



National Coalition for the Homeless Newsletter

NCH NEWS

March 11, 2010

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Make Homelessness Part of our
History, NOT Part of Our Future

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TODAY**

Tent Cities in America: A Pacific Coast Report

The National Coalition for the Homeless announces the first in a series of reports on the growing number of tent cities across the United States. The new report released today is focusing on west coast encampments. *Tent Cities in America: A Pacific Coast Report* looks at how current tent cities have emerged and operate on a daily basis, highlighting the community organizing efforts at work within these settlements and the growing need for affordable and accessible housing nationwide.

As the United States continues to react to the worst economy since the Great Depression, both leading and lagging indicators of this crisis continue to grow. Home foreclosures, unemployment, and the regional poverty rates continue to rise, as newly homeless families see a double digit increase.

44% of people experiencing homeless in America are unsheltered (USHUD 2009). A growing number of unsheltered Americans are congregating in tent cities for safety, community and as locations of last resort.

"Tent Cities are American's de facto waiting room for affordable and accessible housing. The idea of someone living in a tent in this country says little about the decisions made by those who dwell within and so much more about our nation's inability to adequately respond to our fellow residents in need." -Neil Donovan, National Coalition for the Homeless Executive Director.

This report is the first in a series of National Coalition for the Homeless publications that explore the tent city phenomenon. In future reports, NCH will profile homeless encampments nationwide and include a section on policy recommendations for local, regional and national policy and decision makers.

[Click HERE to read the report.](#)

National Announcements

Recognizing the Work of Organizations Helping Homeless Veterans

The Office of Intergovernmental Affairs' Homeless Veterans Program is seeking nominations for the Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Service for Homeless Veterans. Nominations are due by **April 17th**, click [here](#) to access the nominations forms.

GreatNonprofits is also recognizing organizations doing work with veterans experiencing homelessness, go to <http://greatnonprofits.org/veterans> by March 31st for more information or to vote for your favorite organization.

Department of Veterans Affairs' Announces Homeless Veterans Hotline

The (VA) has founded a National Call Center for Homeless Veterans hotline to ensure that homeless Veterans or Veterans at-risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. The hotline is intended to assist homeless Veterans and their families, VA Medical Centers, federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers and others in the community.

To be connected with a trained VA staff member call 1-877-4AID VET (877-424-3838). Or visit <http://www1.va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp> for more information.

Policy Updates

NCH Wants You to Help Shape the Federal Plan to End Homelessness

The National Coalition for the Homeless urges people experiencing homelessness, advocates and service providers to contribute to the development of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, by [submitting public comments](#) to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness or by voting for [NCH recommendations](#).

UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Releases Report on Mission to the US

The United Nations has released the final report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing's U.S. mission, making both broad and specific findings and recommendations about housing rights violations in

the United States. (the full report is available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/13session/A.HRC.13.20.Add.4_AEV.pdf)

The Rapporteur's report recommends, among other things:

- Increasing resources for public and affordable housing;
- Extending the Protecting Tenants At Foreclosure Act beyond its 2012 sunset;
- Making vacant properties available to housing organizations for the provision of affordable housing;
- Developing constructive alternatives to the criminalization of homelessness, and where adequate shelter is not available, homeless persons should be allowed to shelter themselves in public areas;
- Expanding the HUD definition of homelessness to include those living doubled up with others due to economic hardship;
- That Congress pass H.Res. 582 and devote increased resources to the Family Unification Voucher Program.

Upcoming Events

Upcoming Faces of Homelessness Presentations

Our Speakers' Bureau is working with lots of college students this Spring providing alternative Spring Breaks. To find out more information about when and where presentations are happening, please visit: [The Speakers' Bureau Gig Schedule](#).

If you are interested in attending any of these events, please contact Michael O'Neill, moneill@nationalhomeless.org.

NCH and DC Public Libraries Team Up to Tackle Homelessness

NCH has partnered with the DC Public Library and the Teens of Distinction program on a project to educate library patrons about the issues surrounding homelessness. A series of panel discussions is being held monthly at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in downtown Washington, DC, and the project will culminate in a month-long exhibit of portraits and interviews with homeless participants in the program. These portraits will also be displayed at the 2010 American Library Association Annual Conference to be held from June 24-29th at the Convention Center in DC.

NCH Speakers have been the key presenters in the issue panels being held in conjunction with this program. The following panels have been scheduled at the MLK Library:

December 14th, 2009	Veterans and Homelessness
January 11th, 2010	Mental Health and Homelessness
March 2nd, 2010	Gentrification and Homelessness
March 15th, 2010	Youth/GLBT Community and Homelessness
April 12th, 2010	Advocacy and Homelessness
May 10th, 2010	Hate Crimes/Criminalization of Homelessness

Partner News

Webinar Series for Nonprofit Leaders Launched

The National Human Services Assembly, a nonprofit association of the nation's leading human service and community development organizations, has announced a new series of webinars--Thursdays at Three: Knowledge for Nonprofit Sector Leaders.

The series is designed for local and national leaders of nonprofit human service and community development organizations. There are seven one-hour webinars scheduled thus far, with more to come. All sessions are free but space is limited.

The subject matter of Thursdays at Three ranges from operational (e.g., managing unemployment costs), to organizational (e.g., results based accountability) to programmatic knowledge (e.g., new insights on demographic trends and their implications for service delivery). A full description of the program can be found at <http://www.nationalassembly.org/documents/Webinars/LLTWebinar.pdf>.

We Are Just Unhoused, reprinted from the Toledo Streets

There has been an ever growing circle of people who are now using the word "unhoused" to describe our friends who are "homeless." It's just a dignity thing we choose to do.

As the usage has become more common, there is starting to be some controversy, even a little confusion as to the genus and meaning.

Last month former Republican County Commissioner, Maggie Thurber, was on WSPD criticizing the usage by the current County Commissioners when they passed the Homeless Protection Resolution.

And in these very pages one of our own good friends, Greg Peters, thought it was invented for "political correctness," and wrote "Call it what it is, homelessness – and it is growing worse."

We so agree with Greg. Do call it "homelessness" as this is the state people are in and it truly is getting worse.

Those of us who use "unhoused" feel the word "homeless" perpetuates an inaccurate negative stereotype. We feel "unhoused" more accurately describes the transitional state people are in.

But no matter what you call it, it sucks.

Thinking back when I was living on the streets, I never once considered me "homeless;" instead I preferred to refer to myself as "between joints" - a transitional state.

The premise of "unhoused" started when I was giving a talk to about 500 students at Central Catholic High School. As always, I started by asking the kids to identify the stereotypes of the "homeless".

While hearing their predictable descriptions, I wondered how many of these kids know a student who is mentally ill, so I asked. Hands went up. A student that drinks? That does drugs? That asks for money? That smells? With each question at least a handful of students raised their hands.

"So what is the difference? Yes, the students are housed, the homeless are unhoused."

The premise of "unhoused" advanced a week later after the success of our "1Matters - 1Votes" campaign prior to the 2008 presidential election. We personally took several hundred people to vote, but some did not want the "homeless" to vote certain they would all vote for Obama.

One man actually wrote the following in a Toledo Blade letter to the editor.

"THE vast majority of the homeless have mental issues that I believe would impair their ability to make an informed and intelligent decision on the issues and candidates to vote for." - Toledo Blade Letter to the Editor, Oct 2nd, 2008.

First I must ask, what the hell IS an informed and intelligent decision on the issues and candidates to vote for? Every time you vote everyone on the opposing platform deems you uninformed and ignorant, eh?

I will refrain here from slicing and dicing the implications inherent in his letter and provide part of my response printed as a Saturday Op - Ed Column in the same paper:

"The last time we heard this logic it was directed at women and blacks to prevent them from voting. Now it's about the homeless, those I prefer to call more accurately the "unhoused."

"Instead of outrage, people broke into group discussions to judge the merits of the writer's premise. People were not discussing those who have housing with the same "mental issues".

"The debate was about the weakest, easiest targets, the unhoused with "mental issues" who can't fight back.

"People were not discussing the voting capabilities of alcoholics, drug addicts, the unemployed, or victims of domestic violence who have housing. Just the unhoused alcoholics, drug addicts, the unemployed, or victims of domestic violence. "

Besides, I'm thinking if mental issues were disqualifiers for voting, half of the world's politicians could never vote, no matter which platform they side.

Bottom line, we are not asking anyone to change and use "unhoused" as an alternative.

A small group of us recognize the dignity inherent in the usage of the word unhoused, but we don't demand anyone change. Thankfully others, who also recognize, use this word. It grows only through people who see what we see, feel what we feel, and know what we know.

We are neither helpless nor hopeless.

We are just unhoused.

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