

NCH . NEWS . . .

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NCH News - October

This is the October issue of NCH News.

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It's Homeless Out Tonight By David Quammen



I spend a lot of time thinking about the homeless in our country. In fact, that's about all I think about these days. One reason is that's what I am - homeless. It's the second time I've been homeless in the last ten years.

A lot of people wouldn't agree with me that I'm homeless. I don't fit the definition some have created and others believe. I've got a roof over my head and they only count those who are on the street.

I fit the definition better the first time I was homeless. I lived in my van then. It was a van conversion, so some didn't look at me as being exactly homeless. I had a roof over my head.

LeRoy wouldn't agree that I'm homeless. He appreciated the cold shower, clean pants, shirt, socks & underwear I gave him. He also
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appreciated the job I got for him even though he didn't keep it long. He eats out of garbage cans a lot. He's homeless-on-the-street.

Quent doesn't think I'm homeless. I've got a regular place to stay. He goes from his folk's house to the street or a friends place, mostly the streets. He comes around for cigarettes and keeps asking to cut the grass for a few bucks. He's thirty-one and would like a steady job, but he needs some nurturing to break a few old habits. He's homeless-with-a-roof-now-and-then.

Abraham probably would agree that I'm homeless. He's homeless like me - he's got a roof over his head. He's an elder in the Ministry of Help around the corner. He helps a lot of people spiritually and otherly. He and I moved Grace's boxes to a church basement when she was facing being homeless-on-the-street, rather than homeless-with-a-roof. Right now, she's homeless-with-a-roof-for-awhile.

Karen made the arrangements with the church where we stored Grace's boxes. She's helping the church with the transition of integration. She's homeless-with-a-roof.

Most Americans don't look at people who are homeless-with-a-roof as being homeless at all. I mean, it's not like being homeless-on-the-street. But then, they count the homeless-in-a-shelter the same as they count the homeless-on-the-street. Or the homeless-in-a-tent. Or the homeless-on-a-bench.

Most of us who are homeless-with-a-roof exist there on the wings of prayer, subject to the whims of chance or the fancy or others. It's tenuous, at best. Yet even with this precarious hold on life, the homeless-with-a-roof fall in a crack that few even attempt to count. In fact, the latest census admittedly undercounted the homeless-on-the-street but the government has decided to let false information stand.

Websters' Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary doesn't even have a definition of homeless that fits any of the above. Mr. Stephen J. Perrault of Merriam-Webster Inc. told me in a letter that ". . . you have misunderstood our treatment of this term (homeless) . . .". He went on to say "Derivative words whose meanings are considered self-explanatory are often treated as undefined run-ons in our dictionaries as a way of saving space."

Yet they took four lines in their ninth edition to define the derivative homeless-at home, using such words as relaxed and comfortable, at ease, in harmony with the surroundings and on familiar grounds. He tells me that the tenth edition published this past May now defines homeless as having no home or permanent place of residence. After taking four lines to discuss an archaic use of the word that isn't even close, I would have expected a word that defines such a major problem in our country to at least be given equal space in their book.

He closed the letter saying "I hope that this explanation has cleared up your confusion about our treatment of homeless."

I wasn't confused and told him so. "My point, however, deals more with Mr. Mish's (Editor in Chief) opening paragraph of the (ninth edition) Preface: 'This dictionary is meant to serve the general public as its chief source of information about the words of our language. The school or college student, the office worker, the home user - all will find this Collegiate a reliable guide to understanding the English of our day and communicating in it.'"

The opening paragraph on the inside front cover of the dust jacket cites the sale of more than 11,000,000 hardcover copies of the Eighth Edition while it was in print, and it had the same definition as the ninth. No wonder we misunderstand the problem if such a reliable source only recently defined it the way we speak of it using the English of our day. Even at that, the definition is hardly adequate, given the magnitude of the problem and the consequence to millions of America's homeless.

Mr. Perrault really didn't have to tell me "If you look again, I think it will be quite clear to you that the definitions you've cited (in the ninth edition) are not definitions of homeless." I know that, Stephen J. I know it very well.

The various people who do such things estimate our homeless at anywhere from 600,000 to 3,000,000. I think it's more like seven to ten million, but then I look at homelessness differently. I count the homeless-with-a-roof with all the other undefined run-on's that may or may not be part of the English of our day.

However you define it, however you count it, it's homeless-out-tonight for millions of Americans. Until we change how we think of it and what we do about it, tomorrow night won't be any better.

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and what we do about it, tomorrow night won't be any better.

National Summit of Clinicians for Health Care Justice Oct. 23-24

Migrant Clinicians Network

Numerous clinical groups, including the Health Care for the Homeless Clinicians' Network, are co-sponsoring the National Summit of Clinicians for Health Care Justice, in Washington DC on October 23-24.

I hope that you will be able to participate, and that you will share this invitation with others at your agency, in your community and in your profession.

The list of speakers is quite amazing — several former surgeons general, leading academics and committed practitioners.

The website for the Summit is at <http://allclinicians.org/home.php>

Please register there on-line — cut-off date for discounted early registrations is September 15.

The RNC Through the Eyes of a Homeless Service Provider

By Rosemary Reger-Rumsie, Executive Director, Listening House



Listening House was, for the most part, a tranquil island last week. Two "community meetings" were held prior to the convention and LH designed a brochure of What to Expect and Available Services to help people get through the week. One of our guests had shown a LH board member his brochure when she served dinner at St. Matt's on the Westside - he told her it was "great that 'we' were considered in the planning." (Small gestures that mean a great deal to folks.) After the first meeting, one of the guests spoke up and said, "Thank you for holding this meeting; we were feeling left out as if no one wanted our opinion." Another guest asked police, "How much B.S. are your officers going to tolerate from protesters; after all, they'll be on our front porch!" A third person spoke to me Monday evening and said, "I hate it that they're (protesters) are doing this because the cops are going to think the homeless started it, and come down hard on us." I assured him the police were not considering the homeless as being part of property destruction etc.

The most anxious evening was Thursday night since many Mary Hall residents could view the stand-off from their windows. We chose to show a movie that night rather than news coverage because the news was too upsetting, especially since many law enforcement were stationed outside our door. There were two lock-downs during the week, after SPPD notified the staff of Dorothy Day that tear gas might be used in the area. They called to alert our two staffs so we could get folks inside our buildings.

Many of our guests watched the Anti-War march, and a handful marched with the protesters. None of our guests were caught up in the scary confrontations, though one walked into an area that had been gassed when he got off the bus on Monday afternoon.

There was a goodly amount of political discussions throughout the week between staff, volunteers and guests, and many, many guests read the newspaper and watched the news in the evening with us.

We're all glad it's over - September 5th put a new meaning to TGIF. I never believed our guests would be a problem for the convention, but rather that the convention would cause inconveniences to our guests. It did, but their philosophy was, "It'll be over by Friday. We were pleasantly surprised that the anxiety level among our folks was not high.

My singular complaint is that the SPPD and Secret Service were vehement about no bicycles in the area, and throughout the week staff witnessed many citizens riding bicycles in the neighborhood without sanction. I was glad for our extensive preparation, and for the relationship we share with police. We didn't have any surprises or situations we couldn't handle, and for the most part our guests did not suffer more than minor inconveniences.

NCH on the Road

Upcoming Speaking Engagements

September 16th Yeshiva University, New York
September 17th Etgar 36 at GW Hillel 23rd and H St, NW
September 21st Peace College at NCH
September 23rd Pilgrimage
September 24th NYLC
September 25th Drew University, Madison, NJ
September 25th Maret School at St Stephens Church 1525 Newton St, NW
September 29th Christopher Dock Mennonite High School at Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church 201 4th Street, SE
October 1st Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, MD
October 1st NYLC
October 2nd Archbishop Carroll High School
October 3rd Archbishop Carroll High School

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October 6th Peace College at NCH
October 7th Florida Coalition for the Homeless State Wide Conference Orlando, FL (panel)
October 8th Rockville High School in Rockville, MD
October 8th NYLC
October 10th St Camillus in Silver Spring, MD
October 10th Pilgrimage
October 11th Davidson College at NCH
October 14th Metropolitan Public Defender Inc in Portland, OR

National Organizations Launch “Five Fundamentals” Campaign

By Adam Gaeddert

An assembly of national organizations concerned with homelessness has launched the “Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness Campaign,” which challenges candidates for public office at all levels and branches of government to pledge to include the prevention of and end to homelessness among their public policy priorities.

Sponsors of the campaign include: Corporation for Supportive Housing, National AIDS Housing Coalition, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Center on Family Homelessness, National Coalition for the Homeless, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, National Low Income Housing Coalition, National Network for Youth, and National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness.

The campaign's success depends upon individuals and organizations concerned about homelessness challenging the candidates for public offices representing their geographic areas to endorse Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness. The Five Fundamentals is a consensus statement issued in late 2007 by social justice organizations to declare fundamental principles that must animate public policy in a nation without mass homelessness.

Campaign sponsors have prepared a tool kit to assist organizations and individuals in securing Five Fundamentals pledges from candidates for public offices. The tool kit includes the Five Fundamentals statement, a candidate pledge form, instructions for identifying candidates for public offices, and a sample letter, petition, action alert, and news release. The tool kit is available at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/fivefundamentals/index.html>.

For additional information about the Five Fundamentals to Prevent and End Homelessness Campaign, please contact Adam Gaeddert at agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org or 202.462.4822.

Job Opening: Nashville Homeless Power Project

NASHVILLE HOMELESS POWER PROJECT

www.homelesspower.org



SEARCH FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Send Cover Letter, Resume, References, and writing samples (grant applications preferred) to:

Tiffany Allen, Tiffany@HomelessPower.org, with Executive Director in the subject line.
Salary: \$35,000 plus benefits

The Nashville Homeless Power Project seeks an experienced community organizer to serve as Executive Director. Proven experience leading staff of community organizers, and member volunteers is required. Experience overseeing successful organizing campaigns, which have made political, economic, or policy change, benefiting people in poverty also required. Preference will be given to those with first hand experience living in poverty or homelessness and a proven commitment to the value that those directly affected by an injustice should lead the fight against it. This position requires a burning desire to eradicate poverty among wealth, and build a stable powerful organization of homeless and formerly homeless people to make change. A readiness to work long and irregular hours is expected.

The executive director will report directly to the board, and at least quarterly be required to show progress reports on goals laid out by the board.

Contributors for September 2008

NCH would like to thank the following contributors for the month of September 2008:

Jason Andrews
Martin Cook
Donald Reis
Gregory McBroom
Jannell Nelson
Barbara James
United Way of Central & Northeastern Connecticut
Plasmanet, Inc.
United States Soccer Federation Foundation
Fran Czajkowski
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Fran Czajkowski

Paula Lomazzi

Jemal Swoboda

Bill Casto

Bread and Roses Collective DBA Street News

Great Bridge Presbyterian Church

Kay Kirman

Hilton Hotels Corporation

Denver Homeless Voice

Norma Green, PhD

Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless

Coalition on Homelessness

Israel Bayer

Street Corner Media Foundation

Phil Pappas

Harold Handler

National Rural Housing Conference Dec. 3-5 **National Housing Assistance Council**

Please join the Housing Assistance Council at the

2008 National Rural Housing Conference:
Working for Change, Building our Future

Be Inspired as you learn innovative organizational and housing development strategies with other rural practitioners. This year's workshops will include special sessions on green housing development, rental housing preservation, and selfhelp housing.

Celebrate Our Work at the Rural Housing Awards Banquet as we honor those housing leaders who have created change in rural communities.

Change Our Future by contributing to the creation of a Rural Housing Platform that will be delivered to the incoming Administration.

WHEN:

December 3 - 5, 2008

Preconference activities begin December 2, 2008

WHERE:

Hyatt Regency Washington Hotel on Capitol Hill
Washington, DC

I hope you will be able to join us!

NCH Welcomes New Staff and Interns

Once again, NCH is joined by new staff and interns.

Adam Gaedert comes to NCH by way of the Mennonite Voluntary Service, and will be working on policy issues. Originally from Hutchinson, Kansas, his previous experience has been mostly in the area of direct service, volunteering in soup kitchens, tutoring low-income youth, and working construction in the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. A 2007 graduate of Bethel College, he plans to eventually seek a career in higher education.

Emily Roth is a freshman at American University, and intends to major in psychology. She is especially interested in the psychological and sociological aspects of homelessness, and hopes to contribute to NCH's study of hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness.

Erica Pedroza is a junior political science major at the University of Notre Dame. She will be taking part both in voter registration drives aimed at those experiencing homelessness, as well as in policy research. She would like to become a lobbyist for social justice advocacy organizations.

Also from the University of Notre Dame is Amanda Johnson, a sophomore sociology major. She'll be working in a variety of areas at NCH, and has much previous experience working in homeless shelters and service organizations. She would like to travel, possibly seeking work with an international non-governmental organization.

Kyle Boudreau, a junior political science major from the College of the Holy Cross, will (among other things) be writing narratives for NCH's hate crimes report. Having invested much of his time in direct service efforts such as food pantries, he decided to intern at NCH after seeing the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau. He plans to work for a nonprofit organization addressing problems of homelessness or hunger.

As always, we are pleased to host this promising new class of staff and interns.

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