

Quotes about *after homelessness...*

Positive Feedback

"I lived on the porch of Rectory/Holy Trinity Cathedral for almost 5 months. *After homelessness...* really hit Home, so to speak. I thought it was very well done! It has inspired me to try to help the Street People I met while I was outside. I was never homeless while at Trinity. Many thanx for an excellent play."

Lawrence, audience member

"*After homelessness...* may be the most important show you can see this year."
Jerry Wasserman, Vancouverplays.com (see also "not-so-positive", below)

I attended the *after homelessness...* performance last night. I am blown away by the creativity of this project & integrity it gives all in allowing us to truly empathize and take responsibility for the tragedy that this city has been riding through for years. Bravo for all your hard work, you should be highly commended for this important piece.

Lisa Fox Valdes, audience member

"*After homelessness...* is unlike any other theatrical experience I had ever seen. It felt like we were watching real people facing real issues. In a conventional play, no matter how much I suspend my disbelief I know that I'm watching actors playing roles. Here, while I knew that these actors were playing fictional roles, the experiences were real and their performances were coming from a very real place. It wasn't just acting, it was re-acting, and, quite possibly, re-living. Knowing the context of the source of the material made the play more visceral...the actors were completely believable.

Even more powerful than the initial performance of *after homelessness...* were the performances of the (audience members) who took on the re-imagining of roles. With the performance pushing just over two hours with no intermission, it actually felt too short. Even thinking back about it now makes me emotional. This play was a gift to people who needed a way to speak, because by speaking truthfully they can become strong and heal. I am immensely grateful to have experienced those moments. Remember, it's not about you and me or them, *it's about us*.

Glen Gaetz, audience member (from Glen's blog)

"Some of the most profound moments I have ever experienced in theatre occurred during this performance (*after homelessness...*). Don't go if you want to feel comfortable and secure in your life. It is only for those who want to feel hopeful, uncertain, aware, responsible, angry - in other words, connected."

Jennifer Brooks, audience member

"I participated in Headlines Theatre's *after homelessness...* last night and it was an awesome experience! Totally engaging and thought-provoking. No easy answers of course but there were intriguing contributions from the audience, many of whom had had personal experience with homelessness or could relate to some of the feelings and experiences depicted. (It is) an experience like no other you have had. It is significant to our lives as people in this community who are engaged citizens; people who together can take actions to effect positive change. As David Diamond said, in one way or another, we're all affected by homelessness. And it's true."

Melinda Suto, audience member

"I have just been to see *after homelessness...* This was the first time I have been "in" an SRO, although I have heard the term many times, and the first time I really grasped the horror of living there. Now I can understand the need to create and enforce legislation dealing with SROs.

This was the first time I really understood the depth of attachment a street person can have to their shelter (a tarp in the play). Now I understand why people are calling for "tent cities" here on the west coast. I understand why it's important to have safe, humane policies for moving the homeless and their improvised shelters. The play's director, David Diamond, explained to us (the audience) that one of the purposes of theatre is to create an image of reality and place it before the eyes of the audience. He and his theatre company accomplished this around the issue of homelessness and a whole roomful of people were the wiser for it."

Michael Duff, audience member, excerpted from a letter to the Premier of BC, Finance and Culture Ministers.

"*after homelessness...* is phenomenal. Giant congratulations to all of you. I have passed the following along to all my local friends: Please see this life changing show! We've all driven by the homeless and wondered what to do. You can be part of this dialogue with your fellow humans who have struggled with homelessness."

Kim Hayashi, audience member

"*after homelessness...* is a remarkable piece of theatre. Images of the play have stuck with me. It was sold out Saturday night, I think (or very close to it) and it certainly deserves to be sold out every night."

Jennifer Gray-Grant, audience member

"Your insightful production (*after homelessness...*) gave me food for thought. Law makers need to get rid of having to chase soft drug dealers, instead, government should be making money in the marijuana industry. Then use this money in the health care industry beginning with mental health. What the hell, we claim to love our children. We have telethons for them we do wonderful things - then what happens after they are no longer cute little kids; or the kids that slip through the cracks.

I have lived in horror watching my children crumble from substance abuse. No one is watching, no one is there. Any how loved your play. Please continue the good work."

Elinor Stock, audience member

"I attended a performance of *after homelessness*. I would just like you all to know, cast, crew and anyone who helped. YOU ARE TRULY DOING SOMETHING!!!! Words cannot express the enjoyment and the thought-process that the play gave to me. I myself was left with an urge to become more involved in my city's crisis. This is theatre at its most genuine form, thank you very much for this great experience."

Alec J Ross, audience member

"Congrats on *after homelessness...* - a superb community engagement project . I can't wait to see the report that comes out of this. I was only able to see one community dialogue and one evening play, it was wonderfully authentic and generous.

We were also able to project the webcast at the Squamish Helping Hands Society, so about 10 homeless adults here were able to see it too. From reports I heard of the evening, their eyes were glued to the screen. It was a miracle that the community here got together and made it happen but it was sure easier than getting people to Vancouver to see it. Not the same as being there live, but the webcast is such a great mechanism for getting people connected. Thank you so much."

Nicole McRae, audience and Headlines' Board Member

"*After Homelessness...* was gripping, while excruciating. One couldn't help but think, "How can I know this and not act to help?" The acting was intense, as most of these performers had intimate experience of homelessness in some respect. The humanity of the homeless characters was authentic. This theatre piece did not just entertain. It sent the audience out with a mission: to engage others in dialogue about homelessness, to advocate for homeless

people, and to demand government action on homelessness. There is no more noble goal for theatre than that it change people's lives. In the case of *after Homelessness...*, change occurred, not only in the lives of the audience, but, hopefully, in the lives of many homeless people.”

Faune Johnson, audience member

“*After homelessness...*” is a compelling production, guaranteed to rip away the don’t-get-involved complacency of any middle-class viewer. The play features six main characters, performed by actors who have all known homelessness in their own lives. These range from Nico (Justine Goulet), a young, dreadlocked rebel with a punk attitude and a desire to remain drug-free, and Shawna (Sandra Pronteau), a crack-addicted thief, to Bob (Kevin Conway), a near-broke man on lithium who finds solace in alcohol after eviction from his condo. In another play, these characters could well appear as crusty stereotypes, eliciting pity or even dismissal from a contemptuous audience. (*After homelessness...*) invites audience-members to think beyond knee-jerk responses and bureaucratic models that degrade people and their situations. Instead, it offers viewers the chance to respond immediately, from their guts.”

Heather Conn, audience member

“*After Homelessness...* was my first ‘theatre making policy’ show ever. I very much appreciated the way you facilitated audience participation and conversation. Your questions for the actors and participants drew out responses that were helpful in really connecting with the ‘dialogue behind the rhetoric’ and deeper thoughts and feelings. Thanks for helping us to better see and understand.”

Lisl Baker, audience member

“I was at *after homelessness...* last night. Congratulations on a remarkable production...the most powerful to date.”

Beryl Wilson, audience member

“I just wanted to thank you for our clients to be able to go and see *after homelessness...* I only got positive feedback from clients who attended. Our clients sometimes experience homelessness and poverty first hand, and they were able to emotionally connect to the production for sure.”

Kathy Bencsik, Burnaby Family Life/Life Skills Services

“I attended *after homelessness...* and was amazed at the style and grace that came from the players and the direction of the show. The play was so well written, acted and kept me on the edge of sanity. I was in that place in one time in my life and was brought back to that way of life very quickly. The intervention aspect was invigorating. I was immediately up and acting in the production. I really hope that this gets some well deserved credit.”

David G, audience member

“Magnificent show!”

Judy Graves, Coordinator, Tenant Assistance Program, City of Vancouver

“I really enjoyed *after homelessness...* My husband works for Project Comeback out of Newton Advocacy and I work as a nurse in Surrey in the community so am not a stranger to the homeless population. I think the actors did an amazing job, especially if it was an emotional experience for them. It was well presented, the content was great, and it gave me a greater understanding of the need for proper housing. I hadn't realized before what a toxic environment these people are faced with every day. Thanks so much for a very enjoyable evening.”

Cathy Anderson, audience member

"I found the whole experience of *after homelessness*... quite gripping. The participation of the audience in the scenes was very educational for me. I left the performance feeling like I knew more than I did when I came in...and that for me was gold."

Mark Cseszko, audience member

"I found myself learning about something I thought I "knew" in *after homelessness*.... It is a hard topic to deal with and to make it work because the media is always talking about it on the news. The fact that the actors have experienced the hardships of homelessness/poverty/drug addiction/alcoholism leaves a strong mark as spectator. The idea of the director encouraging the audience to participate and put themselves in the shoes of the characters is excellent. Real, Wonderful and touching! Thanks and hope to see more of it."

Carolina G., audience member

"This Friday I had an experience that helped me to understand the power of theater as a tool to not only tell stories, but to retell them in new ways until the injustices within them are healed, and how acting can be used as a tool for empowerment, community building, and as a way to reclaim dignity. I went to see Headlines Theatre's production *After Homelessness*. Right away, the set got to me. I chose to sit in the first row and the bare light bulbs in rooms smaller than prison cells, the stained couch with dirty rigs hiding in the cushions and the walls thick with scum, made my Kitsilano born and raised self uncomfortable. When the play started, I didn't feel like I was watching a play, the characters were so real and I was so close that I felt like I was halfway in that "hotel". The characters were that real party because most of the actors have lived or are living the stories they were telling. The specifics were fictional, but by reading the bios in the program and by seeing their integrity on stage, I got the impression that they were telling a story that they felt in their bones and they believed really needed to be told. They brought humanity to the oppressive and inhuman conditions of the SRO hotel and sent a clear message to the audience that no person on this earth deserves to live in such a hostile space.

One of the most powerful moments in *After Homelessness* was when a well-dressed woman in her 50s replaced the character of a crack addict. She was able to improvise a few lines, but then she began to weep uncontrollably. I didn't get the impression that it was her pity that was making her cry. I identified with her privilege and maybe I'm projecting, but what I thought made her break down was something that I was also experiencing: getting it, for the first time, an understanding of the indignity and inhumanity that homeless people face everyday and that we, the audience, share our common humanity with the characters on stage."

David Q., audience member

"I saw *After Homelessness* at Holy Trinity Anglican Church in New Westminster. The play was very impressively done. I thought the cast did an excellent job. Diamond's effort to find answers had some very effective moments. The result is an audience that becomes seriously connected to the issues bringing their own experience and values onstage."

John Klassen, PhD, audience member

"It obvious that complaining about our citywide (homelessness) problem is not the answer. There needs to be more of an attempt to come up with solutions. One man, along with a team of upstanding individuals, is our best bet. His name is David Diamond, and he has created the forum theatre-based production, *after Homelessness*... In Diamond's words "The theatre can take statistics and transform them into personal stories; the theatre can be a true voice of people who are struggling with various aspects of the homelessness issue; the theatre can open up the irony of the creation of 'the other' in a world where in fact there is only 'us' and in doing so, re-personalize 'the other'."

"After viewing Headlines Theatre's performance (*after homelessness*...) on November 28, I can honestly admit that no one is doing what this production is doing. With a cast that has either experienced some, or all of the issues of homelessness, addiction and mental illness, the audience is given the gift of a genuine production. "

Alec J. Ross, audience member

“I was extremely impressed with the fact that the people were able to interact with the play (*after homelessness...*), as it gave some interesting solutions to the parts in the play. It goes to show how important it is to go to the people who are struggling to find answers that will work, instead of someone who learns something through video, and classes. The people who actually live these problems seem to have a better idea as to what will work and for the most part came to solutions that would not cost millions of dollars to do the research necessary to put plans into action. This play was extremely informative and gave a very reality like impression. I hope that I could attend something similar in the near future.”

Alec Athey, audience member

“I attended *after homelessness...* with my 16 year old daughter who like many of us is increasingly concerned about homelessness in Vancouver. I was very happy we came, the evening was both educational and inspiring. I surprised myself by stopping the action and jumping into attempt to change the situation. It was a lot more difficult than I had anticipated and although my intervention was unsuccessful, being part of the process provided a greater appreciation for the complexity of the problems.

The authenticity of the actors impressed me as did their ability to improvise through all of the changes that the play took. There were times however that it felt uncomfortable to be a spectator of people’s misfortune. Perhaps that is not such a bad thing to feel uncomfortable about. Again the process of forum theatre provides one with an opportunity to not just be a passive spectator out for an evenings entertainment. Thank you to all who created the play.”

Teresa McDowell, audience member

“*After homelessness...*, is not traditional theatre. The play allows for the complex theme(s) of the play to transcend into an authentic theatre experience for the audience, who are not permitted to be ‘merely an observer’; but rather an active participant either in thought or action or both.

After homelessness... goes well beyond a theatrical experience, the collective talents of those associated with this play can be very proud of the fact that their contribution has illustrated the reality without sensationalizing it. A profound desire in humanity, has come to be within this exploration, likely as a result of all of us being asked to look within for the solution. Unlike Traditional Theatre, Forum Theatre leaves its characters in our hearts and souls, well reliving their stories in our thoughts.”

Don Rock, audience member

“I have not been able to stop thinking (or talking) about *after homelessness...* and the issues that were discussed there. Thank you for involving multiple communities in this discussion- poverty, addiction and homelessness are not the problems for only the poor, addicted and homeless to deal with. It's something that all of us as members of our community need to demand answers and solutions from our government. Your play has helped me move from a state of paralysis where I was unable to move when faced with the topic of affordable housing to a place where I feel like my voice has a place in the housing crisis debate. And you can be sure that I will loudly be adding my voice to the debate. Thanks for the food for thought - I will be chewing for a long time into the future.”

Melinda Mennie, audience member

“Just wanted you to know what a wonderful experience it was to see *after homelessness...* the other night. I found it to be a powerful experience. Bringing the audience into the equation made it all the more dynamic and personal. I often feel that the problem of homelessness and the myriad of issues faced by homeless people are overwhelming. This play presents these issues through real person’s stories which makes it a very personal piece. Because the audience is challenged to involve themselves by replacing a character in the play it engages audience members to think about the issues from start to finish. This format is a powerful tool to fight the frustration, fatigue and resulting resignation most people feel in regard to difficult social issues. Thanks for my favourite theatre experience ever.”

Mindy Francis, audience member

We felt the whole event (*after homelessness...*) was brilliantly done – the play had an edgy humour that portrayed the harsh realities of the downtown eastside while putting a human face on it. The re-run with the interactive component was equally as gripping, and David’s moderating work to oversee it, to education, the question, and the challenge was exquisite towards finding seams of redemptive hope.

Gordie Lagore, audience member

“I found the play *after homelessness...* be a very accurate account of what it is like to be homeless. The issues that the play touched on from mental illness to addiction, the barriers once living in the DTES preventing many from finding a way out even if they want to.”

Heather Saunders, audience member

In *after homelessness...* we are to yell “stop,” and offer viable solutions for the problem. Our suggestions will be sent to policy makers, who struggle to come up with the solutions themselves. It is a brilliant suggestion. Few of us have ever considered ourselves policy makers. The audience is charged with power. We are given a voice in all of this, and as the night progresses, we begin to bridge the gap between “us” and “them.”

Homelessness is a problem we all care about, but very few ever feel they have the power to help make a change. This innovative piece of theatre helps give us all a voice, and begin to reconcile the feelings of helplessness we have surrounding homelessness.

Headlines Theatre is unique. It is a theatre of change. It is a theatre of the mind, and the heart – theatre that is actively helping to change policies, and the opinion that nothing can be done by the “average Joe” without the money or power to help make a real difference. I greatly admire the work of the strong and dedicated people involved in this production, and thank them for allowing the issues to be voiced, by anyone who cares enough to voice them. To all of them, I say Bravo.”

Michele Venetz, audience member

“I very much appreciated how *after homelessness...* highlighted the many difficulties that homeless persons may be experiencing, such as mental illness and drug and alcohol addictions. The play makes it obvious that there is a greater need for access to drug and alcohol programs, counselors, mental health after hours services for those in crisis and for easier access to housing. And, the interaction with the audience let each of us realize that this problem is not just for the homeless population to solve, it is really up to all of us in society to help solve. Wonderful project which I’m sure will contribute to some interesting suggestions for this social problem.”

Kimberly Fraser, audience member and Registered Psychiatric Nurse

“I was very impressed with *after homelessness...* and was struck by the gritty reality it portrayed. I had never been to a Forum Theatre production before, so had no idea what to expect. I’m really excited about the passion expressed and the potential for effecting social change.”

Sandie Seymour, audience member

“*after homelessness...* was an incredible production that burst beyond the boundaries of ordinary theatre to address serious issues of homelessness in the community of Vancouver. Not only were thought-provoking questions asked, but solutions were brainstormed and recorded to bring about change. Thank you for such an enlightening, uplifting evening!”

Meghan Mast, audience member

“I attended *after homelessness...* in New West and was thoroughly captivated by the whole process. I am a university professor who has worked with street-entrenched youth on literacy projects so I had a special interest in the topic. I was particularly impressed with the decision to present a more nuanced representation of the issue of moving away from homelessness -- It is my experience that many street youth do not necessarily wish to stay on the streets and so need a variety of support systems in place to transition into whatever lifestyle they aspire

to. This play was both dramatic -- and the interaction with audience doubly dramatic with the inherent tension of waiting for participation, and thoughtful in terms of social action -- posing possible solutions in all their complexity while also reaching toward policymakers.”

Theresa Rogers, Professor, Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC

Not-so-positive feedback

“Instead of *after homelessness...*, another good title would be the difficulties in creating after homelessness. *After Homelessness...* tells us about the difficulties of street life and why the homeless chose to live on the street. The actors fully clothed the tale of despair, hopelessness, loneliness, fear and the sense of no one listening. I found myself thrown into their situations, in many cases; speechless. I found myself understanding; wanting to do something but much like them, helpless and/or hopeless.

We were asked to think about policies throughout the show. At times, I felt so shattered that I was embarrassed to think that I could not think about these things. Midst the scenes, my mind almost ran rampant on how to get out of the situation. I could see how one would become very weary.

Gail McKay, audience member

<http://www.plankmagazine.com/review/after-homelessness-sinking-heart>

Cathy Sostad, Plank Magazine

“The forum part of *after homelessness...* on the evening I attended was...problematic. One group of audience members were on their own wavelength and made a lot of noise that wasn't particularly relevant to the issues at hand. As moderator, Diamond spent much of his time and energy keeping control, like a teacher having to deal with rowdy students in a class. Diamond is extremely committed, intense, and very, very good at this. You have to wonder how, if at all, it could work without him there. In fact his presence and role are so very central, and so commanding, that it sometimes seems to be the David Diamond Show. The problems dramatized in the show are difficult and complex. The reactions and solutions proposed by the audience interveners were almost all naive and simplistic: be nicer, don't do drugs, don't go off your meds, don't succumb to despair. The government, cops, landlords, social services, and Olympics got a lot of blame. But I didn't hear a single idea that the official scribe, assigned by Headlines to take notes that could later be translated into policy suggestions, could realistically do anything with.

A couple of the interveners were fascinating—people who had, themselves, obviously been there. For the actors this may prove to be a life-changing experience. And the evening does give the rest of us--people who feel concerned about this problem and frustrated by its apparent intransigence--an outlet. It makes us feel that we are doing *something*. But I'm not convinced that anything more than feeling better will actually come out of the project. I hope I'm wrong.”

http://www.vancouverplays.com/theatre/reviews/review_after_homelessness_09.shtml

Jerry Wasserman, Vancouverplays.com