

NCH . NEWS . . .

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Hello,



This is the September edition of NCH News.

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AMescall@nationalhomeless.org

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[Terrorists as Homeless?](#)

By Kelly Fawcett, NCH Intern, Oregon State University '06

In the wake of the London bombing last July, homeless people are becoming targets for police harassment. Many fear that terrorists may be dressing up as homeless people to watch buildings and mass transit stations to plan their future attacks. The federal government issued a warning that read, "In light of the recent bombings in London, it is crucial that police, fire and emergency medical personnel take notice of their surroundings, and be aware of 'vagrants' who seem out of place or unfamiliar."

Officials in Summit, New Jersey became overly sensitive of the warning when they used the U.S. Patriot Act to justify kicking homeless people out of a train station; an action many argue exceeds the boundaries of the legislation. Even a spokesman for the U.S. Justice Department remarked that the move was a "fundamental misunderstanding of what the Patriot Act is," and "an overreaching application of the law."

A similar experience happened in Somerville, Massachusetts, where a police officer questioned a street-clothed man who was found sleeping outside of a restaurant across the street from the Davis Square Social Security Office. The police officer grew more suspicious as the man had a passport from a "county of interest," typically a Middle Eastern or South Asian county. Although he was questioned, then later released, the investigation is continuing, reported an FBI spokesman.

The U.S. federal government warning is based on one issued by the FBI on July 4, 2004 that said that terrorists may try to disguise themselves as homeless people, shoe shiners or street sweepers to blend into the urban landscape. "This is particularly true of our mass transit systems, where homeless people tend to loiter unnoticed," the Washington US Attorney's office message said. Despite the fact that the message was intended to be "informative, not alarming," it is clear that police and other enforcement agencies are targeting homeless populations in a variety of public places.

Richard Kreimer, who was one of the people kicked out of the train station in Summit, is taking legal action by suing the New Jersey Transit System, the city of Summit, and nine police officers, claiming that homeless people have been unlawfully thrown out of train stations in New Jersey since August. He also wants a federal judge to decide if train stations are public or private property, and whether people who are not ticketed passengers have a right to be in them.

Ed Barocas, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey said, "Removing an individual simply because of the way that they look...or searching them based their economic status is unconstitutional...The alert asked for increased vigilance. It does not in any way authorize the police to take illegal actions." Kreimer made a good point saying, "Yes, it is possible that someone could or will [dress up as a homeless person,] but someone could also be disguised in a three-piece suit, or as a priest."

Mark Alston-Follansbee, executive director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition, said that citizens would be better served if their government put more thought into helping homeless people get off the streets. "These kinds of folks who are at the bottom of the barrel, they get blamed for all of the problems in our society. I think that if our society spent more time thinking about helping them get homes, there'd be less of this kind of hysteria."

Michael Stoops, acting executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, believes that these actions by police are stigmatizing to the homeless population, and they reinforce stereotypes that those experiencing homelessness are dangerous or criminals. He adds that since the 9-11 attacks, the fencing around all government buildings in Washington DC has been expanded; a terrorist dressed as a homeless person would be one of the "worst disguises ever," a man dressed in a suit would be far better able to breach those barriers. Stoops also agrees with Alston-Follansbee when he says, "If everyone had a home, then a person on the street would be suspicious and it would be right to assume that they could be a terrorist;" until then, advocates consider this kind of treatment to homeless people as a form discrimination, and a clear violation of

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Bad Day LA is No Good

Maggie Hart, NCH Intern University of Maryland '06

Entertainment has the power to alter our opinions and knowledge, for better and for worse. In the coming months, the video game industry is set to release a new game that negatively depicts street people in Los Angeles; advocates feel that portrayals such as these will only promote negative stereotypes of homeless people.

The entertainment software developer and publisher Enlight Interactive, Inc. is planning to produce and market Bad Day LA, a video game depicting a catastrophically destroyed Los Angeles and a man's fight to help survivors.

Enlight Interactive describes the main character, an African American man, as a "homeless whacko" and a "street bum" that is forced to rescue people "he could care less about." Supporting characters include racial minorities and women, all who are also negatively depicted. These stereotypes demean homeless individuals and minorities and send false perceptions to the game's players and viewers.

In the company's own words, "Bad Day LA is a humorous third-person action/adventure game...Designed for the mass market with a heavy emphasis on fun...it is low on frustration, high on comedy." While Enlight Interactive may be aiming to amuse its consumers, they are reinforcing negative stereotypes to players, the majority of which are children or youth. This audience is highly susceptible to influence; young children especially can easily internalize the images that they see and take the games' "comedy" portrayals as reality.

Enlight Interactive further markets Bad Day LA as a game comparable to Saturday morning cartoons. However, children's television shows fail to employ a sense of satisfaction after a killing, like most video games including Bad Day LA.

The website clearly explains that the goal of Enlight Interactive is to, "make a compelling entertainment experience for the mass market." However, negative social perceptions should not be used for mere entertainment purposes, especially when the target audience is children and young people.

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Bob Erlenbusch, Executive Director of Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, describes Bad Day LA as “unacceptable, offensive, demeaning and derogatory at every level: racist and sexist.”

The video game market currently offers a well-known game, titled Grand Theft Auto, that similarly promotes violence and slants perceptions of minorities and women. This game, made by Rockstar Games, has been controversial in recent months due to its graphic content and harmful messages.

In Los Angeles, there are currently around 90,000 homeless men, women, and children. While homeless advocates are fighting to decrease this number, “entertainment” such as Bad Day LA stands in the way by promoting prejudice and ignorance.

What You Can Do:

Contact Enlight Interactive and ask them to rethink their decision to market Bad Day LA.

Paul Lombardi

CEO

Enlight Interactive, Inc.

8725 Yvonne Court Way

Parksville, MD 21234

Phone: 410-661-3301

Fax: 240-282-2287


Website: <http://www.enlight.com/us/>

Outrageous Quote of the Month

"We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

- Rep. Richard H Baker (R-LA)

Bridge the Economic Gap Day is a Grand Success

 *Kelly Fawcett*

Earlier this month, on Tuesday, September 6th, organizations around the country participated in “Bridge the Economic Gap Day.” The event was sponsored by the Universal Living...
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participated in "Bridge the Economic Gap Day." The event was sponsored by the Universal Living Wage Campaign, and coordinated by Richard Troxell, the director of House the Homeless, located in Austin, Texas. Nearly 100 cities participated in all 50 states, and Troxell has already identified the event as, "a grand success."

Campaigning for the demonstration began months ago when unions, community organizations, religious groups, and businesses across the United States were called and asked to participate. Those that took part were sent a ten-foot banner that read, "Bridge the Economic Gap with a Universal Living Wage," and located a major bridge or overpass to hang it from. On September 6th, from 4:30 to 6:30pm, the banners flew over freeways across the country in the hopes of reaching a large audience during rush hour. Many locations also had rallies of supporters that passed out leaflets and bumper stickers, and were available to answer questions to pedestrians or cars passing by.

Here in Washington DC, Mike O'Neill, of the National Coalition for the Homeless, organized a rally for the event at 23rd and Virginia Streets, which was one of two Bridge the Economic Gap Day locations in the DC area. At the rally, there were about 30 advocates, holding 4 large banners and several signs. The group was able to gain support from passing motorists and pedestrians. O'Neill commented that, "It was great to see such a diverse group of people participating in the rally." The crowd ranged in age from about 18 to 65, and included George Washington and American University students, community group members, teachers and students from Arch Bishop Carroll High School, and people who were currently or formerly homeless. There were also members of the press from Street Sense, the GW campus paper, and the Arlington Sun.

Mike O'Neill felt that Bridge the Economic Gap Day, "brought attention to an important issue." In the United States, nearly one out of every four workers earns a wage that is too low to support a family; the Universal Living Wage Campaign is built on the premise that anyone who works a 40-hour week should be able to afford housing and other basic needs in the community in which they work. The Universal Living Wage Campaign is a committee of House the Homeless, which is dedicated to rooting out the causes of homelessness in order to eliminate it. A living wage is one of the most important components in combating poverty, along with affordable housing and universal health care.

Richard Troxell, who has personal ties in his work, as he was once homeless himself, is very happy with the results of the campaign. He is getting positive reports back from cities that participated and already looking ahead to Bridge the Economic Gap Day next year. Despite the general success, the campaign wasn't without shortfalls; Hurricane Katrina caused many locations in the southern states to be unable to participate. However, Troxell reported that supporters in Mississippi drove over 100 miles to participate in a rally that was further north away from flood damage, and some survivors in Louisiana joined the rally in Austin, Texas. Troxell thought that it was great to see hurricane victims involved, especially because the vast majority of survivors will be forced to take minimum-wage jobs, "and the issue of a living wage will become increasingly important to them."

Troxell is already beginning to plan the Universal Living Wage's next event, which will take place on Tax Day, April 15th. This event will also be a national action, as groups around the county will stand outside post offices with banners that read, "Reduce Taxes with a Universal Living Wage." If you would like to participate in the event, you can contact Richard Troxell directly at: rrtroxell@aol.com or (512) 796-4366. The Universal Living Wage website (www.universallivingwage.org) also has more information about the event and issues surrounding the need for a living wage.

Despite the problems associated with Hurricane Katrina, Bridge the Economic Gap Day seemed to make a nation wide impression. The main goal of the event was to raise awareness of the importance of a living wage, and perhaps the hurricane worked to assist in that respect. The event also brought communities and organizations together in a common cause, which will further help fuel the campaign and fight homelessness.

What you can do:

Visit the Universal Living Wage website at www.universallivingwage.org to learn about the issue.

Participate in the Universal Living Wage's next event on April 15th.

Contact your senator or local governments and tell them how important a universal living wage is in preventing poverty and homelessness.

As we Help the Old Homeless We Must Help the New Homeless too

A Statement On Katrina from The Homelessness Marathon

(<http://www.homelessnessmarathon.org>)

Contact:

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For immediate release.

AS WE HELP THE NEW HOMELESS WE MUST HELP THE OLD HOMELESS TOO

We are broadcasters who, for the past eight years, have been trying to draw attention to the problem of homelessness in America, and unlike a lot of people, we are not surprised by the slow governmental response to the Katrina catastrophe. In fact, during our February broadcast, we included a segment entitled "Hurricanes and Homelessness." Our voices have been part of the small chorus that has been warning for a long time that this day might come. And we issued our particular warning based not on meteorological or coastal conditions, but on what we know of the government's negligence towards those in need. Based on what we've learned, we would like to make the following observations:

1 - Thousands of poor black people were left to die in New Orleans.

Instead of merely being warned to get out, they should have been offered help getting out. But the City of New Orleans locked down its busses and the Federal government did nothing. It was the lethal abandonment of poor black people that began the social breakdown, not the looting.

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2 - If racism is the elephant in the room, the war against the poor is the Tyrannosaurus. Over the past thirty years, we have gone from being a country with surplus low-income housing units to a country with millions of units too few. The housing infrastructure just isn't there anymore to take in the Katrina refugees. It isn't there because America stopped investing in public housing. And America stopped investing in public housing because of a radical political agenda to invest, instead, in the bank accounts of the wealthy. The dead and desperate of the Gulf Coast bear witness to the folly of letting rich people run our country.

3 - The new homeless and the old homeless are the same. Part of the war on the poor has been the relentless demonization of homeless people as drunks and crazies. That was never an accurate image, but it's true that some people put themselves more in the way of homelessness by drinking just as some people put themselves more in the way of it by building beach houses in a hurricane zone. Either way, we are confronted with the same

question: Do we wish to be the kind of society that lets people die in the streets -- as they are dying now -- or the kind where we help each other out, no matter what our foibles? We must choose to be a society that lends a hand, and to truly make that commitment, we must do away with the old divide-and-conquer distinctions between poor folks and "normal" people. AS WE HELP THE NEW HOMELESS WE MUST HELP THE OLD HOMELESS TOO.

New Faces

This fall there are many new faces at the NCH office. There are four interns who began work at the end of August, as well as several year long employees who come to us from various service organizations. We know that it is important for our members to be aware of staff changes within the organization in order to better know who to contact with their concerns, so we would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to the new staff members here at NCH.

Angie Mescall started at NCH in late June. Angie is here as an AmeriCorps VISTA and is serving as the Development Coordinator here at NCH. Angie can be reached at AMescall@nationalhomeless.org or 202-462-4822 x15.

Ann Marissa Ambacher started at NCH in August. She is here with the Capuchian Franciscan Core. Ann Marissa is a Policy Analyst, and can be reached at AAmbacher@nationalhomeless.org or 202-462-4822 x18.

Kirsten Peterson will also be working as a Policy Analyst. Kirsten is here with Mennonite Voluntary Service and began work in September. She can be reached at KPeterson@nationalhomeless.org or 202-462-4822 x16.

Jodi Barrett is an intern from George Washington University. Jodi will be working at NCH until December, during her time here she will be focusing on Civil Rights and working on the Hate Crime's Report.

Maggie Hart is an intern from the University of Maryland. Maggie will be working at the NCH office on Fridays.

Steve McCrossan is an intern from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. Steve began working in August and will be at NCH through December. He will be working on Civil Rights during his time here, focusing on the criminalization report. Steve can be reached at civilrights@nationalhomeless.org or at 202-462-4822 x

Laura Seacross is an intern from James Madison University. She began working in August and will be here through September. Laura is focusing on Civil Rights during her time here and beginning work on the criminalization report. Laura can be reached at civilrights@nationalhomeless.org.

NCH on the Road

Michael Stoops, Acting Executive Director

Oct. 6 & 7—Center for Disease Control, Atlanta. Meeting of the National Network on Tobacco Prevention and Poverty

Oct. 11 & 12—Texas Homeless Network, Corpus Christi. Richard Troxell, NCH Board Member from Austin, and Michael Stoops will do a workshop on civil rights/hate crimes.

Oct. 13—Duke University Medical School. Faces of Homelessness panel to focus on the health issues of homeless people.

Oct. 17 & 18—Florida Coalition for the Homeless, Tampa. Civil Rights/Hate Crimes and the Youth Voice in Ending Homelessness workshops

Oct. 22—Meeting Ground, Elkton, MD. Keynote address at annual meeting.

Oct. 28—Eastern North Carolina regional homelessness conference, Washington, NC. Keynote
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address and a workshop

Calendar of Events

October 17-18- The Florida Coalition for the Homeless 10th Annual Homeless Conference
"Building the Dream...Opening the Doors."

In Tampa, FL, for more information visit www.flacoalitionhomeless.com/.

October 26th-28th SAMHSA Training Conference on Homelessness and Mental Illness.
"Preparing People for Change: Knowledge and Choice"

The third national conference addressing homelessness for people with Mental Illnesses and/or Substance Use Disorders, will be held at the Hilton Washington Hotel in Washington DC from Oct 26-28, 2005. To view the Conference Flyer, please go to <http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov/pdfs/ConferenceFlyer.pdf>.

November 13th-19th- Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week

Each year, one week before Thanksgiving, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness co-sponsor National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. During this week a number of schools, communities and cities take part in a nationwide effort to bring greater awareness to the problems of hunger and homelessness. For an organizing manual including a variety of events that you can do, please go to www.nationalhomeless.org/awareness.

November 19- Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Walkathon

The 18th Annual Help the Homeless Walkathon will be held in DC on November 19th. Please consider joining the NCH team for the walk. You can register online at www.helpthehomelessdc.org.

December 21- National Homeless Persons Memorial Day

Since 1990, NCH has sponsored National Homeless Person's Memorial day on or near the first day of winter (December 21st) to remember our homeless friends who have paid the ultimate price for our nation's failure to address this issue. Learn how you can participate in this year's National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day at www.nationalhomeless.org.

Four easy ways to help:

1. Send your gift to the National Coalition for the Homeless

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2. Call 202-462-4822 ext 15 and speak with Angie Mescall
3. Donate online at www.nationalhomeless.org
4. Host a Bringing It Home Dinner Party. To host a dinner party/event or for more information, please contact Anna Bremner at abremner@blueskycollaborative.com or 617-731-1821

Click [here](#) if you would like to be removed from this list.

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