to institutions.

<http://www.csh.org>