

NCH . NEWS . . .

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NCH News -- June 2008

This is the June issue of NCH News.

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Tax Day and the Universal Living Wage By Richard R. Troxell, NCH Board of Directors

On average, gasoline is \$3.58 per gallon nationwide. Oil now fluctuates around \$118.00 a barrel. COSTCO is rationing rice and flour to its customers. The World Food Organization busted its own budget when it was forced to add 100 million dollars to its budget just to meet the escalated world poverty food demand since last year.

Home foreclosures are up 16% over this time last year. 38 % of those are affecting tenants and causing people to become homeless.

For the seventh year in a row, on April 15, 2008, Tax Day, House the Homeless and the National Coalition for the Homeless again promoted the Universal Living Wage. The ULW formula uses existing government guidelines to fix the federal minimum wage. It advances the idea that anyone working 40 hours in a week should be able to afford basic food, clothing, and shelter (including utilities) wherever that work is done throughout the U.S.

Since 2001, the ULW Campaign has held education demonstrations outside of US Post Offices all across America. We continue to distribute flyers that declare that if employers paid fair living wages, we could reduce our tax burden by reducing dependence upon food stamps, TANF, general assistance and the Earned Income Tax Credit. This is not to suggest doing away with these programs but rather to return them to their original safety net role of temporary transitional help.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, 3.5 million people will again experience homelessness this year. The ULW implemented over a ten year period will conservatively end economic homelessness for 1 million minimum wage workers and prevent economic homelessness for all 10.1 million minimum wage workers . Join the Movement. See what all the excitement is about: www.UniversallivingWage.org

Speaker Spotlight: Robin Denegal



Interviewed by Sarah Rosa, NCH Homeless Challenge Project Director

Robin Denegal, 47, has been part of NCH's Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau for three years. She is originally from Washington, DC, where she currently resides. While in the Air Force she lived in Texas, Mississippi, and Nevada; and has briefly lived in Maryland and Virginia.

In her spare time, Robin enjoys reading, writing, going to the movies and playing Scrabble. She especially likes to read romances, autobiographies and biographies -- those that "tell the story of how a person became famous"; true and inspirational stories. Robin also keeps a journal, writing about her different life experiences.

Her goals are to become a published writer and to be married.

Robin says she experienced homelessness for exactly 9 years, 6 months, and 13 days. It was another speaker, Elaine, who referred Robin to the Speakers' Bureau. Prior to becoming a speaker, Robin was sharing her story of being homeless on her own to such groups at schools, and even congress. She got involved with the Speakers' Bureau after attending a recruitment meeting. "I enjoy telling my story to an audience." Robin said in the hopes that they "not go through the same path I went through."

NCH on the Road
Upcoming Speaking Engagements

May 23rd
United Methodist Student Forum
United Methodist Church
Washington, DC

May 27th
Iona College
The Pilgrimage
Washington, DC

May 27th
Lincoln School
Youth Services Opportunities Project
Washington, DC

June 2nd
1st Presbyterian Church of Tuscaloosa
The Pilgrimage
Washington, DC

June 3rd
AVODAH: Jewish Service Corps

Washington, DC

June 4th
Etgar 36
Washington, DC

June 6th
Summerville Presbyterian Church
The Pilgrimage
Washington, DC

June 10th
Lexington Presbyterian Church
The Pilgrimage
Washington, DC

June 11th
First United Methodist Church of Mason City
United Methodist Church
Washington, DC

June 11th
University Presbyterian Church of Chapel Hill

Picture the Homeless Seeks Summer Intern

The Rental Subsidies Committee at Picture the Homeless is looking for a part-time intern to build support for the committee's demands. We will hold a series of direct actions, public education and media activities this summer to mobilize support for the re-evaluation of Mayor Bloomberg's Five Year Plan to reduce homelessness. The intern will be involved in intensive outreach, base building and mobilization activities.

The position is for a part-time high-school-age youth organizer with an interest in social justice. Effective communication and computer skills, schedule flexibility, and willingness to travel through the 5 boroughs are all critical to the success of this position. Bilingual English-Spanish is a major plus. Picture The Homeless is an Equal Opportunity Employer: people of color, LGBT youth, and homeless or formerly homeless people are encouraged to apply.

How to Apply: mail, email or fax cover letter with resume and names/affiliation of three references. Do not phone with inquiries!

Now Available: My Own Four Walls 2008 DVD

HEAR US, Inc. has just released an expanded version of their DVD My Own Four Walls. The DVD contains short documentaries depicting youths' experiences of rural homelessness.

Suitable for a wide variety of audiences, this expanded version of the DVD includes one new film and educational guides. The original My Own Four Walls received the 2007 Outstanding Media Award from the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

Visit the HEAR US Website for price and purchase information.

To NCH: A Letter of Appreciation

By Ed Bell, NCH Board of Directors

Back in the early ninties, I had last saw my grandmother Hazel Brown in a emergency shelter in Washington D.C. The name of the shelter was the House of Ruth. My grandmother had left the city of Detroit and went to kive with family in D.C. I was very young at the time and did not know this. I attendned a community symposium while visiting Washington, my mother put me in contact with my grandmother's family. They took me to see my grandmother. She remembered me despite her mental challenges. She brought me flowers and a card to my hotel room. Needless to say it was a tear jerking reunion.

Ten years passed and we did not hear from grandma, not a word. I became very concerned because no one in the family had heard from her or heard anything pertaining to her. I was pastoring a church and told my congregation that I must go and find out if she is still living. I returned back to Washington D.C. with my wife and stayed at the Holiday Inn. I contacted Social Security to see if she was still living. I got no response from them. Then I remembered that she was in a shelter and was referred to NCH. I called the office and spoke with Micheal Stoops. I shared some information with him concerning grandmas mental challenges. He referred me to I believe St. Elizabeth's hospital. I called there and immediately they recognized my grandmother's name. They directed me to a group home. Once I called the group home they put my grandmother on the phone. I said grandma, this is Ike (nickname), do you remember me? She said how could I forget you. The emotional response is still beyond words. I said I am coming to visit you right now. My wife and I immediately took a cab and went to the group home (I forget the name).

When we arrived, I saw my grandmother, we hugged embraced, and kissed. It seemed to have shortened the time we had been apart. We talked and I informed her of all the family developments, marriages, her grandchildren, great, and great great grandchildren. We talked about all the good times we had together and the many delicious meals she made, especially, the oatmeal at breakfast. It was the best in the world.

The next year I took her great grandchildren and great great grand children to see her. We had a great time together and it was the first time they saw their grandmother also. The following year I visited grandma just to get some oatmeal. Grandma 85 years ols, walked to the store and bought a box of quaker oatmeal, came back to the home and cooked it for me, a whole pot of it. It was just as good as it always was!!

A few months later we received a call that grandma was in the hospital. We returned to Washington to see her in the hospital. Grandma died shortly thereafter while in the hospital.

While visiting my mother and sister in New York, I told my mother I wanted to visit with grandma's family whom we had never met in our lives. They currently live in Atlanta and Valdosta Georgia. My wife and I are flying to Atlanta to meet them on May 28th. We have never met this part of the family. The journey continues on thanks to NCH and others.

This is why I have a longing to give back to NCH. I cannot put into words the experiences that my family and I have had with the help of NCH. It is like a story of my roots. I will gladly update you after my trip to Atlanta. I do know they are making big plans for our arrival. Stay tuned and thank you.

Open Letter to Philip Mangano

Open letter to: Philip Mangano Ex Director US Interagency Council on Homelessness,

The Ten Year Plans coming out of American cities and being promoted by the federal government in an effort to end "chronic" homelessness cannot do so without addressing serious economic concerns of people experiencing homelessness.

Obviously, there are many aspects to homelessness. However, on one level we can divide homelessness into two distinct economic categories: those who work and those who are unable to work. Sustainable responses to these economic categories can be

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characterized as establishing "Livable Incomes."

Presently, there are over one million minimum wage workers experiencing homelessness on an annual basis. Although working a full time minimum wage job, a person cannot afford basic rental housing throughout urban America. This is true even with the pending minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour by July of 2009. Historically, Congress has embraced the practice of only increasing the minimum wage to a level that takes the American worker less than the economic distance necessary to climb out of poverty. The current minimum wage structure does not elevate the minimum wage worker to a level where they can afford basic housing and the other core necessities of life. Decidedly, the current Congressional approach only ensures their position in the ranks of America's homeless population. At the same time, while these individuals meet the definition of "chronic" homelessness with four or more instances of homelessness over a three year period, none of America's 10 year plans provide a solution to this problem.

House the Homeless, Inc. in Austin, Texas conducted a survey in December 2007 of 625 people experiencing homelessness. Astonishingly, 38% indicated that they were currently working, yet still homeless. Upon releasing the survey results (margin of error of 3.98%) we were notified that in Atlanta, Georgia, 45% of their homeless population were working at some point during the week. From Fredericksburg, VA, we learned that 54% were working "at significant jobs." In Austin, we also posed the question: "Would you work a 40 hour week job if you were sure it would pay you enough for basic food, clothing and shelter [a living wage]?" The resounding affirmative response was that 90.7 % said they would work 40 hours for a living wage. Apparently, the work ethic is there but the wage is not.

Then there is the situation affecting people who cannot work, but who in 2008 will receive a government stipend in the form of Supplemental Security Income, SSI, in the amount of \$637.00 throughout the nation. This is about half of the federal minimum wage and again wholly inadequate to sustain independent living without being further heavily subsidized. Securing housing in Washington, DC, Boston, MA or Santa Cruz, CA etc. in the general housing market with an annual income of less than \$14,000 (or even half that per year) is not possible.

In order to stimulate the economy, specifically the housing industry, and to end "chronic homelessness" for a significant portion of the nation's homeless community, we must:

1) establish the principle/formula that by using existing government guidelines including the HUD Section 8 formula and the HUD Standard that no one should pay more than 30% of their income on housing, and in so doing, we ensure that anyone found to be disabled by the federal government will receive a monthly stipend, (SSI), that enables them to afford basic food, clothing, shelter (including utilities) wherever that person lives throughout the United States.

2) establish the principle/formula that by using existing government guidelines, including the HUD Section 8 formula and the HUD Standard that no one should pay more than 30% of their income on housing, we can permanently fix the federal minimum wage and ensure that anyone working 40 hours in a week will be able to afford basic food, clothing, shelter (including utilities) wherever that work is done throughout the United States. See www.UniversalLivingWage.org to read support statistics, the mathematical formula and the hardest asked and answered questions found in our Facts and Myths Section.

By indexing to the local cost of housing, we ensure affordable housing throughout the US. This simple approach mirrors US Military pay practices (Base Housing Allowance).

We strongly encourage the Interagency Council on Homelessness to adopt our resolution and send the United States Congress and the US Department of HUD the clear message that our focus on homelessness 1) must be for all those experiencing homelessness not just "chronic" individuals, and 2) we must fix the Supplemental Security Insurance program and the Federal Minimum Wage ensuring that all participants (workers and those unable to work) can afford basic, food, clothing, and shelter (including utilities) throughout the United States.

Sincerely,

Richard R. Troxell

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5/15/2009

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