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**From:** National Coalition for the Homeless**To:** {EMAIL\_ADDRESS}**Subject:** NCH News- August 2009**NEWSLETTER**

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### **New Criminalization Report Available**

This week, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and the National Coalition for the Homeless





(NCH) released [Homes Not Handcuffs](#), tracking a growing trend in U.S. cities – the criminalization of homelessness. The report focuses on specific city measures from 2007 and 2008 that have targeted homeless persons, such as laws that make it illegal to sleep, eat,

or sit in public spaces. The report includes information about 273 cities nationwide.

*Homes Not Handcuffs* ranks the top 10 U.S. cities with the worst practices in relation to criminalizing homelessness. It also identifies examples of more constructive approaches to homelessness.

NLCHP and NCH released their last joint report on the topic in 2006. In the 224 cities surveyed in both this report and the 2006 report, there are currently more laws used to target homeless persons, including an 11 percent increase in laws prohibiting loitering in certain public places and a 7 percent increase in laws prohibiting “camping” in certain public spaces.

“As a result of the economic crisis, homelessness is on the rise. Instead of helping to prevent homelessness, many cities are criminalizing those who lose their homes by passing ‘quality of life’ laws,” said Michael Stoops, Executive Director at NCH. While more cities are cracking down on homeless people living in public spaces, the housing and homelessness crisis in the United States has worsened over the past two years, particularly due to the current economic and foreclosure crises. According to a report released last week by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 41.8 percent of the homeless population was unsheltered between January 2007 and January 2008. Most cities do not have adequate shelter space or affordable housing to meet the need, leaving many homeless persons with no choice but to live in public spaces.

“Criminalizing homelessness is not only an inhumane way of approaching people who are poor and vulnerable, but is counterproductive in dealing with the problem of homelessness,” said Tulin Ozdeger, NLCHP Civil Rights Program Director. “It costs more to jail a person than it does to provide permanent supportive housing.”

## **Book Reviews**

### ***Homeless Hearts: Life Stories of Women in a Homeless Shelter***

**Reviewed by Eliza Horn, NCH Intern**

In this revealing book, Dr. Jean A. Newsome interviews twelve homeless women who are residing in shelters. Each woman talks about her childhood, relationships with family and friends, marriages and children. At the end of their life story, they discuss who/what had the most positive and negative effect on their lives. Finally, they explain where they see themselves in a year. Each chapter ends with a section called “From her heart,” which is a copy of a sheet each woman fills out, asking her to answer such questions as what “happiness is” and what “beauty is.” The unique handwriting and answers demonstrate the personality and humanity of each of the women. At the end of the book, Newsome provides an update on the women’s wellbeing three months after their interviews.

The book's greatest strengths lie in the patterns of the women's lives. Parental neglect, domestic abuse, and sexual assault are themes that repeat themselves. A cycle emerges and the reader is able to understand how and why this happens so often. The role of parents, particularly of the mother, is prominent in many of these stories. Most of these women had physically and emotionally abusive mothers. A few of them had to care for their siblings because their mothers neglectful. Because of their upbringing and position in life, the women that did have children tended to become neglectful mothers themselves and acknowledged their lacking abilities as parents. When asked about what they wanted in the future, most of the women mentioned reconnecting with their children. Some of the children of these women also ended up in poverty, like Tamara, a homeless woman who prostituted with her daughter. While all the women who were mothers cared deeply for their children, they did not have the experience and resources to be good mothers and perpetuated the cycle of poverty.

Sexual assault was another common occurrence for these women. Seven out of the twelve women were raped at some point in their lives. Four of these women were raped/sexually assaulted as children, typically by a family member. Eva was raped at the age of seven by her step-father. Candace was raped by her uncle when she was twelve. Tracey was raped by her grandfather when she was twelve. From these stories, the reader is able to see how such experiences contributed to their homelessness. A few of these women developed psychological disorders and/or substance abuse problems later in life, which some doctors thought was influenced by their childhood incest. The other women who were victims of sexual assault as adults tended to experience severe violence. Lillian was raped for hours and then had to be taken to the emergency room where she received stitches. While they described their rapes during the interviews, all the women had extreme emotional reactions. When Dr. Newsome asked them what the worst event in their lives were the majority of the women who experience sexual assault stated that was the worst event in their lives.

Domestic violence was also a common experience among most of the women and, unfortunately, they tended to experience this multiple times throughout their relationships. Georgia was the victim of domestic violence throughout her life. In her most recent occurrence, the violence was so severe that she suffered a stroke and now has a permanent slur when she talks. Kelly was also a domestic violence survivor. Kelly's second husband, who was an alcoholic and drug addict, pushed her through a glass coffee table and threw a telephone at her head. The police were never involved in these situations so the abusers were never arrested.

Five of the women were put in jail for misdemeanors. Three of them have psychological disorders such as Mary, who has Delusional Disorder, Anne, who is bipolar, and Valerie, who is a paranoid schizophrenic. None of the women received any help or counseling while in jail.

Consistently, the women voiced how thankful they were to be in the shelter. Many had found a supportive system and finally felt safe. Many were close to their counselors. Each expressed a desire to have a home and start work, but unfortunately after three months Dr. Newsome found many had not been able to achieve this goal.

### ***Mental Health and Emerging Adulthood among Homeless People***

## Reviewed by Rebecca Surgis, NCH Intern

Although many studies about the homeless population have focused on a specific age group, Dr. Whitbeck was the first to examine the effects of homelessness on adolescents as they transition into adulthood. Adolescence is arguably a defining time in every person's life; it is the time when we develop, mature, and grow into our future selves. Homeless adolescents, however, are often deprived not only of the stability of a home, but also of a caring family and social support. They are particularly vulnerable to traumatic life events, health problems, and many other stressors that affect their development.

Dr. Whitbeck explores the major issues that affect runaway and homeless adolescents. He begins by discussing mental disorders, such as conduct disorders, antisocial personality disorder, depression, PTSD, and substance abuse. These disorders are extremely prevalent in homeless adolescents, and many people are affected by multiple disorders. The book also explores "coping" mechanisms such as dissociation, self-mutilating behaviors, and suicidal ideation. Other topics touched upon are health and health-care utilization, employment, education, hunger, and housing. The information is presented both as statistics and as accounts from homeless adolescents, and every chapter includes a summary and discussion section, followed by theoretical implications, policy implications, and conclusions. The book ends by an analysis of the transition to adulthood and the effects of homelessness on adolescents' development. Dr. Whitbeck is able to teach a great deal from his observation of homeless adolescents as they become young adults.

### Public Policy Update

#### Homelessness and Hate Crimes

The National Coalition for the Homeless continues to urge Congress to protect people experiencing homelessness under federal hate crimes laws. Most recently, NCH offered a statement to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee at a hearing on the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act (S. 909). That legislation improves federal hate crimes laws, including the addition of gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity as new protected categories.



Citing a body of evidence that homeless people are continuing to be selected intentionally as victims of crime due to their status as homeless, NCH recommended that homeless status be included in federal hate crime statistics and enforcement laws. Among recent hate-motivated incidents that NCH cited in its statement were the 2008 deaths of homeless men set on fire in Los Angeles, beaten in Cleveland, and struck by hatchet in the District of Columbia. "Crimes against people experiencing homelessness such as documented above are rightly understood to be hate crimes, and accordingly should be classified as such for purposes of hate crime data collection and for enhanced penalties at sentencing," said NCH Executive Director Michael Stoops.

NCH enthusiastically endorsed the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act and companion legislation approved earlier this year by the U.S. House of Representatives. However, NCH urged Congress to use the bill as the vehicle for adding homeless people to federal hate crimes laws, saying that there was "no substantive rationale why their addition can not be accomplished" through this legislation.

NCH's full statement is available for viewing and download [here](#).

### **National Housing Trust Fund**

Efforts continue to identify funding streams to capitalize the National Housing Trust Fund. The House Financial Services Committee recently held a hearing on H.R. 3068 the TARP for Main Street Act of 2009. The bill, introduced by Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-MA), would provide \$1 billion to the National Housing Trust Fund from dividends paid to government by institutions who received money under the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). In addition the bill also supplies a third round of Neighborhood Stabilizations Program (NSP) funding as well as funds for mortgage relief for homeowners who have lost their jobs; and funds to stabilize troubled or foreclosed multifamily properties.

### **Quarterly Public Policy Conference Call**

The National Coalition for the Homeless hosted its 3rd Quarterly Public Policy Conference Call with the grassroots on July 8, 2009. The call featured two guest speakers -- Catherine Bendor, Legal Director for the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), and Fred Karnas, Jr., Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and former Executive Director of NCH.

Ms. Bendor reviewed for participants new federal tenant protections that were passed as a part of the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act. The tenant protections assist renters whose rental property is foreclosed, who through no fault of their own are often suddenly without housing. The new protections provide tenants with the right to at least a 90 day notice before they can be forced to vacate the premises. If the tenant has a bona fide lease they may stay up to the end of their lease. These protections are the minimal protections that each tenant is federally granted. They do not over-ride state protections that go beyond the federal minimum.

Ms. Bendor pointed out the importance of educating people on the new protections. While NLCHP and others are working to educate the lending community and the various regulatory entities about the new provisions, she encouraged callers to educate tenants and landlords in their communities. She then pointed to various resources online for more information, including materials posted at [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org).

Mr. Karnas offered a presentation about steps HUD is taking to implement the HEARTH Act, legislation recently passed by Congress to reauthorize the HUD McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs. Among its activities, HUD is

convening by-invitation focus groups in various regions of the country to gather views from public authorities, providers, and advocates. Organizations and individuals are also invited to send comments directly to HUD. Finally, Mr. Karnas signaled that draft regulations would be published for public comment.

Participants on the call encouraged HUD to identify concrete steps for gathering views from people experiencing homelessness and formerly homeless people. They also suggested that HUD implement additional steps such as inviting online comments, to gather views from members of the public, particularly those not being invited to attend or able to attend a regional focus group.

NCH's next quarterly public policy conference call with the field is set for October 14, 2009, 4:00 pm Eastern time. Please mark your calendars.

### **NCH Welcomes New Interns**

We are pleased to introduce the newest members of our team.

Intern Diego Fernandez attends Davidson College, where he majors in political science. Diego came to NCH after hearing of the positive experience of a previous intern. Diego will focus on reaching out to homeless victims of hate crimes, and on networking with other DC-based advocacy organizations. In his spare time, he enjoys reading and the outdoors.

Intern Samantha Hordes is a second year business major at American University. She was placed at NCH through the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism. For fun, she likes to volunteer and go to the movies.

### **HUD Releases '08 Data on Homelessness**



The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has just released its 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). This report includes point-in-time count data from January 2008 and twelve months of shelter use data in over 200 communities.

To read this report – the first since the increase in unemployment began in Spring 2007 – click [here](#).

### **Thank You from NCH**

We would like to thank the following recent contributors:

Ellen Bogolub  
KuWanda Brathwaite  
Debra Cronmiller  
Neil Friedman  
Good Samaritan Ministries  
Carmen Josephine Hurtado  
James Griffy



Paul Kohler  
Stacy Lynch  
Becca Mudge  
Plasmanet, Inc.  
Edward James Sass  
Karla Weigold

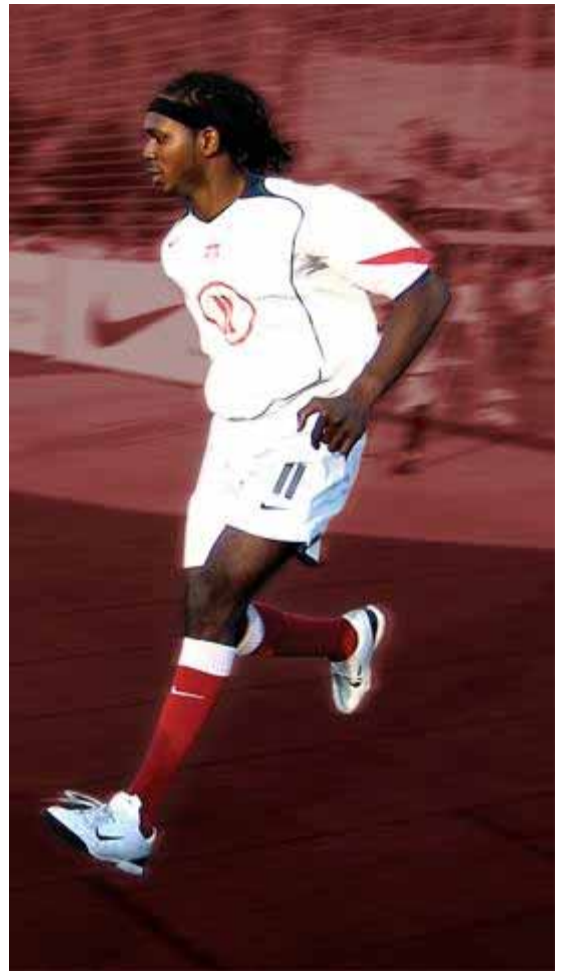
## Street Soccer USA Cup to be Held July 31-August 2

Thanks to the Ted Leonsis Foundation, Mark Ein's Washington Kastles, national homeless services provider HELP USA, and NIKE, the Street Soccer USA Cup will once again be held in Washington DC this July 31-August 2. NCH will co-host this event.

The Street Soccer USA Cup is a unique sports for social change event in the United States featuring homeless youth and adults, male and female from 16 cities across the country where they participate in local programs.

The local programs focus on setting goals on and off the field and connecting players to job training, education, and other specialized programs. During the Street Soccer USA Cup, 16 teams representing a variety of agencies (grassroots, city wide, and national homeless service providers) from cities including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Sacramento, Austin, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. to name a few, will compete for the Street Soccer USA Championship in fast-paced, 4 versus 4 street soccer action.

Across the country, SSUSA programs works with homeless youth and adults, building community, fostering a sense of belonging and accountability, and setting goals for a better future with the participants – all through the positive power of sports. Each year, the best players/ambassadors at the Street Soccer USA Cup are chosen to the US National Street Soccer Team and travel to the Homeless World Cup, which this year will be held in Milan, Italy in September. Since 2005, 28 of our 32 National Team alumni have moved off and stayed off the street and stay off the street since being part of SSUSA. And to date, over seventy-five percent of the participants change their lives for the better including securing full-time jobs, long-term housing, and freedom from addiction and mental health afflictions.



### More Blogs on Homelessness

Brian Davis, Vice President of NCH's Board of Directors and Executive Director of the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), has pointed us to two more great

blogs:

[clevelandhomeless](#): NEOCH's forum on poverty and homelessness in Cleveland.

[End Homelessness](#): The blog of Boston-based grad student and experienced service provider Shannon Moriarty.

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