

HANDOUT TWO: FILMMAKERS' PERSPECTIVE

Filmmakers Jon Shenk and Pedro Kos choose to make visible the crisis of homelessness in America through their documentary short *Lead Me Home*. After having read a *New York Times* opinion piece, [“The Tent Cities of San Francisco”](#) written by Dan Duane in 2016, Shenk and Kos reflect:

Like a lot of us, Dan had grown used to the homeless population living near where he lived and had the typical response we think a lot of people have, which is some fear. And when he started writing about it and spending time in homeless encampments, he had an epiphany: a faucet on the side of the building became a kitchen, a park bench became a living room, a patch of grass in a median became a campground.

That made so much sense to us, and we realized that if we suddenly found ourselves without a home, we would do what human beings do, which is to try to figure out a way to create some sanctuary for ourselves so that we could sleep, so that we could eat, so that we could go to the bathroom, so that we could socialize and have safety. And so that remained a North Star for us throughout the filming, to create visual language that would allow people to be reminded that the cycle of the day for those of us who are fortunate enough to have homes to go to at the end of the day is actually not that dissimilar to the cycle of people on the streets, in terms of what we aim to achieve. Living in San Francisco and LA, we often see people experiencing homelessness in our day-to-day lives. Often, people simplify the issue, and cast blame in a way that dehumanizes those on the streets. We wanted to make a film which would reflect the complexity of the issue. More importantly, we wanted to show how each individual experiencing homelessness has a different story. We have enormous respect for people who work in the trenches in an attempt to solve the underlying problems that lead to homelessness, but we felt strongly that we could contribute by reminding the audience of the range of human experience out there. *Lead Me Home* is a personal depiction of this giant, complex problem which is national, political, and has emerged as a result of health care, housing, and tax policy history going back decades. That's where it started.

As we began the journey of making the film back in 2017, we met with different organizations working in the homelessness space, from shelters, to supportive housing, to social workers, law authority, and city officials. More importantly, we were lucky enough to meet and connect with a number of extraordinary people from all walks of life who were experiencing or had experienced homelessness. We shot each of the subjects in the film going about their daily lives and then constructed the film as the experience of two days, from sunrise to sunset, really focusing on the things that unite us all as human beings. We wake up, we do our morning routines, we eat, we do our laundry, all these everyday things we all have to do. We really focused on depicting these core human experiences that we all share, but from a perspective that we have been marginalizing and making invisible. The film is meant to “shift perspective (and) to create an experience rather than dissecting problems intellectually.”