Silicon Valley Tech Titans: How Can They Help Solve Poverty And Inequality?

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Technology companies in Silicon Valley need to do more than offer money to help those in poverty and those who can't afford housing.
(Photo : Justin Sullivan | Getty Images)

There's a big spotlight on Silicon Valley these days. It has nothing to do with technology innovations taking place and everything to do with how the community of Silicon Valley is fast becoming one that features two populations: the haves and the have-nots.

The situation is birthing greater inequality on an economic scale, an educational scale and a gender scale.

Home to some of the most illustrious and successful technology players in the world, Silicon Valley is undergoing a metamorphosis that few geographic locales have ever experienced - and it's not all positive, according to advocates for the poor, the homeless and those fighting for income equality in the workplace.

From sky-rocketing rents, which are prompting some to live in car garages and to hold down two to three jobs for those not employed in the six-bracket jobs, to children not getting required educational and community services, Silicon Valley is not what most in the U.S. likely envision.

As one organization [describes](#) it in apt fashion: poor people are not doing well in Silicon Valley, despite the vitality of the economy, especially those in the African-American and Latino populations. While the overall poverty level statistic isn't extraordinary, nearly a third of the area's residents were not self-sufficient as of three years ago.

This figure may illustrate the situation more than any other data point: 38 percent of Silicon Valley public school students were getting free or reduced meals in 2014.

Monthly rents run an average of $645 more in Silicon Valley than in other California communities and nearly $1,200 more than U.S. average rent costs.

While there is progress in relation to helping out those in need, such as increasing the minimum wage, efforts are not keeping pace with the rising costs of housing, food and other services.

While there is a bounty of philanthropic organizations, most backed and funded by tech players and top-tier tech visionaries, those advocating for the poor and poverty-stricken say more needs to be done. Money, several organizations note, isn't the lone solution. The minds that are innovating technology could be tapped to innovate solutions to poverty and social inequality.

The tech companies "have these record profits and are really driving the cost of living up," [said](#) Maria Noel Fernandez, campaign director for the grassroots and labor movement Silicon Valley Rising. "Just as we would expect any other piece of our community to respond when something is not working for the vast majority, I think there is a responsibility for these tech companies to engage in conversation and to be part of the solution - and to really be a part of this community. There's a sense that the headquarters of these companies are these little islands. They're such different worlds."