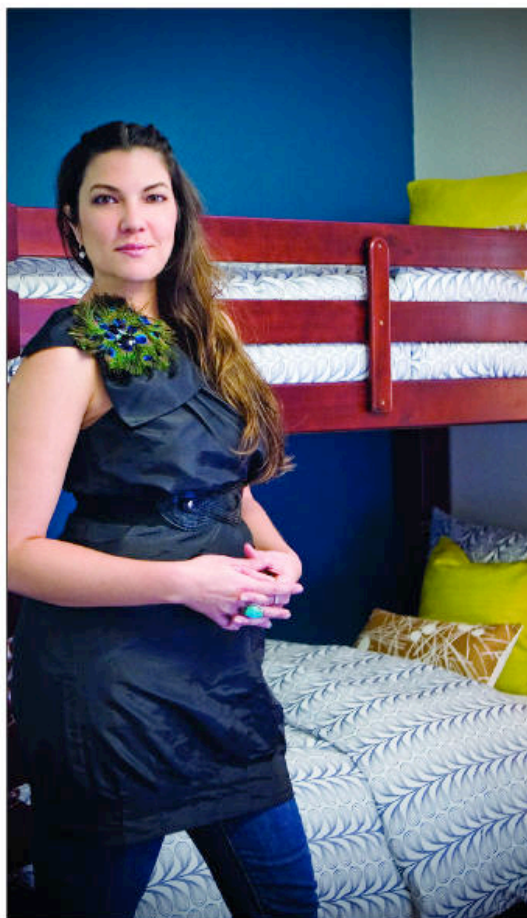


reasons. Says Fleischer, “Physical, mental and sexual abuse, lack of education, support, love and guidance lead many people down roads that make them more susceptible to job loss, mental illness, addiction, etc., and therefore less resilient.”

Speaking directly into a camera propped against a car seat or held at an arm’s length while in motion, Fleischer serves as narrator and tour guide as she escorts us through the outskirts of LA and into the lives of these uncommon protagonists. They genuinely trust Fleischer and, because of this trust, there is an intimacy garnished that makes it impossible for these people to become the other on whom we can pass judgement.

In a culture capitalizing on poverty porn — movies such as *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Precious* becoming successful as they subversively patronize their subjects — *Without A Home* is an accurate account of a detrimental problem plaguing our society. Fleischer not only immerses herself into the underbelly of extreme poverty, she does so without a pejorative subtext. This is the documentary’s largest strength and, for that, Fleischer deserves the accolades she has received.



Vanessa De Vargas is an accomplished interior designer who had decided — toward the end of last year — it was time to give back to her community in the form of volunteer work. She didn’t know in what form the service would shape itself, but through mutual friends and connections from her past, De Vargas became acquainted with Upward Bound House, an organization whose mission is to “eliminate homelessness among families with children in Los Angeles by providing housing, supportive services and advocacy.” Since 1997, the organization has successfully placed more than 1,100 individuals, including more than 650 children.

With less than two months to prepare for its grand opening, De Vargas spearheaded a project in which 18 interior designers would decorate a former budget motel on Washington Boulevard

in Culver City. Not only did De Vargas recruit her fellow designers into the community effort, she also obtained a plethora of corporate sponsorship, such as Kohl’s and Benjamin Moore, which generously supplied all the paint. De Vargas described the collaborative process as a “revolving flea market of goods,” where the designers traded and re-imagined many items, which could have easily been disposed.

From the durability of the furniture to the spatial arrangement, De Vargas and the other participating designers worked within specific constraints. Each room showcases the particular decorator’s aesthetic sensibility, juxtaposing cutting-edge design with monetary and architectural limitations. The resulting rooms look more hotel-chic than shelter-shab, proving that intention is far more beneficial than any obstacle.

www.upwardboundhouse.org

GET INVOLVED!

Regardless of how the specifics are manifested, everyone can play some part in promoting awareness and demanding change to the status quo. Compassion only goes so far. Determination does the rest of work. There are many ways people can get involved in their communities and make a difference. Check out some of these noteworthy causes.

VANESSA’S PICKS

Habitat for Humanity
www.habitat.org/cd/local

Downtown Women’s Shelter
www.dwcweb.org

RACHEL’S PICKS

Saint Joseph’s Center
www.stjosephctr.org

PATH
www.path.org

Children Mending Hearts
www.childrenmendinghearts.org

The David Lynch Foundation
www.davidlynchfoundation.org

Tarzana Treatment Center
www.tarzanatc.org