HOMELESS PERSONS’ MEMORIAL DAY

Homeless people die from illnesses that affect everyone, frequently without health care.

Homeless people die from exposure, unprotected from the heat and cold.

Homeless people die from violence, often in unprovoked hate crimes.

Health care is a human right.

Housing is a human right.

Physical safety is a human right.

Remember our neighbors and friends who have died without homes.

Remember why they died.

DECEMBER 21
The First Day of Winter. The Longest Night of the Year.
Organizing Manual

National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day

Homeless people will die in your community this year. Plan to memorialize them on December 21, the first day of Winter, the longest night of the year.
The Organizing Manual

National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day

December 21, 2008

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A memorial service in Miami-Dade County, Florida
An Overview

Each year since 1990, on or near the first day of winter and the longest night of the year, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has sponsored National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember our homeless friends who have paid the ultimate price for our nation’s failure to end homelessness. Beginning in 2005, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council joined and the National Consumer Advisory Board as co-sponsors of this meaningful event.

In an effort to maximize the impact of the day, we encourage local and statewide organizations to hold memorials for those who have died homeless in their communities. In 2007, more than ninety cities conducted Memorial Day events on or around December 21.

What You Can Do

1. Determine how many homeless persons have died during the previous year in your community. There is no official tracking of homeless deaths in most communities, so start now to collect the names of those who die. Work with homeless people, service providers, and public officials to compile as complete a list as possible.

2. Organize an event to commemorate this day and raise awareness about homelessness and its severity.

This Manual

This manual should serve as a resource to assist you in your efforts. If you have any questions, contact: Michael Stoops, NCH, at (202) 462-4822 x19 or mstoops@nationalhomeless.org and/or John Lozier, NHCHC, at (615) 226-2292 x24 or ilozier@nhchc.org

Bangor, Maine
Organizing an Event to Commemorate National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day

Your Event

Invite other organizations to participate in planning the event. Local and State Coalitions for the homeless, Health Care for the Homeless projects, shelters, housing programs, service providers and outreach programs may all wish to participate.

Decide what type of event you will sponsor. Past events have included:

- Candlelight marches
- Vigils
- Graveside services
- Plays and performances
- Special religious services
- Public policy advocacy

A few of the 2007 Memorial Day events are described briefly below. Please keep in mind these are local events tailored to diverse communities. Local organizers are encouraged to think creatively about ways to honor the memory of those who have died, while building for a future without homelessness.

Work with your local health department and/or health care clinic/program to identify the number of people who have died in your community without an address. Try also to obtain people’s names and ages.

A name-reading ceremony is a powerful component of most Homeless Memorial Day events. A list of names read in 2007, in cities throughout the country, is available at http://www.nhchc.org/memorialday.html

Please contact Michael Stoops at the NCH (202) 462-4822 x19, mstoops@nationalhomeless.org and/or John Lozier at NHCHC at (615) 226-2292 x24 or jlozier@nhchc.org

with the following information:
- What type of event you are planning
- The number of homeless people who have died in your community
Working with the Media

Media coverage of homelessness usually reaches its peak just as winter begins and during the holidays. National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day offers a great opportunity to work with the media during this time in order to raise awareness of the issue of homelessness. Media coverage is a great tool to emphasize governmental policies, or lack thereof, which can be a part of the problem or the solution for those people experiencing homelessness.

Your group should:

Issue a press release (see enclosed samples) announcing your event, giving information on the details and the needs in your community.

Write a letter-to-the-editor of your local newspaper drawing attention to your event and to the issue of homelessness in general.

Invite the media to your event if you feel comfortable doing so.

Working with your Local Government

In order to attract more attention to this year’s Memorial Day, work with your local town or city council, the Mayor, the State Legislature, or the Governor. Encourage them to pass a proclamation/resolution that recognizes December 21 as National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day and describes homelessness as a continuing and serious issue that must be resolved (see sample proclamations below).

For Additional Homeless Memorial Day Resources:

Please visit http://www.nhchc.org/memorialday.html to see resources and useful links from the 2007 National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day.
Highlights from 2007 Memorial Day Events

In 2007, over 90 different communities across the United States and Canada held National Homeless Memorial day events.

Alaska – Bethel
Arizona – Flagstaff, Tucson
California – Fresno, Los Angeles, Modesto, Redding, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Cruz, Walnut Creek
Colorado – Colorado Springs, Denver
Connecticut – Bridgeport, Hartford, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, Norwich, Stamford
DC – Washington
Florida – Fort Lauderdale, Gainesville, Inverness, Jacksonville, Port Charlotte, Monroe County, Orlando, Pinellas County, Sarasota, Tampa
Georgia – Atlanta
Hawaii – Oahu/Honolulu
Illinois – Chicago, Rockford
Kansas – Wichita
Maine – Bangor, Portland
Maryland – Baltimore
Massachusetts – Boston, Hyannis, Springfield, Worcester
Minnesota – Minneapolis
Mississippi – Jackson
Missouri – St. Louis
Montana – Billings, Helena
New Mexico – Albuquerque
New Hampshire – Concord, Keene, Lebanon, Manchester, Nashua
New Jersey – Atlantic City, Camden
New York – Buffalo, New York City
Nevada – Caron City, Las Vegas, Reno
North Carolina – Asheville, Durham, Greensboro
Ohio – Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo
Oklahoma – Tulsa
Oregon – Portland
Pennsylvania – Montgomery County, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh
South Carolina – Charleston, Spartanburg
Tennessee – Chattanooga, Memphis, Nashville
Texas – Corpus Christi, Houston, Lubbock, San Antonio
Utah – Salt Lake City
Vermont – Brattleboro, Burlington
Virginia – Charlottesville, Norfolk
Washington – Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, Yakima
Wisconsin – Kenosha
Wyoming – Cheyenne
Canada – Nova Scotia, British Columbia
Some of these events were:

**Baltimore, Maryland** – Leading up to Memorial Day, the Baltimore Health Care for the Homeless Project hosted four policy forums to engage the community in dialogue about homelessness. The forums addressed the topics of Housing and Homelessness, Criminalization and Homelessness, The Baltimore 10-year plan, and Organizing.

**Bethel, Alaska** – Local grassroots representatives held a program entitled “In From the Cold”, to remember the homeless in the region and to stand in solidarity with those who are homeless and in need. The ceremony included the City Council’s proclamation of the Memorial Day, poems, songs, a closing remembrance, and hot chocolate. The committee also initiated a ribbon campaign – attendants wore white, blue and silver ribbons in honor of the Memorial.

**Buffalo, New York** – At the Memorial Service, the Western New York Coalition for the Homeless sold white ribbons for $2.00 to help fund a homeless awareness campaign in Western New York.

**Concord, New Hampshire** – Homeless Memorial Day organizers asked attendees to bring canned food to share with a local food pantry.

**Denver Colorado** – The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless held a vigil for over 100 departed Coloradans. The mayor attended the vigil, held on the steps of the City and County Building.

**Fort Lauderdale, Florida** – A group of local people who work as hair stylists volunteered on site to provide shampoos and haircuts to anyone who wanted one.

**Fresno, California** – On December 23, The Fresno Homeless Coalition hosted a Memorial Day event. Events included a standing circle, prayer, blessings and sage burning, naming the departed, and testimonies. In the planning stages is a memorial mural for the Ambassador Motel that will include the names of the deceased or possibly a temporary plywood wall where the names will be listed.

**Hartford, Connecticut** – The Healthcare for the Homeless staff at Charter Oak Clinic held a candlelight service and poetry reading at Mercy Housing and Shelter to
commemorate Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. The staff erected a cairn and listed the names of their clients who died in 2007.

**Helena, Montana** – Over 100 people braved the cold weather at Helena’s Memorial Service in Women’s Park, doubling last year’s attendance. The names of 27 homeless Montanans were read – 13 were from the Helena Area. The speakers included Mayor Jim Smith, Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger, and the most notable, Gerard Fortin, who shared the story of a homeless friend who died of Leukemia at the age of 44.

**Honolulu, Hawaii** – Street Beat Inc. hosted a memorial service. They provided free Hepatitis B and C screenings and a Hawaiian print T-shirt for the homeless and others who were screened. They also provided the Hepatitis B vaccine for adults who do not have health insurance or whose health insurance will not pay for it.

**Salt Lake City, Utah** – Each year, the Fourth Street Clinic holds a candlelight vigil and homeless memorial around the winter solstice to raise awareness about homelessness. Kaylynn Boone, a member of the Board of Directors of Fourth Street Clinic and formerly homeless woman, read the names of the 49 known homeless people who died in Salt Lake County in 2007. With the death of a 16-year old child this year, those in attendance were reminded of the intense vulnerability that faces each and every person who does not have a permanent, safe place to call home.

**Seattle, Washington** – Seattle remembered 84 people who died homeless in King County in 2007 during a silent candlelight vigil at Westlake Mall Park in Downtown Seattle. The Women in Black, a group which stands vigil in downtown Seattle every time they hear of the death of a homeless individual who died by violence or outdoors, organized the event.

**Spartanburg, South Carolina** – Three individuals shared their testimonials and attendees stood in the cold night air for several hours to experience just a taste of what the homeless of Spartanburg have to endure. The event included a “mock soup kitchen,” where attendees were given soup, bread, and coffee. The Mobile Medical Unit, which provides medical services to homeless individuals in the area, was on hand for people to tour. A candlelight vigil, poetry, and gospel singing were also featured.

**Washington D.C.** – The National Homeless Persons Memorial Day Vigil at McPherson Square Park included prayer, poetry, music, testimonials, and local political and religious leaders.
Sample Flyers and Agenda

National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day

On December 21, the First Day of Winter, the longest night of the year, join us to remember those who have died homeless in our community during 2008.

[Insert local details here]

National Sponsors:
Saint Vincent Catholic Medical Centers
The Department of Community Medicine

In coordination with
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Health Care for the Homeless Council

In Remembrance
National Homeless Person’s Memorial Day

Join us to remember and celebrate the lives of those in our community who died homeless in ______

Friday, December 21

Where:
Time:  
Program: Prayers, Music, Storytelling

For every hour and every moment
thousands of men leave life on this earth, and their souls appear before God.
And how many of them depart in solitude, unknown, sad, dejected, that no one mourns for them or even knows whether they have lived or not - Fyodor Dostoevsky
For More Information
Call (603) 443-6150
Food Items will be welcomed
Donations of non-perishable

Everyone is welcome! Come share your thoughts and memories or just stand in quiet solidarity with us.

Across from the Green
Outside, in front of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon
5 pm on the 21st of December, 2007
For a candlelight vigil to remember those who have lost their lives to homelessness
Please join us! The Upper Valley Haven

December 21st is Homeless Persons Memorial Day

December 21st is the Longest Night of the Year
December 21st is the First Day of Winter
Memorial Litany

Yvonne Way
Allen Wood
Teddy Smith
Karen Duggan
Smallwood
Andrew Douglas
Robbie Robertson
Joe O'Neill
Lena S. Langley Sr.
Kathy I.
David Freeland
Fred Reiterman
William Thomas
Russell Hill
Christopher Reitan
Rose Gadesis
Kathy Ford
Marino Frazier-Meige
Deborah Poage
William Davenport
Joe Davenport
Liam A. A. O. A. W.

Memorial Service

Sanctuary Prayer
Robert Hendry
Welcome
and our words take to flight
Asto, wide, wide, wide to

Memorial Litany

Donald Williams, NCH
Helen Breit

Memorial Service

Sanctuary Prayer
Robert Hendry
Welcome
and our words take to flight
Asto, wide, wide, wide to

Memorial Litany

Donald Williams, NCH
Helen Breit

Sample Press Releases

National Coalition for the Homeless
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Email: info@nationalhomeless.org | Website: www.nationalhomeless.org

Date of Issue: December 17, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Michael Stoops, (202) 462-4822 x19; mstoops@nationalhomeless.org

Local, National Groups to Commemorate National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day on December 21

Washington, DC – In 2007, ___ people without housing died of natural causes, murder, suicide and/or hypothermia in Washington, D.C.

The city has responded by reducing the availability of shelter beds and continuing the demolition of affordable housing units, thus driving many families and individuals into homelessness.

What will D.C. do for people experiencing homelessness next year?

On December 21, 2007, local and national advocacy groups, service providers, as well as people experiencing homelessness, will mourn those who died. We will also educate the Washington, DC community that the lack of affordable housing and shelter is a problem that must be addressed. The memorial service will take place at _____________, and will include reading and speeches from attendees such as ________, _____. It will begin at ____.

“I think the important thing to remember is that these deaths are entirely preventable,” _____ said. “If our cities make affordable housing, living wages, and accessible health care their top priorities, we will not have to hold any more memorial services for people who died without housing – because there will be no more people who die without housing.”

This year, over ___ cities across the nation are sponsoring events, which include candlelight marches and vigils, graveside services, plays and other performances, and special religious services.

National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day has occurred on the first day of winter, December 21, since 1990. The event is sponsored by the National Coalition for the Homeless, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, the National Consumer Advisory Board, and local groups nationwide. It is intended to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness, and to remember our homeless friends who have paid the ultimate price for our nation’s failure to address the issue.
Evansville: People experiencing homelessness are three to four times more likely to die prematurely than their housed counterparts, according to a study released today by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council in observance of National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day.

The mortality report was released locally in connection with Evansville Homeless Memorial Service that will take place on December 21, 2007 at Trinity United Methodist Church at 10:00 in the morning. The local observance is sponsored by Aurora.

Entitled “Premature Mortality in Homeless Populations: A Review of the Literature,” the study found that premature death is more highly associated with the presence of acute and chronic medical conditions than with mental illness, substance abuse, or hypothermia. Dr. James J. O’Connell conducted the comprehensive review of research on homelessness and mortality for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council.

"Today we celebrate the lives and mourn the deaths of 7 of our homeless neighbors in Evansville this year," said Luzada Hayes, spokesperson for Aurora. "This is the highest number of deaths reported in one year that organizers can remember. The mortality report confirms that these local deaths are not isolated tragedies, but are part of a deadly national pattern, which we must act to end."

“As homelessness continues to increase, so does the outrage of death on our streets. Having a permanent roof over one’s head, an adequate income and health care would greatly reduce the number who die homeless,” said Michael Stoops, Acting Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless.

“These death rates are stunning. Life on the streets too quickly leads to death on the streets,” said John Lozier, Executive Director of the National Health Care for the Homeless Council. “Available research clearly affirms the importance of guaranteeing access to comprehensive health care and affordable housing for all Americans. These resources mean the difference between life and death for our most vulnerable friends and neighbors.”
For the past 15 years, National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day has been observed on December 21 – the first day of winter and the longest night of the year. The National HCH Council and the National Coalition for the Homeless cosponsor the day to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember our homeless friends who have paid the ultimate price for our nation's failure to end homelessness. Last year, more than 100 cities from Detroit to Seattle to Washington, DC sponsored events to honor those who died and to recommit to the task of ending homelessness.

Evansville has participated in the national observance for the last six years. Organizers are aware of 49 individuals have died over the last 15 years while homeless in Evansville.
**Sample State Proclamation**

The State of Washington

**Proclamation**

WHEREAS, adequate housing is essential for healthy families and communities; and

WHEREAS, housing has become increasingly inaccessible due to rising costs and a shortage of rental and single family housing; and

WHEREAS, every member of society, including individuals experiencing homelessness, deserves the dignity of safe, decent, accessible, and affordable housing; and

WHEREAS, nationwide each year, an estimated 3.5 million people experience homelessness, with an estimated 45,600 homeless people in the state of Washington; and

WHEREAS, December 21 has been designated National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day by the National Coalition for the Homeless; and

WHEREAS, in this season of generosity and sharing, citizens of Washington State are encouraged to commit themselves to promoting compassion and concern for all, especially for the poor and homeless; and

WHEREAS, remembering that winter poses extreme hardships for homeless people, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless will hold memorial services for those who died in 2005 because of conditions associated with homelessness;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Christine O. Gregoire, Governor of the state of Washington, do hereby proclaim December 21, 2005, as

**NATIONAL HOMELESS PERSONS’ MEMORIAL DAY**

In Washington State, and I urge all citizens to join me in this special observance.

Signed this 13th day of December, 2005

Governor Christine O. Gregoire
**Sample City or County Resolution**

_________ City Council/County Commission Resolution  
Designating December 21, 2007 as  
National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day

WHEREAS, the winter poses extreme hardship for inadequately housed low-income men, women, and children in ______; and

WHEREAS, the spirit of the holiday season of giving provides an opportunity for affirmation and renewal regarding the commitment to end homelessness; and

WHEREAS, December 21st has been designated National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, and is so recognized by cities nationwide; and

WHEREAS, in this season of generosity and sharing, citizens of ______ are encouraged to commit themselves to promoting compassion and concern for all brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and homeless; and

WHEREAS, in remembering those who have died on the streets, the cause of ending homelessness is kept urgent as is the city's/county’s collective commitment to preventing such deaths in the future, now therefore

RESOLVED, BY THE CITY COUNCIL/COUNTY COMMISSION OF ________,  
That we hereby declare December 21, 2007 National Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day, in recognition of the people who have died on our streets, in our emergency shelters, and in condemned or abandoned properties, from ailments or conditions directly related to homelessness.

______________________________  
President of City Council/County Commission

Introduced by: _________________

Sponsored by Council Members: ____________