

# The Bruin Shelter for Homeless College Students

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 [dcifurn.com/case/bruin-shelter-homeless-college-students](https://dcifurn.com/case/bruin-shelter-homeless-college-students)

## BACKSTORY

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Every once in awhile you get the chance to contribute to something really important.

As a company, we're quick to respond to these moments because they they give special meaning to what we do.

When UCLA student Louis Tse reached out to me and shared the story of his burgeoning Bruin Shelter for homeless college students (now called Students 4 Students), I knew it was one of those moments.

You see, Louis was a bright young man completing his PHD in mechanical engineering at UCLA.

He was also homeless.

Louis went to school during the day and lived out of his car at night, finding free wireless hotspots where he could study.

At the same time, Louis was keenly aware that his was not an isolated problem. He wanted to find a solution to help other students in the same difficult situation.

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## Homeless College Students: A Growing Problem

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You might be surprised to learn that homeless college students aren't rare...in fact, it's a troubling trend.

Housing insecurity and homelessness among students is a growing problem across all of America. In major cities—and especially along the coasts—the cost of housing has exploded over the last decade.



The statistics are nothing short of shocking. Reporting on [student homelessness](#), CBS news writes that, “according to financial aid applications, there are more than 68,000 students who claim to be homeless.”

## 14% of Students Are Homeless

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*The Atlantic* sheds light on the numbers from a recent report on student homelessness in their article [\*A Striking Number of College Students Are Hungry and Homeless:\*](#)

A new [report from the Wisconsin HOPE Lab \(pdf\)](#) finds many more community-college students are homeless or lack food than previously reported. Overall, the survey looks at 33,000 students across 70 community colleges in 24 U.S. states. Of these students, around two-thirds are “food insecure,” meaning they have limited or uncertain access to nutritionally adequate and safe foods. Around half of these students are also “housing insecure,” meaning they are forced to move often or cannot afford rent or utilities.

More striking still is the number of community-college students who are homeless: around 14 percent. The report identifies a few key differences between homeless students and the remainder of those surveyed—namely, that homeless students have less reliable work schedules in fields that are less related to their majors or intended career. Homeless students are also half as likely to earn a living wage (at least \$15 an hour).

In California, the problem is acute. According to the [Students 4 Students](#) website, here are the number of Golden State students experiencing homelessness:

- 5% of UC students across 10 campuses
- 10% of CSU students across 23 campuses
- 19% of LA Community College Students

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## **Bold Vision: A Home for Homeless Students**

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It was against this backdrop that Tse and his cofounder and friend Luke Shaw decided to do something about the problem.

It was a bold and visionary idea that quickly gathered steam and support from many quarters. Bruin Shelter would create a safe and supportive environment for homeless students to live.



That meant homeless students struggling for food and lodging would have a safe, secure, and stable home to eat, sleep, socialize, and study during the academic year.

According to the [Students 4 Students](#) website:

Students 4 Students is the first shelter in the nation to exclusively serve homeless college students. Founded, managed and staffed by UCLA students under the guidance and support of an experienced Advisory Board and dedicated faculty advisors, S4S meets the basic needs of homeless college students from all area schools, while connecting them with resources to finalize post-shelter housing plans and a path to graduation.

Homelessness is not an isolated issue. For these students, it comes with a heavy dose of stress, shame, and mind-dulling hunger. Taken together, these issues compromise one's ability to focus and flourish as a student.

So it's not hard to imagine how meaningful this could be to homeless students struggling with primary survival needs like food and shelter.

Tse obviously understood this first hand.

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## Starting With A Selfless Motivation

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But there's an even more compelling twist to this story. One that often gets lost in the telling.

Tse was homeless by choice. Wait, what? Yep.

Let me explain.

This was a big project. And before opening the shelter, Tse needed to pull together resources and support.



At the beginning of this process, Tse wasn't homeless. But he couldn't find anyone to fund the shelter.

Instead of giving up, this only strengthened his resolve. Tse decided that the shelter must happen no matter what because too many of his peers needed it.

So he decided to live in his car. That way, he could leverage money he would otherwise use to rent an apartment to fund the shelter.

Here's how Tse describes his decision to sacrifice his personal housing for a larger cause:

The math always made sense to me: one person sacrifices their housing so that 30 others can have it.

## Building Bruin Shelter

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Tse's self-sacrifice was phase one of getting funding for the shelter. Winning a \$20k grant from the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA was the next big milestone.

Then the Bruin Shelter received a significant endorsement from the UCLA Chancellor, who approved their initiative as an official student-run organization.

Momentum was building.

Tse then appealed to the larger UCLA community for donations like food, clothes, blankets, and toiletries.

That's when Tse approached DCI and asked us to donate beds for his new project: a homeless shelter run by and for students.

The goal was to build a refuge with enough beds to serve 18 to 27 students for each academic semester.

To this end, Tse reached out to DCI in 2016 and told us about the vision for Bruin Shelter. He had found us by researching UCLA's approved vendors list. We were a natural starting place to get donated furniture.



For our part, it was clearly a great cause addressing a serious issue in California. I knew that housing costs in LA were prohibitive. Tse and his team were positive and dynamic, and we wanted to help in any way we could.

After clearing it with UCLA, we moved forward.

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## Beds For Bruin Shelter

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They had just found a location for the shelter in a refurbished Lutheran church, another major milestone. Now they needed the furniture. Louis wanted it to be the same quality as the campus housing furniture to ensure the dignity of the space and students.

We ended up providing the shelter with the same sustainable solid hardwood beds we installed at UCLA: bunk beds with guard rails and lockable underbed storage drawers.

The Bruin Shelter team came and picked it up while we were installing the same furniture on UCLA's campus. We provided the furniture and they set it up themselves. Soon after the shelter opened, we receive this note.

“To Amos and the entire DCI family, thank you profoundly for providing safe, reliable beds for students going through extreme hardship to lay their head in. It truly takes a village – all of us – to make our shelters run for them and their futures, and we thank you profoundly for believing in us and our residents.” -Louise Tse

## A Thriving Program

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That was two and a half years ago and now Students 4 Students is flourishing. The organization is set to open a sister student-run shelter—Trojan Shelter—on the USC campus.

Today, Bruin Shelter is run by 60 student volunteers. To get in, students fill out an application and go through an interview process. If accepted, they are guaranteed a bed for 6 months including a daily family-style breakfast and dinner prepared by the volunteers.

Residents of the shelter receive other forms of support too.

Case managers from the UCLA Department of Social Welfare come by to help residents locate more permanent housing and tap into city programs that subsidize rent for homeless individuals. Medical and dental students from the university provide routine check-ups. Counseling is also available.

By partnering with established non-profit organizations, we connect our residents with well-known expertise in long-term resources and planning to make the transition into independent living. By engaging local community-based agencies and congregations, we have created a wide network to help our residents thrive while they stay with us, while giving them the tools to be successful once they transition to stable, permanent housing. Students 4 Students offers assistance during this transition process and is proud of its 90% success rate.

## Bringing Attention To Student Homelessness

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Students 4 Students serves another important function. In addition to offering food and shelter to students in need, the program is drawing much-needed attention to the issue of homeless college students.

CBS News, the Christian Science Monitor, Business Insider, and PBS Newshour are just a few of the media outlets to cover their story. Recently, students from UCLA gymnastics helped them raise money for the shelter. The Los Angeles Metropolitan Opera donated their Winter Concert proceeds to Students 4 Students.

Even with that success, student homelessness remains a daunting issue.

In terms of the larger issue, 18-27 beds doesn't make a big dent in the homeless student population. The competition for a spot in the shelter is stiff. The waiting list is 100 students long.

But before the Bruin Shelter came along, the nearest homeless shelter in the area was about 2 hours away.

## **A Life-Changing Solution For Homeless College Students**

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One thing is certain, for the students who gain admission and six months of secure room and board, it's life-changing. You don't have to look far to see the proof.

Louis Tse graduated with his PHD and now works as a thermal engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

If that's not a happy ending, I don't know what is. Here are a few more testimonials.

“Thanks to S4S, I've gotten on my feet and I just got accepted into UCLA! Bruins helped me through homelessness, and I'm looking forward to being a Bruin too, paying it forward, and lifting others as I climb.” – Casey, Shelter resident, 2017

“I'm a part of the SMC Guardian Scholars who referred me to S4S. Without S4S and Bruin Shelter, it's a really scary thought. I just can't imagine where I'd be. I don't have the words to thank you for all the help you have provided. Without all of the supports you have given me I would be in a much worse state. The biggest change in myself that I've noticed is I have the strength and optimism now to get my diploma.” — Former S4S resident

[View Case Study \(PDF\)](#)

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**Project Location:** SANTA MONICA, CA

**Project Size:** 27 sets

**Building Type:** Student Shelter

**Project Team:** Students For Students, DCI

**Product List:** Bunk Beds, Underbed Storage

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