

# NCH . NEWS . . .

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NCH News - January

This is the January issue of NCH News.

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## **NCH to Launch Series of Public Policy Conference Calls**

The National Coalition for the Homeless is pleased to launch a series of quarterly conference calls around homelessness public policy. The hour-long calls will be both informational and interactive. NCH will update participants on current public policy developments pertaining to homelessness. More important, we will use the calls to gather feedback from the field on current topics and on NCH's public policy positions. Each call will include a brief presentation and focused discussion on a featured policy topic.

The target audience for the conference call series is broad – any individual who wants to engage with NCH on public policy matters is invited to participate. We especially welcome people experiencing homelessness or formerly experiencing homelessness; staff or volunteers of state and local homeless coalitions; staff of entities responsible for developing homelessness plans or continuum of care applications; homeless assistance service providers; and state and local policymakers.

The first call will take place Wednesday, January 14, 2009, 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm Eastern Time. The call-in number is 1-877-358-8255. The passcode is 9119873. We will ask participants to mute their phones as presentations are made, and to email questions or requests to make a comment to [agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org) during the call.

The featured topic for the first call is the pending Reauthorization of HUD McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs.

For additional information or to register to participate in the conference call, please contact Adam Gaeddert at 202.462.4822, ext. 228, or [agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org).

The other calls in this quarterly series will take place on April 8, July 8, and October 14, 2009, at 4:00 pm Eastern time.

## **Book Review: *Homeless Hearts*** **By Kyle McSweegan, NCH Intern**

The image of the homeless man is a stubbornly tenacious stereotype which, for whatever reason, refuses to relinquish its central role on the streets of the collective unconscious.

While single men do constitute the largest proportion of the national homeless population, families with children are among its fastest growing segments, and 65% of those families are headed by single women (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2007). The picture in rural areas is even more divergent, where women and children together make up the largest group of people who are homeless (Vissing, 1996). And of those women who are homeless, we know that about half are fleeing from domestic violence (Zorza, 1991).

Yet the unique predicament of these women never seems to garner the attention it so sorely warrants. Dr. Jean Newsome's book, *Homeless Hearts*, in a style, at least in this reviewer's opinion, strongly reminiscent of El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, steps into the lives of a dozen such women at a homeless shelter through a series of case-study-like interviews. What emerges is a dozen different stories that are at once heartening and heartbreaking, divided by chapter, and followed by 'From Her Heart' fill-in-the-blank questionnaires. It is these completed questionnaires which are probably the most heartrending of all, as we are able to see each woman's impressions most unfiltered, down to their original handwriting reprinted, in which their notions of happiness and wealth, friendship and courage, among others, are expounded.

Those interested can reach the author at [homelesshearts@gmail.com](mailto:homelesshearts@gmail.com), and obtain copies of her book by following the instructions below.

\$21.00 [Book = \$17.00, Shipping & Handling = \$4.00]

Please send check or money order to:

Jean Newsome  
318 Crest Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35209

Credit card orders, please phone:

(205) 870-7461 [Little Professor's Books; Alabama]

\*\* A portion of each sale will be donated to a shelter in Birmingham, Alabama

**Action Alert: Ask President-Elect Obama to Address Homelessness**



The National Coalition for the Homeless urges homeless people, advocates, service providers, and other concerned Americans to contact President-Elect Barack Obama through his "change.gov" website and ask him to make ending and preventing homelessness a national priority during his term of office.

A new Presidency is a valuable and critical opportunity for Americans to demand that ending homelessness, the most extreme form of poverty, be placed high on the national agenda. Please tell President-Elect Obama that he should commit to drastically increasing the supply of affordable housing, ensuring adequate incomes for all Americans, expanding access to health services, ensuring access to education for homeless children and youth, and protecting homeless people from discrimination and violence.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Visit the website of the President-Elect's Transition Team: [www.change.gov](http://www.change.gov).
- Roll over the "American Moment" tab at the top of the screen, and select the "Share Your Vision" option from the dropdown menu. (Should take you to the webpage <http://change.gov/page/s/yourvision>.)
- Leave your e-mail address, name, zip code, and a message for President-Elect Obama. We invite you to use this text, although you may personalize or expand the message as you see fit:

"Dear President-Elect Obama,

As you continue to make appointments and develop strategies for confronting our nation's challenges, please make sure that preventing and ending homelessness is high among your first-term priorities. The number of homeless and precariously-housed people in the United States – already absurdly high in the wealthiest nation in the world – will continue to climb as the foreclosure crisis and the economic recession persist. I ask that you make a commitment to preventing and ending homelessness during your first term. Specially, I urge you to drastically increase the supply of affordable housing, ensure adequate incomes for all Americans, expand access to health services, ensure access to education for homeless children and youth, and protect homeless people from discrimination and violence.

Sincerely, [your name]"

#### BACKGROUND:

The National Coalition for the Homeless, in partnership with 14 other homelessness and poverty advocacy organizations, recently sent a letter to President-Elect Obama emphasizing six recommendations for preventing and ending homelessness. Those recommendations include:

1. During the first year of your Administration, hold a White House Conference on Homelessness at which a federal, interagency plan to end homelessness in the United States is presented. The plan should have concrete goals and timelines.
2. Fund at least 150,000 new housing vouchers each year to help address the critical shortage of rental housing affordable to people with extremely low incomes who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; create and sustain 90,000 additional units of permanent supportive housing; add 20,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers and 40,000 new units of permanent supportive housing for veterans who are homeless or at risk; fully fund the housing programs created by the Violence Against Women Act; increase funding for the National Housing Trust Fund, and provide 19,000 vouchers for homeless families under the Family Unification Program. Further, prevent low-income people from becoming homeless as a result of the current foreclosure crisis by providing at least \$575 million in emergency funding to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to use to assist tenants displaced by foreclosure.
3. Ensure that every American has an annual income—whether through wages, public income assistance, tax credits, or a combination thereof—sufficient to obtain and maintain permanent housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the household's income.
4. Ensure that your health care plan guarantees access and eliminates all financial barriers to comprehensive health services – including mental health services – for all Americans, and enact Medicaid policies that allow reimbursement for effective services that help reduce the use of more costly emergency and hospital care.
5. By 2010, strengthen educational access and stability for homeless children and youth, including young children and unaccompanied youth, through the reauthorization and the full funding of the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act.
6. Support and advance homeless persons' civil rights to vote, to frequent public places, to utilize public facilities, and to enjoy equal protection of the law.

#### ACTION RESOURCES:

To view the full letter to President-Elect Obama, visit the website of the National Coalition for the Homeless ([www.nationalhomeless.org/housing/obamarecommendations.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/housing/obamarecommendations.html)).

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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Contact Adam Gaeddert, NCH Policy Advocate, [agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org](mailto:agaeddert@nationalhomeless.org) or 202.462.4822.

**NCH on the Road**  
**Where to Catch the Faces of Homelessness Speakers Bureau**

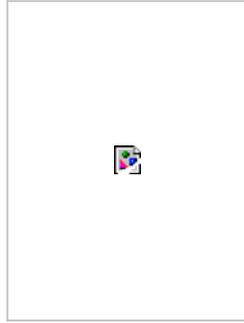
December 15th The Pilgrimage (DC)  
December 22nd The Pilgrimage (DC)  
January 5th United Methodist Church (DC)  
January 7th NCH offices  
January 7th Youth Services Opportunities Project (DC)  
January 9th Religious Action Center  
January 10th The Pilgrimage (Elon University)  
January 11th NCH offices

**A Big Thanks from NCH**

**We would like to express our gratitude to the following groups and individuals for their recent generous contributions:**

Cathey Briggs  
Cheryl Johnson  
Community Action  
Partnership  
Erica Ernst  
Icare Shelter Home-  
General  
Joan Hammond  
John O'Keefe  
Joshua Eberle  
Kay Pikerling  
Marilyn Cipollone  
Mass. Affordable  
Housing Alliance  
Ralph Fasano  
Regina Lanning  
Rita Dopp  
Sandra Farler  
Stephanie Nagel  
The Lord's Place  
W.P. Suresh Paul  
William & Brenda Barnes

**Homeless World Cup: Perspectives from India, England, the U.S., Uganda and Nigeria**  
**By Lawrence Cann, New York Times**



A proud hooligan/soccer player distinguished rugby from soccer for me. Rugby, he said, is a hooligan's sport played by gentlemen, and soccer is a gentleman's sport played by hooligans.

Indeed soccer is the people's game across the world. Perhaps that is why soccer, a social tool in the United States, has proved more effective than more domestically popular sports. It does not put a premium on height and size, and it requires nothing more than a ball.

Like the U.S., India is not a soccer nation. The national passion there is cricket.

"If it were a homeless cricket team, I would find all the sponsors I would ever need," said the tall, handsome Abhijit Barse, who is the communications director, among many other things, for the homeless soccer team from India. "If we played cricket, it would be a farce. Cricket is a privileged sport; soccer is the poor man's game."

Read more [here](#).

### **Public Policy Update**

Welcome to the first installment in a regular series of public policy updates from the National Coalition for the Homeless.

Even though the current economic recession is threatening to swell the ranks of homeless Americans, the dawning of a new presidential administration gives NCH a renewed sense of optimism. President-Elect Barack Obama has shown early signs of commitment to issues affecting low-income Americans, including affordable housing, livable wages, and accessible health care. His nominee for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Shaun Donovan, is a well-respected administrator with ample experience in low-income housing issues. Furthermore, Obama has signaled his intention to sign a massive Economic Recovery Plan as one of his first acts as President. That bill could include a number of housing provisions that would benefit people at the greatest risk of becoming homeless.

As transition to a new administration proceeds and Congress prepares for a new session, NCH continues to advocate for ambitious policy changes to prevent and end homelessness. The following are NCH's public policy priorities for 2009:

#### **Bring America Home Act**

The Bring America Home Act (BAHA) is the signature public policy element of NCH's campaign to prevent and end homelessness. BAHA is a comprehensive bill that includes provisions in the areas of housing security, income security, health security, and civil rights. It establishes that it is a national goal to fulfill the basic human need of shelter for all Americans. BAHA was introduced in the 108th and 109th Congresses by the late Representative Julia Carson (D-IN). NCH has strengthened the bill's content since its development five years ago and is preparing for its reintroduction in the 111th Congress. To read more about BAHA, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/BAHA.pdf>.

#### **National Housing Trust Fund**

In August 2008, Congress and the President enacted into law an omnibus housing measure that included the establishment of a National Housing Trust Fund. The NHTF is a permanent federal program intended to increase and preserve the supply of rental housing for extremely low and very low income families. Currently, NCH and others are seeking the inclusion of \$10 billion for the NHTF in the 2009 budget. For more information, visit [http://www.bethesdahosting.com/.../397\\_2008...](http://www.bethesdahosting.com/.../397_2008...)

NHTF in the Economic Recovery Plan. Funding at that level would be sufficient for rehabilitating or building 100,000 rental homes for the lowest income households using green standards. Advocates are also working with HUD to develop regulations implement the NHTF. To read more about the NHTF, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/NHTF.pdf>.

### **Foreclosure and Homelessness Prevention**

NCH's April 2008 report, "Foreclosure to Homelessness: The Forgotten Victims of the Subprime Crisis," reported that a majority of local and state homeless coalitions had seen an increase in homelessness since the foreclosure crisis began in 2007. In December 2008, an annual survey from the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 12 major cities reported an increase in homelessness as a result of foreclosure, with renters of foreclosed properties being the victims most vulnerable to homelessness. In response to this crisis, NCH and others are urging Congress to include \$2 billion for the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) program in the Economic Recovery Plan, to be used solely for the purpose of homelessness prevention. These funds are necessary to ensure that those threatened with the loss of shelter due to foreclosure have the resources to stabilize their current housing or transition to a new home. For further information, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/Foreclosure.pdf>.

### **HUD McKinney-Vento Programs**

The McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs administered by HUD make funds available to emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing programs, and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness. Congress and advocates have been working to increase the funding level and consolidate programs into a more efficient system—a process that is long overdue. In the 110th Congress, the House of Representatives passed an HMV reauthorization measure. NCH expects the House-passed bill to serve as the base bill for reauthorization in the 111th Congress. NCH is urging Congress to address shortcomings in the bill, including the definition of homelessness, and provisions that restrict communities' flexibility in determining how best to use federal funds, and to amend the bill to require that service providers, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness are fully involved in the decision-making process and to improve privacy protections of client data. NCH will also work in 2009 to increase appropriations levels for HUD McKinney-Vento programs. For further information, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/HMV.pdf>.

### **Rural Homeless Assistance**

Rural homelessness is an epidemic afflicting thousands of individuals and families every year, but rural communities often face a dearth of homeless assistance services. The current formula and method for distributing funding through HUD homeless assistance programs (the continuum of care application process) puts rural communities at a disadvantage. The Rural Homeless Assistance Act, a legislative proposal of NCH, would create a rural homeless assistance program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Funds for that program could be used for homelessness prevention, emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, and capacity-building assistance. NCH is seeking a Congressperson to sponsor the Rural Homeless Assistance Act in the next Congress. As an interim measure, NCH calls for a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study into the unmet homeless assistance needs in rural communities. For further information, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/Rural.pdf>.

### **Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program**

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program assists very low-income families and elderly and disabled individuals in obtaining affordable housing on the private market. Section 8 has prevented countless low-income families and individuals from falling into homelessness. At a time when affordable housing in the private market is scarce and the foreclosure crisis is pushing the number of people experiencing homelessness even higher, NCH and others urge Congress to include in the Economic Recovery Plan the authorization of 400,000 new Housing Choice vouchers at \$3.6 billion over two years to provide the lowest-income households with rental assistance. Ultimately, NCH and others back the addition of two million additional vouchers into the housing assistance system.

### **Hate Crimes Against the Homeless**

Since its first annual report on the subject in 1999, NCH has documented over 700 unprovoked violent attacks against homeless people, with over 200 of those attacks resulting in death. Those incidents have included setting a man on fire, pushing a sleeping woman into a river, and beating a woman's face with a tire-iron. In many cases, the attackers have never met the victims, and they don't benefit materially from the attacks; they are motivated only by a dehumanizing bias against homeless persons. Such attacks

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don't benefit materially from the attacks; they are motivated only by a dehumanizing bias against homeless persons. Such attacks deserve to be called what they are: hate crimes. The Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act and its sister bill, the Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Enforcement Act, would direct the FBI to gather data on potential hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness, and to prosecute accordingly. Those bills were introduced in the 110th Congress by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX). NCH is preparing for reintroduction of those bills early next year. For further information, please visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/Hate%20Crimes.pdf>.

### **Universal Livable Income**

Approximately 44 percent of the adult homeless population has performed some type of work for pay in any given month, yet most do not make enough to afford housing. Many more homeless persons may be unable to work due to disabling conditions, and are eligible for disability benefits under the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) programs, but not currently enrolled. As for wages, the payment levels under SSI are insufficient for obtaining affordable housing. NCH will be working with President Obama and the Congress to ensure that every American has an annual income—whether through wages, public income assistance, tax credits, or a combination thereof—sufficient to obtain and maintain permanent housing that costs no more than 30 percent of the household's income.

### **Universal Health Insurance**

Homeless people suffer from multiple health problems at a rate far higher than the general U.S. population, yet 55 percent have no medical insurance. Once people become homeless, they have shorter life spans than housed persons, and are three or four times more likely to die prematurely due at least in part to untreated medical problems. NCH will be working with homeless and health care advocacy partners to ensure that the Obama Health Care Plan guarantees access and eliminates all financial barriers to comprehensive health services for all Americans.

### **Homeless Access to Recovery through Treatment Act**

Homelessness presents serious barriers to treatment for behavioral health conditions, and people experiencing homelessness present complex challenges for which most mainstream providers are ill-equipped or untrained. The Homeless Access to Recovery through Treatment (HART) Act, a bill designed by NCH and supported by numerous homeless and behavioral health organizations, would strengthen and expand substance abuse and mental health services to people experiencing homelessness by improving mainstream and targeted homeless programs of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The HART Act was introduced by Rep. Hilda Solis (D-CA). NCH is planning to have the bill reintroduced. For further information, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/2008Policy/HART.pdf>.

### **Correction**

The review of the book *Faces of the Shadows, Life on the Street*, appearing in the December issue of NCH News, was authored by NCH intern Kyle McSweegan, not Kyle Boudreau. NCH News apologizes for this error.