

Rose Broome of HandUp by Sarah Morgan

The seed for HandUp, a crowdfunding site that solicits donations to help the homeless, was planted in early 2012 when Rose Broome passed a shivering woman huddling in the doorway of a real estate office in San Francisco. “On a cold night, I was walking down the street and saw a woman sleeping on the sidewalk,” recalls Broome. “She didn’t have a jacket, she didn’t have a sweater — just a thin blanket protecting her from the cold ground.” That night, Broome says, “I made a commitment to myself to do one thing to make a difference, and that one thing turned into HandUp.”

The platform for HandUp allows those battling homelessness to appeal directly to donors to fund their particular needs. Since 2013, more than 2,000 people have raised nearly \$1.6 million. By sharing their stories on the site, those in need are able to fundraise for housing assistance — security deposits, moving costs, help paying back rent, and so on — as well as for food, education, medical care and technological access. “Having a phone, the Internet, the ability to text is extremely important for everyone, especially for the most vulnerable people,” says Broome, who, besides cofounding HandUp, acts as its CEO.

The need for funding is enormous. Nationwide, 3.5 million people struggle with homelessness every year, and 50 million people live below the poverty line. But there’s a misconception about what being homeless looks like, says Broome, pointing out that the image of a person sleeping on the street, wrestling with mental health issues or drug addictions (or both), tends to capture the public’s imagination. In reality, however, 30 percent of those who are homeless are part of families. As Broome puts it, “You could walk right past 80 percent of people experiencing homelessness and not know any different.”

HandUp works by partnering with organizations that serve homeless populations. These organizations help their clients sign up and create profiles on the site (to date, they’ve launched more than 5,800 campaigns in 29 cities). When donors give, the money goes to the organization, which will pay for the items requested. Donors get an email update when their money has been put to use. HandUp also helps homeless people create donation request cards, which they can hand out to people they meet on the street, and donors in San Francisco can buy HandUp gift cards in \$25 increments and distribute them when they meet someone in need (the cards can be used for groceries, clothes and other goods at HandUp’s nonprofit partners).

Join the cause! Help those experiencing poverty or homelessness. Read their stories, then post a message or make a donation [here](#).

Broome and her cofounder, Sammie Rayner, are passionate about using technology to solve problems and create change. “It’s surprising, but right now, only 8 percent of charitable giving happens online,” Broome says. And unfortunately, the nonprofit sector tends to lag far behind the private sector in adopting new technologies. “So often, nonprofits are the last to get some of the best technology to do their work,” adds Rayner.

For the nonprofits that work with HandUp, the platform allows them to fund needs that wouldn’t otherwise be met, filling in the gaps left by restrictive government and foundation grant funding. SF Cares, a collaborative project of several Lutheran churches working to serve low-income and homeless individuals in San Francisco, has used HandUp to raise \$18,000 for the needy they work with, plus another \$20,000 toward their general operating costs. “They’re funds our organization never would have gotten before,” says the Rev. Dr. Megan Rohrer, the executive director of SF Cares and pastor at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church. And the people doing the giving through HandUp are new donors that SF Cares might not have reached on its own, she adds.

Rohrer says she loves the way HandUp lets people combatting homelessness “speak in their own voice.” And she likes that the site lets people decide for themselves what they need to improve their lives. “Plus,” she says, “any time that I don’t have to spend fundraising means I get to eat with the homeless, and I get to sing songs with them too.”

Creating human connections is as much a part of HandUp’s purpose as developing innovative technological solutions. “On HandUp, you can read the stories of thousands of people who need help with very specific goals,” Rayner says. “As soon as people read the human story and have that connection through our platform, it’s harder to have the same stereotypes, and it’s harder to judge.” When donors give on HandUp, they can also post words of encouragement. The people who receive money through the site often say those kind words mean more than the donation, adds Broome. “A lot of people who are homeless feel invisible,” she says. HandUp helps them feel seen.