

NCH . NEWS . . .

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Hello,

This is the November/December issue of NCH News.

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In this issue:

1. Bumfights Lives On: A Look at the Newest Installment in the Film Series
2. CBS' 60 Minutes Searches for Answers in "Bumhunting"
3. A Vile Teen Fad: Beating the Homeless
4. Violence against Homeless Persons: What's Your Stand?
5. Hate Crimes Ad
6. Russia Wins Homeless World Cup
7. NCH on the Road
8. NCH Announcements
9. National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day
10. Calendar of Events

Bumfights Lives On: A Look at the Newest Installment in the Film Series''

Meredith Koch, NCH Staff

In his October 1st CBS *60 Minutes* piece, Ed Bradley attacked the creator of the Bumfights film series. Yet, despite lawsuits and public outrage like that from *60 Minutes*, the film series continues to thrive. In the last six years, the National Coalition for the Homeless has witnessed a significant increase in violent attacks on homeless people, one fourth of which resulted in death. The age group primarily responsible for these crimes on America's homeless population is teenagers. These teens cite no motive for executing these brutal offenses, other than doing it for "fun." This purposeless violence is supported in the continuation of the video series titled *Bum Fights*. These videos feature homeless people who are bribed with alcohol or false promises of money if they participate in dangerous acts and are filmed while doing so. Although *Bum Fights* is not sold in major retail stores, it is still promoted by individual mom and pop shops and websites. *Bum Fights* has now sold over 300,000 copies in the last five years, and these videos will continue to inspire teens to kill or harm homeless people until they are eliminated entirely.

Even after much criticism received on these films, the producers created a fourth *Bum Fights* video in 2006. Participants in an earlier *Bum Fights* video had already hit the filmmakers with a civil lawsuit in San Diego in 2003. Therefore, the fourth edition is not as concentrated on the homeless population, but continues to exploit individuals. Most scenes portrayed teenagers partaking in harmful acts to themselves, with the exception of intermittent glimpses of homeless people. Throughout the movie, teenage boys light themselves on fire or jump off highly elevated surfaces, usually under the influence of drugs or alcohol. These images of inane violence climax in a scene depicting a homeless man walking around the street exposing his self. While the film focuses less on the homeless, it fails to end its repeated glorification of heartbreaking images.

The video provides no rationale as to why these boys are attacking themselves or others. The film's only attempts to discredit
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the images comes through the opening statement that the people in the video are stupid, and that the producers do not condone such behavior. Still, the most disheartening realization of it all is that the people involved in *Bum Fights* deem their actions as being entertaining. They are neither avid hate activists nor were they involved in past discriminatory violence. They are simply kids looking for the thrill, and their emphasis is on the most vulnerable of people. The question now is: why? After four films we are left to wonder when the public will cease to be entertained by the degradation of human beings.

CBS' 60 Minutes Searches for Answers in "Bumhunting"

Jessica Schuler, NCH Staff

Homeless advocates have long been asking for some national recognition of the horrors of violence targeted against homeless individuals. On October 1st, their request was answered when CBS' *60 minutes* program aired a segment entitled "Bumhunting".

The program centered on the rising number of teens involved in acts of violence toward homeless persons. Included in the piece is an interview by the late *60 Minutes* correspondent, Ed Bradley, with Jeffrey Spurgeon, one of four teenage boys convicted in the murder of Michael Roberts in 2005. Spurgeon, along with three friends, viciously attacked Roberts over several hours, returning to the scene of the crime three times. Roberts later died from the injuries he sustained. Spurgeon is currently serving a 35 year term in a Florida correctional facility.

Incidents such as that in Fort Lauderdale leave bystanders wondering why these increases are happening. Has America become so desensitized to the plight of our homeless that we feel no guilt at attacking them? The "Bumhunting" segment probed deeper into America's growing detachment. One undeniable connection lies in the Bum fights chain. The film series is the brainchild of producer Ryan McPherson, who has since sold the rights. The series, which just released its fourth installment, portray homeless men and women forced to do stupid and harmful pranks in exchange for money or alcohol. In the Bradley interview, taped from the facility where he is serving his 35 year sentence, Spurgeon admits that he and his friends watched the videos all the time, and loved to "mock what they saw". The day of Roberts' death the foursome were doing just that, with tragic results.

The segment's airing is a small but important step for homeless persons and advocates. Through continued press we can work to raise awareness and end the perpetual dehumanization of homeless individuals. Recognition like that raised by *Sixty Minutes* sends the message that violence against homeless individuals will no longer be tolerated.

A Vile Teen Fad: Beating the Homeless

Michael Stoops and Michael Levin

Across the nation, America's homeless are under attack - literally. They are hunted down during youthful rites of passage by roving packs of males armed with prejudice and tools of torture.

The number of violent incidents against our country's most vulnerable members has risen dramatically this year, with 16 murders in the first nine months so far. One homeless man was set ablaze in his wheelchair in Spokane, Wash.; another man was beaten with [baseball bats](#) in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; a homeless woman was drowned by two young men who rolled her into Tennessee's Cumberland River while she slept.

The hate behind this brutality is not fostered in rural Klan rallies or overseas terrorist camps, but in [high school](#) locker rooms and suburban living rooms. While [homeless people](#) have often been stereotyped as worthless, depraved, and disposable, prejudice now has a potent new ally: "bum rushing" videos.

This twisted fad has inspired some youths to kill for the "fun" of emulating what they see on a video screen. One group of teens inspired by these videos murdered Michael Roberts, a frail homeless man who succumbed after being relentlessly pummeled by nail-

studded two-by-fours and a log in Holly Hill, Fla. Teens buy and trade hundreds of thousands of these videos, making their producers rich. They also film their own assaults, broadcasting them online.

In the first nine months of 2006, 36 of 58 known homeless attackers were teens ages 14 to 19. Such violence seems to be correlated with the rise of bum videos. The number of reported incidents in 2003 nearly doubled, jumping from 36 reported attacks in 2002 to 70 in 2003. The number of nonlethal attacks reached 77 through the end of this September.

In Calgary, Alberta, youths filmed themselves beating and urinating on a homeless man, and screaming out "bum fights!" In Los Angeles, a youth admitted that he, too, was inspired to kill a homeless man with an aluminum [baseball bat](#) after viewing a video.

Perhaps most disturbing is not the media's influence on violence and prejudice, but the nation's almost casual acceptance of this violence and the images that derive from it.

If any other minority group reported hate- crime homicide numbers this high there would be a national outcry for justice. A comparison by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, and the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), found that from 1999 to 2005 there were 167 homeless homicides by domiciled attackers. The number of these killings is more than double the number of all other officially tabulated hate- crime homicides combined. The glaring disparity underscores the case for action. But how do we act?

We need to enhance data collection by law enforcement and improve outreach to the homeless community. Homelessness must be added to vulnerable-victim laws and hate-crime legislation.

Officials should work to raise community awareness so neighbors can help eradicate homelessness altogether, not just remove it from their own line of vision. Community education efforts should model the NCH's Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau. The Bureau is made up of of current and former homeless people who give talks to break stereotypes. This year, this panel has made more than 300 appearances, speaking to more than 17,000 people, mostly youths.

Their work is leading the way to stop the dehumanization of those without homes. Without further effort, violence against the homeless will continue. The burden falls on all our shoulders to end homelessness. Until the day when all Americans are housed, the least we can do is ensure their safety.

• *Michael Stoops is acting executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington. Brian Levin is director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino.*

Violence against Homeless Persons: What's Your Stand?

NCH has been conducting a survey on hate crimes and violence to question the public on their view of violence against the homeless. Below we have included a preview of our preliminary findings. NCH will be releasing an analysis of the survey's results after its completion. If you have yet to take the survey or want to find out more, please visit our website at www.nationalhomeless.org.

What is the best solution to the growing problem of violence against homeless persons?

	Response Total
Provide more round-the-clock shelters	67
Add homelessness to the state hate crimes statute	101
Provide more affordable housing for all people	258
Create stiffer penalties for anyone convicted of assaulting a homeless person	66
Set up local Faces of Homelessness Speakers	
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Teenagers convicted of unprovoked beatings of homeless persons should face adult penalties.

	Response Total
Strongly agree	318
Agree somewhat	239
Disagree somewhat	78
Strongly disagree	30
No opinion	19

Nationwide attacks on homeless persons nearly doubled from 1999 to 2005. To what do you attribute this rise in attacks?

	Response Total
Boredom (crime of opportunity with a belief that no consequence would follow)	385
Copycat crime motivated by news and/or video of similar incidences	203
Politically or socially motivated hate crime	310
Racially motivated action	142
Other (please specify)	187

Would you support efforts by the National Coalition for the Homeless to add homelessness to the hate crimes statute in your state in order to create stronger penalties for those convicted of violence against homeless persons?

	Response Total
Yes	512
No	46
Maybe (please explain)	108

Hate Crimes Ad

In the Last 8 years, Over 500 Homeless Men, Women and Children Have Been Attacked

Victims range from 4 months to 84 years old.

58% of the perpetrators were ages 13–19.

WHAT CAN WE DO? We need to educate lawmakers, advocates, and the general public on the problem of violence against homeless persons. Your support will help the National Coalition for the Homeless take a stand against violence!

Please become a member of NCH by sending in your tax-deductible contribution today!

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Russia Wins Homeless World Cup

Russia has won the Cape Town 2006 Homeless World Cup, the international street soccer tournament changing lives.

Russia beat newcomers Kazakhstan in the finals yesterday (Sunday) by one goal to nil in front of packed crowds at the Grand Parade.

Speaking at the press conference yesterday morning, Russia's Captain Shelaevskiy Viatcheslav said, "One of my strongest dreams has been realised. Kazakhstan are our good neighbours and good friends. I will never forget these days. Our main goal when we get home is the creation of a street soccer league. Football helped save me. I've made friends and if anything happens to me, I now have friends to help me."

Kazakhstan's Captain, Kalikov Yergali said: "I am very glad to have participated in this championship, especially in Africa. The venue for the Homeless World Cup gives us huge satisfaction. We are very impressed with the city of Cape Town. Russia are our brothers. Many thanks to sport that unites classes and people."

Mel Young, President and Co-founder Homeless World Cup, praised the players for their spirit at the tournament: "Congratulations to Russia, winners of the 4th Homeless World Cup in Cape Town. Each and every player here stands proud, stands triumphant. You have represented your country with honour. You are all fantastic. Congratulations on a great tournament."

Mr. Adolf Ogi, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace, sent his congratulations to the organisers and the hosts of the Cape Town 2006 Homeless World Cup:

"The Homeless World Cup, especially through its capacity to attract media attention, is an outstanding example of how the positive potential of sport can play a vital role in promoting health, education, development and peace. Like many other events, projects and initiatives, which take place all over the world without being noticed by the broad public, the Homeless World Cup uses sport as an innovative instrument to build bridges between people, to overcome cultural differences and to spread an atmosphere of tolerance."

Mr. Ogi expressed hope that, in view to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the event would inspire all stakeholders in South Africa to initiate and further support projects using sport as a tool for development and peace.

In addition to the Homeless World Cup won by Russia:

Each player received a medal for participating in the Homeless World Cup, uniting with 48 nations to represent their country, light up Cape Town, South Africa setting an example for 2010.

For more information please log on to www.homelessworldcup.org.

NCH on the Road

Stay up to date on NCH's upcoming speaking events throughout the county

Speakers' Bureau Events

The Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau is a program of the National Coalition for the Homeless that is comprised of people who are or have been homeless and works to educate the public about homelessness and what can be done to end it.

November

- **Nov 2nd** Washington College in Chestertown, MD
- **Nov 6th** University of Tampa in Tampa Bay, FL
- **Nov 8th** Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, MA
- **Nov 8th** Merrimack College in North Andover, MA
- **Nov 8th** University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA
- **Nov. 8th** Washburn University in Topeka, KS
- **Nov 9th** UMASS Boston in Boston, MA
- **Nov 9th** Suffolk University in Boston, MA
- **Nov 9th** UCONN in Storrs, CT
- **Nov 12th** University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, IN
- **Nov 12th** Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA
- **Nov 13th** Villanova University in Villanova, PA
- **Nov 14th** Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, MI
- **Nov. 14** Citrus County, FL
- **Nov 15th** DeSales University in Center Valley, PA
- **Nov 15th** Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT
- **Nov 16th** Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, PA
- **Nov 16th** Trinity College in Hartford, CT
- **Nov 16th** Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA
- **Nov 17th** Harwich High School in Harwich, MA
- **Nov 27th** University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, PA

In 2005 we spoke to over 280 groups, 43 states and nearly 17,000 people. If you are interested in bringing our Faces of Homelessness Panel to your school, please contact Michael O'Neill, Speakers' Bureau Coordinator, at moneill@nationalhomeless.org.

Other Speaking Events

- **Nov. 6-7** National Network on Tobacco Prevention & Poverty, Madison, WI
- **Nov. 9** Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence, KS: community meetings and a social work class
- **Nov. 12** Food Not Bombs, Orlando, FL: Litigation against the recently enacted "no feeding" the homeless law
- **Nov. 13** Univ. of Fla. Law School: Hate crimes/violence against homeless people
- **Nov. 15** Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, Cincinnati, OH: 10th anniversary of the "passing" of buddy gray, a founding board member of NCH.
- **Nov 16-17** Oneonta, NY
- **Dec. 8** Jackson, MS: State wide Homelessness Conference

NCH Announcements

1. NCH's Faces of Homelessness video is now available on DVD. The film costs 15 dollars. Ordering information is available at our website.
2. In January the NCH Newsletter will be switching to an entirely electronic format. Please make sure your e-mail address is up to date with our records if you wish to continue receiving the newsletter.
3. On Thursday, December 21st The National Coalition for the Homeless is sponsoring National Homeless Person's Memorial Day. NCH will be holding a candlelight vigil in McPherson Sq. in Washington, DC and encourages cities around the country to hold similar memorial services. Please see our ad in this month's newsletter for more information.
4. [Pledge an Hour – Volunteer to repair the world](#)
 - **Poverty. Hunger. Violence. Illiteracy.** There are many problems facing our community and the world today. And, a Jews, it is our responsibility to pursue justice, and to make a difference when and where we can.
 - Because we share these Jewish values of *tzedek* and *tikkun olam*, National Coalition for the Homeless is partnering up with Hillel to launch the Pledge an Hour campaign. Our goal is to get **250,000 service hours pledged by November 30. Will you help us make a difference?**
 - Visit www.pledgeanhour.org to Donate!

National Homeless Person' Memorial Day

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.

Calendar of Events

December 6-8, 2006:

- National Rural Housing Conference 2006. Washington DC. More information about the conference can be found at <http://www.ruralhome.org/Conf2006/index.htm>.

Dec. 21, National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

- National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day: Co-sponsored by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council.

For more information: www.nationalhomeless.org/getinvolved/projects/memorial.

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