

Hello,

This is the summer edition of Safety Network. If you would like information about NCH or would like to receive this newsletter in print version, please contact Rachele Huelsman at rhuelsman@nationalhomeless.org.

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Images from the Edge Gives Voice to Mentally Ill/Homeless

Images from the Edge, a book published by The Friends of Mississippi State Hospital Inc, gives a unique perspective on the difficulties that the homeless and the mentally ill face. The book features the writings and artworks of homeless and mentally ill at patients at the Mississippi State Hospital in Jackson. These works were created as part of the Community Services Stubbs Homeless Program at the Hospital. Linda Townes, director of Stubbs Homeless Program, has been collecting the writings and art of her patients since the early 1990s (“Mental...” 1).

Townes began art and writing workshops at the hospital after frequent visits to homeless shelters revealed the frustrations of the homeless. “I kept hearing, “No one wants to hear from us. No one really cares about what we have to say.” These people believed, for good reason, that they had absolutely no voice.” (“Mental...”1). Townes was determined to give them a voice.

In spring of 1993, she toured the Mid-Town Mental Health Homeless Program. The programs director, Maire Williams showed her a notebook full of emotionally charged writings by the clients of this program. Inspired by this experience, she started writing workshops at the Stubbs Homeless Program. Soon, the writing workshops expanded into writing and painting workshops (“Images”... Foreword).

The writing and art has gained national attention. Actor Morgan Freeman is a fan of the works. “The creative pieces resulting from this art therapy collection unveil the pain and suffering common to us all—a theme that dominates the lives of these eloquent poets and artists, giving a voice to their

humanity and demanding to be heard” says Freeman. Michael Stoops of the National Coalition for the Homeless says “This books shows us that the real experts and educators are the people who have experienced homelessness and poverty” (“Images”...Backcover).

Images from the Edge corroborates these assertions. Collections of cinquain poetry, written by groups or individuals, express the not only trepidation but also aspiration. These are poems of addiction, self realization and perseverance. Paintings by men and women who have faced the stigmas of homelessness and mental illness pull the reader between exhausted resignation and gritty resilience. These voices speak of a life unimaginable to many of the readers. However, these works transcend the differences manifested by these artisans. Rather, these works remind the viewer that struggle, in varying degrees is common to us all.

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International Network of Street Papers Conference

From June 7 to June 10, 2006 the International Network of Street Papers (INSP) Conference took place in Montreal, Quebec. Michael Stoops and Neal Kern of National Coalition for the Homeless attended this event and arrived by Air Canada. The conference had newspapers from countries around the globe including South Africa, Macedonia, Japan, Germany, and Canada.

Wednesday, June 7 served as an introductory day. Dinner was provided at the Headquarters of L'intineraire, the Montreal street newspaper. This was an opportunity for representatives to introduce themselves and to learn about one another's organizations.

Thursday, June 8 marked the beginning of the conference. This was the first conference in which the International Network of Street Papers and the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) were attending together. A DVD that presented the struggles of the homeless youth of Montreal was shown. Then, delegates were broken into small workshops that could address specific issues related to social development, marketing, editorial content and meeting vendor's needs.

The afternoon began with a general meeting of the INSP in which staff reports were announced and the budget was debated. While important to put forward, these proceedings were somewhat dull. However the afternoon ended on an upbeat discussion of accomplishments that each newspaper had made in the last year.

The evening portion of the conference was a forum. The speakers at this forum included Mel Young (Honorary President of INSP), Alan Gravel (President of the Professional Federation of

Quebec Journalists), Walter Moser (Canadian Research Chair in Literary and Cultural Transfers at the University of Ottawa), Shirley Roy (Director of Research Center on Homelessness, Social Exclusion, and Poverty at the University of Quebec) and host Anne-Marie Dussault (Tele-Quebec). The forum was composed of a discussion, a question and answer section and a charming short film about an impoverished family searching for a panacea to their troubles in the form of a Red BMW.

Friday, June 9 began with a tour of the “other Montreal”. This tour included a brief history of poverty in Montreal, a look at the significant landmarks of the poor and socially excluded and a warm lunch at one of Montreal’s most famous soup kitchens.

After a lunch, delegates heard a speech by economist Leo-Paul Lauzon. A fiery and charismatic speaker, Mr. Lauzon expressed his strong displeasure of corporate power and the failure of mainstream media to accurately portray homelessness. The afternoon continued with the small workshop format of the previous day. These workshops emphasized thinking globally. Topics of these workshops included, creating effective networks, getting content correct, finding practical ideals of campaigning and effective networking. Saturday, June 10 began with the second part of general INSP meeting. Tensions were high as issues such as minors working as vendors and voting representation were debated. These debates ran long and became the alone agenda item finished in the morning.

The intensity brought on by the debate of the morning was offset by the upbeat presentation of the Homeless World Cup. A group of representatives of the Homeless World Cup showed an inspirational DVD of the 2005 Homeless World Cup in Scotland. The emotional appeal of the DVD was supported by the assertion that 94% of participants had improved their personal, professional or social lives after involvement with the Homeless World Cup. Delegates now moved to their third and final group workshops. These workshops centered on using street papers as a force for positive social change. Topics included, encouraging vendor art and writing, measuring the effectiveness of the newspaper and brainstorming for the future of the newspapers. This was the final official event of the conference. All delegates were then invited to a dinner cruise around the St. Lawrence River. This cruise gave delegates a final opportunity to eat, drink and reflect on the roles that their street papers will have in an ever changing world.

Health Center Reauthorization Act

On April 26, 2006, The Health Center Reauthorization Act of 2006 (H.R. 5201) was introduced in the House of Representatives. The bill, sponsored by Michael Bilirakis (R-FL) and Gene Green (D-TX), reauthorizes section 330(h) of The Public Health Service Act (PHSA). Included in the bill is reauthorization of the Health Care of the Homeless Program (HCH) (NHCHC “Mobilizer” 1). The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) supports this legislation and is requesting at least \$172 million (Fiscal Year 2007) in funding for this act (NCH “Program” 1).

To participate in the HCH program, a non -profit community based organization must provide

health services regardless of a client's ability to pay. These services include: dental, medical, housing and substance abuse treatment. These organizations are also required to incorporate homeless or former homeless people into the governing body. (NHCHC "Mobilizer" 1).

The HCH program was first created as part of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. This was the first federal bill to recognize that mainstream health care does not adequately serve the needs of the homeless. In 1996, Congress reauthorized the HCH Program and included the Health Centers Consolidation Act. This reauthorization included programs for the homeless, migrant workers, residents of public housing and other potentially homeless people (NCH "Program" 1).

The HCH program is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The HCH program is located in HRSA's Bureau of Primary Health Care, a division for Special Populations (DPSP) the Health Care for the Homeless Branch (NCH "Program" 1).

Funding for the program HCH program is appropriated by Congress each fiscal year. It is deposited in the consolidation of health center account. The HHS Secretary divides the money between the HCH and three other health care centers programs. In fiscal year 2006, \$155 million (about 8.6 percent of the total health center appropriation) was allocated to the HCH program (NCH "Program" 3). This money is given, in grants, to participating organizations. These grants are awarded on a competitive application system. The applications are reviewed by a panel of outside experts and HRSA staff (NCH "Program" 1).

People experiencing homelessness face significant challenges in accessing addiction and mental health services due lack of identification, lack of residence, difficulty in maintaining schedules and lack of transportation. Many addiction and mental health services are unable to provide permanent housing which is crucial to the success of these programs (NHCHC "Treatment" 1). A case study done by social workers Annick Barker (LCSW-C), Martha Alvaran (MSCN, CRNP), Janet Caughlan (LCSW-C) and Patrica Post (MPA) shows the struggles of the terminally ill are compounded by homelessness (NHCHC "Comorbid" 1).

The subject of their study, "Mr. F", is a homeless African American man in his late forties. He was chronically unemployed and has lived on the Baltimore streets since the mid 1990s. He was diagnosed with HIV in 1999 but was unable to receive consistent medical treatment. Mr. F had trouble accepting the HIV diagnosis. As a result, he became depressed and socially isolated. He contacted a HCH program in 2003 (NHCHC "Comorbid" 2).

Once evaluated, he was given a single medical provider and a therapist case manager. He was diagnosed with depression and adjustment disorder (NHCHC "Comorbid" 2). Adjustment disorder is a short term psychological disorder that occurs after a traumatic event, such as the contraction of a terminal disease (Wikipedia 1). Regular therapy session and treatment can lead to a resolution of conditions such as adjustment disorder (NHCHC "Comorbid" 2). Mr. F showed signs of improvement while working with the HCH program.

The adjusted problems reappeared in May of 2004, when Mr. F was diagnosed and treated for tuberculosis. He was infectious at time of treatment and was quarantined. The isolation of the quarantine and lack of communication with the hospital staff exacerbated his adjustment struggles. Mr. F was unable to tolerate his quarantine and left the hospital against doctor's wishes. He disappeared for nearly two weeks. Once he was found, he was admitted to a second hospital that had more experience with the psychological challenges the homeless face. He made no attempts to leave the second hospital (NHCHC "Comorbid 3).

Although Mr. F recovered from his adjustment problems, he is still reluctant to share personal information, is fearful of showing weakness and can be apprehensive about receiving assistance. These problems are common among the recovering homeless and demonstrate the need for HCH programs to prevent recidivism (NHCHC "Comorbid 2). With the help of HCH, Mr. F was able to attain treatment for his medical and psychological conditions.

The need for HCH is clear. Over 600,000 homeless people per year received assistance at over 170 HCH sites. More than 510,000 had no financial resources, 426,000 had no medical care and 132,000 were eligible for Medicaid (NCH "Program" 3). The HCH program needs to be reauthorized and well funded so the homeless can have access to health care that they deserve.

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House and Senate Bills Scarcely Identifying Support for the Homeless

Since 1994, there have been no significant legislative changes to HUD's homeless assistance programs. There have been few attempts to reauthorize the programs, including one in 2000 to convert homeless assistance programs into block grants provided to states, but no bills that have successfully passed.

Currently, there are two bills in Congress, S.1801, The Community Partnership to End Homelessness Act, and House bill, H.R. 5041, the Homeless Assistance Consolidation Act. Both of the acts would consolidate HUD's three competitive homeless programs into one competitive program, while at the same time adding prevention as an eligible activity.

Although both bills contain similar substance, each possesses specific detail that drastically differs from the other. Both bills in some way relieve HUD of some of the responsibility of overseeing grantees. The Senate bill would require communities to establish Collaborative Applicants, which are similar to existing Continuums of Care. The house bill would require every community to establish a Continuum of Care board, which would oversee funding to other grantees.

The bills, however, have different approaches to services. S. 1801 would allow HUD to reduce the types of services that are eligible for funding if the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that other federal funding for those services was increasing. H.R. 5041, on the other hand, would give HUD broad discretion in determining which services could be funded. Both bills continue to emphasize permanent housing. H.R. 5041 proposes to continue the Samaritan Housing Initiative much as it is practiced now and require that each Continuum of Care set aside 30 percent of funding for permanent housing (new and renewal). This, however, only pertains to individuals who have a diagnosed disability, leaving out families and youth. S. 1801 would provide bonuses for new construction and rehabilitation while setting aside 30 percent of funds for new permanent housing for individuals/families with diagnosed disabilities, and 10 percent of funds for new permanent housing for people/families without disabilities.

The National Coalition for the Homeless strives to end homelessness for all, and supports legislation that reflects this mission. Both bills in Congress need much improvement before this task can be completed. Each bill, in its own approach, fails to address important factors that are necessary for service providers and the entire homeless population to survive.

For a side-by-side analysis of both bills, along with current legislation, and to view our suggested recommendations, please visit the "resource section" of our website at www.nationalhomeless.org

*Some information in this article was adapted from the National Alliance to End Homelessness website.

Homeless Advocates March for Housing

The Journey Home to Create Houses

Zachary Krochina

“What do we want?”

“HOUSING!”

“When do we want it?”

“NOW!”

Rhode Island activists boomed this chant last week throughout the State House in Providence. They had just completed a 5-day, 57-mile trek across their state and were urging the General Assembly to heed their united voice. “I’ve walked more than 50 miles and I’m tired,” a formally homeless youth, Joe Freitas, pleaded at the podium, his words bouncing off the domed roof, “But not as tired as I am of seeing my homeless friends sleeping under overpasses and sleeping in shelters and having no place to go...let’s get that \$75 million on the ballot!” The crowd, forced to line the stairwells and balconies for lack of space, roared in approval. Eric Hirsch, a Providence College professor and one of the organizers, expressed the group’s primary request: “To the people in this building, the legislature and the governor, we’re not asking for much. All we’re asking is to put the housing bond on the ballot and let the people decide. It’s the least you can do.” He closed with resounding determination of repeated action, “To the people of this building, if you don’t do this, we’ll be back!”

Evoking the spirit of 1960s civil-rights demonstrations, *The Journey Home* was launched by concerned Rhode Island citizens in an attempt to bring both awareness and action to a growing housing crisis. Hundreds of people (including the Democratic candidate for governor) participated in this five-day procession (from May 21-25) across the state that concluded in the above-mentioned capitol rally. The march “came about through the frustration of homeless people and their advocates,” Hirsch explained, “We know how to end homelessness; we just don’t have the will to do it.” We can only hope that their exemplary call for action will prove successful in creating such will, and if the words of Freitas—spoken after the rally—are any indication then let us remain optimistic: “I think we’re going to create the political will to get this passed,” he said before immediately correcting himself, “I know we will. Not think, I know.”

Congruent with national trends, Rhode Island has seen steadily increasing demand for shelter beds and other homeless services. “In 2004, Rhode Island shelters reported a total of 204,770 bed nights. This was an all time high, and a 7% increase over the previous year. 16% of shelter users had gone without a permanent residence for more than a year, an 8% increase over the previous year,” reports the group’s website (www.thejourneyhome.org). As last year’s *Hunger and Homelessness Survey*, conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, confirms: The lack of affordable housing is the number one reported reason for experiencing homelessness. This issue is intimately linked with the number 2 cause—inadequate pay—which together reveal a desperate dilemma. Even if *available* housing exists, it’s not affordable to the growing number of Americans that work lower-income jobs, especially to those earning the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an

hour.

Since the market economy is not solving this crisis, efforts like *The Journey Home*, which are calling for the government to intervene on behalf of its citizens, are vital. “We envision government as a partner in ending homelessness,” James Ryczek, director of the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless and another march organizer, spoke at the rally. “Capitalism is not a form of government. Democracy is.” Participants in *The Journey Home* are truly acting democratic as they urge their state government to pass a bill that includes a referendum for a \$75-million bond issue to build 1500 new units of affordable housing. Although easier said than done, Hirsch outlines the key to success, “If we know how to solve the problems, then it really comes down to trying to create the will to make this happen.” So let us take inspiration from the words and actions of our smallest state, and reinvigorate our efforts to create the necessary will and demand that local, state, and federal governments commit resources to their stated goal of “Ending homelessness in 10 years.”

*all quotes were collected from these three *Providence Journal* articles:

- 1.) *Week-long march on homelessness to traverse state*, by Randal Edgar and Mark Arsenault
- 2.) *Advocates for homeless set out on statewide trek*, by Mark Arsenault
- 3.) *March to end homelessness: No rest for the weary*, by Mark Arsenault

Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness

Diane Nilan, an “ordinary person” doing extraordinary work for the past 20 years, has compiled an engrossing chronicle of her extensive experience with homeless adults and children, painting spellbinding images of the often nameless and frequently forgotten individuals. Her passion for this issue, and those labeled with the often-negative designation “homeless,” burns throughout **Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness**.

Crossing the Line takes readers behind the scenes at a hectic suburban emergency shelter and introduces an unlikely cast of characters who confirm the path to homelessness is easier to enter than to exit. Nilan’s perceptions and her direct style avoid clichéd stereotypes as she depicts scoundrels and saints.

She spares neither alcoholic nor lawmaker. She extols virtues of convicts and congresspersons. She challenges the affluent and the righteous—*don’t just stand there, do something!* She holds the hands of first-time shelter volunteers. She guides those unable to volunteer but who want to alleviate suffering. She points out seldom-acknowledged systemic shortcomings and identifies societal faults, without sparing herself.

Disarming revelations about her foibles and fears remove excuses that only special or professionally trained people can help, inspiring ordinary persons to alleviate the suffering and injustice of homelessness. Nilan offers seldom-revealed insights about this nation’s poverty policies. Her book
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homelessness. Nilan offers seldom-revealed insights about this nation's poverty policies. Her book hits personal security in the gut with stories about who ends up homeless.

Weaving her personal story throughout this book, Nilan clarifies personal responsibility of all Americans in addressing homelessness and bringing about solutions. No one is exempt—rich or poor, powerful or inconsequential—in restoring the American Dream and eliminating the nightmare of homelessness.

This unique chronicle allows readers to learn about the topic that only rises to the nation's attention when tragedies like Hurricane Katrina hit. It should be required reading for every political and religious leader, social worker and educator, journalist and news director, philanthropist and aspiring do-gooder.

CROSSING the LINE: Taking Steps to End Homelessness By Diane D. Nilan

Published by Booklocker.com, November 2005 www.booklocker.com/books/2265.html

Non-fiction, 254 pages, paperback. \$17.95, e-book, \$12.95

PROCEEDS BENEFIT HEAR US, a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness about homelessness

Visit Diane's Blog, <http://homelessnessUSA.booklocker.com>

Her website: www.hearus.us

Join NCH Today!

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National Homeless and Low Income Voter Registration Week

National Homeless and Low Income Voter Registration WEEK is September 24-30!

Election Day is just a few months away! What can you do to get your clients, residents, staff, and community activists involved? **Plan a voter registration event!**

Here are some easy event ideas:

- Hold a block party or picnic with refreshments, entertainment, and elected officials.
- Set up a voter registration booth in a high traffic area like a supermarket or street corner.
- Have clients who are already registered go door-to-door in low-income areas or visit various homeless shelters in the area.
- Host a candidate forum where clients can meet elected officials and candidates.
- Ask your local Board of Elections to conduct a training on how to use voting machines.
- Sponsor an essay contest for clients to write essays about the importance of civic engagement and voting. Provide a prize for the winner.
- Host a debate watching party and invite your clients and residents.

As you plan your event:

- § Develop a **media outreach** strategy so the candidates can be informed about issues homeless and low-income people face and the community knows when and where to register to vote.
- § **Keep records** of everyone you register to vote so that you encourage them to exercise the right on Election Day.

Who to contact for ideas and support:

National Homeless and Low Income Voter Registration Day is being cosponsored by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC). We have come together to create **materials, toolkits** and offer support while you plan your events. Please feel free to contact us:

- § Elisa Ortiz at NLIHC (Elisa@nlihc.org, 202-662-1530 ext 222).
- § Michael Stoops at NCH (mstoops@nationalhomeless.org, 202-462-4822).
- § Tulin Ozdeger at NLCHP (tozdeger@nlchp.org, 202-638-2535 ext 212).
- § John Lozier at NHCHC (jlozier@nhchc.org, 615-226-2292 ext 24).

Jackson Mayor Melton Rounds Up Homeless Out After Curfew

On Thursday morning, July 13th, Jackson, Mississippi Mayor Frank Melton announced an amendment to the state of emergency declared on June 22nd to install a 10pm curfew on all homeless people. Since Friday night the police have been rounding up homeless people out past curfew and taking them to a gym to spend the night

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curfew and taking them to a gym to spend the night.

On Friday night, while the mayor had expected about sixty people, twenty ate pizza while volunteer social workers “obtained basic information” from them. On Saturday night it was sixteen. Melton will enlist those who used the shelter this weekend to clean up local parks as a way to “earn their keep.”

In his Thursday press conference, Melton called people experiencing homelessness “vagrants” and claimed that this curfew would help cut down on crime involving homeless people.

Michael Stoops, Acting Executive Director of the Washington, DC-based National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), has blasted this curfew as “another form of racial and economic profiling” that is “reminiscent of the Jim Crow laws of old.”

Ace Knox, a Jackson man experiencing homelessness in Jackson, said “It sounds a bit like discrimination.”

Melton claimed that “this is not punitive” and “we want to help people.”

However, he did not consult people experiencing homelessness or service providers before announcing the curfew. He claimed to recognize that the city already had a ten-year plan to end homelessness but said, “I just don’t have ten years to deal with this.”

Some of the service providers in the community have expressed apprehension about the mayor’s hasty plans. Some appreciate the attention that he is giving to the plight of homelessness but, at best, question the effectiveness of his efforts. Many in the community agree. “I think he’s doing too many things too fast,” said Knox.

“If Jackson enacts the curfew, it will be the first city in the country to do so. This will set a horrible precedent and might lead to other cities doing copycat curfews,” Stoops said on Friday.

To many citizens of Jackson, this is another step beyond Melton’s bounds of power. The President of the Chamber of Commerce sent out a newsletter on Thursday that called for the mayor to end the state of emergency, arguing that it is making the city unattractive to new business. Melton has responded that he will continue it until the residents of Jackson feel safe.

Melton claims to earnestly “want to get to the bottom of this [homelessness]” and “help people.”

An editorial in *The Clarion-Ledger* stated, “If the city wanted to deal effectively with the homeless, it would work with the local groups—even as faith-based initiatives—to coordinate existing services and enlist the state to provide emergency shelter and crisis intervention where the homeless can receive substance-abuse and psychological help.”

Housing with Services Helps Rural Communities

The “housing plus services” model, which provides both affordable housing and supportive services tailored to residents’ needs, enables many rural organizations to meet their communities’ specialized needs, according to a new report from the Housing Assistance Council.

“Providing either affordable housing or supportive services can be a challenge in rural places,” noted Moises Loza, executive director of the Housing Assistance Council. “But HAC is pleased to find that a number of local rural organizations have found ways to connect the two. The combination has proved to be extremely helpful for people with special needs.”

Five case studies in HAC’s report illustrate some of the ways rural organizations are providing housing plus services for five different populations: people who are elderly, homeless, victims of domestic violence, or recovering from substance abuse, and those with mental healthy problems or disabilities. The case studies highlight the essential components for successful housing plus services projects in rural America, such as strong community collaboration, innovative community organizations, and targeted yet flexible housing plus services programs. The report also includes a funding and information resources guide.

Formulas for Success: Housing Plus Services in Rural Areas is free on HAC’s website, www.ruralhome.org. Printed copies are available for \$4.00 each to cover postage and handling from Luz Rosas at HAC, 202-842-8600 ext.137, luz@ruralhome.org.

Annual Help the Homeless Walkathon

Please support NCH in the Fannie Mae Foundation Help the Homeless Program, which raises awareness of and funds for Washington metropolitan area organizations that are working to prevent and end homelessness. The Help the Homeless Walkathon on the National Mall will be held on Saturday, November 18, 2006.

Please make a donation to support a walker’s participation in the Walkathon, or register to join us at the Walkathon. To make a secure, online donation or to join our team, please visit the Help the Homeless Web page at www.helpthehomelessdc.org.

The support you provide is vital to making continued strides in preventing and ending homelessness.

Please click on the title to visit the Help the Homeless Walkathon website and download the registration form. If you have questions please contact:

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