



ORGANIZING MANUAL

**National Homeless
Persons' Memorial Day**

National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Manual

December 21

The first day of winter. The longest night of the year.

People in your community will die without a home this year. While we understand the importance of every life, we recognize the reality of conditions that individuals and families experiencing homelessness face. National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is the day to remember those who have died during the year while unhoused, unsheltered, living in shelters, transitional housing, or other uninhabitable places and spaces, and without a place to call home.

Over the past years, hundreds of cities representing more than thirty States and the District of Columbia have participated in the National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. Let's make this a year of increased awareness and advocacy by organizing in our communities to memorialize the lives that have been lost across the nation as we work throughout the coming year to end homelessness and the need for such a day.



THE FIRST DAY OF WINTER. THE LONGEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR.

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Overview

Since 1990, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has sponsored National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day every year on December 21 – the first day of winter and the longest night of the year – to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember those who have died while living without a permanent home. In 2005, the National Health Care for the Homeless Council and the National Consumer Advisory Board joined NCH as co-sponsors of this meaningful event.

In an effort to maximize the impact of the day, we encourage local and statewide organizations to hold memorials for people experiencing homelessness who have died in their communities that year. In 2016, over 179 Memorial Day events were held on or around December 21st to honor the people who died homeless. In 2019 over 200 events memorialized people who died without housing. Each year we continue to hold this sacred time of remembrance and honor for all who have passed without housing and look toward to the day when everyone will have a place to call home.

What You Can Do

1. **Get involved with a memorial service in your city:** A list of the year's Memorial Day Events, including contact information for local sponsors can be found at: www.nationalhomeless.org/about-us/projects/memorial-day
2. **Organize your own event to commemorate those who have died** while living without a permanent home and raise awareness about the severity of homelessness.
3. **Record the names of people who died without housing during the year in your community.** In many places homeless deaths are not tracked or recorded, so work with people who are experiencing homelessness, service providers, and public officials to compile a list as best as possible.

Resources

This manual should serve as a resource to assist you in your efforts. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact us.

National Coalition For The Homeless
2201 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20037
www.nationalhomeless.org
Phone: (202) 462-4822 ext. 703
info@nationalhomeless.org

National Healthcare for the Homeless Council
PO Box 60427
Nashville, TN 37206
www.nhchc.org
Phone: (615) 226-2292
Fax: (615) 226-1656

Planning Your Event

Invite other organizations to participate in planning the event. Local and statewide coalitions for the homeless, health care for the homeless projects, shelters, housing programs, service providers and outreach programs may all wish to participate. **People who have experienced/are currently experiencing homelessness should be incorporated** into these events at every stage.

Make sure to **tailor your local event to your own community**. Try to think creatively about ways to honor the memory of those who have died and ways to raise awareness about homelessness. Past events have included:

- Candlelight vigils
- Silent marches
- Graveside services
- Plays and performances
- Special religious services
- Public policy advocacy events

All organizers are encouraged to work with their local health department and/or health care clinic/programs to identify the number of people who have died while homeless in the local area. Try to obtain the names and ages of each person. *A name-reading can be a powerful component of your ceremony, as could a moment of silence for each of the deceased.*

A full listing of this year's Memorial Day events is posted at <https://nationalhomeless.org/homeless-persons-memorial-day/>. Consult the list Memorial Events for more ideas and examples.



Working with your Local Government

In order to attract more attention to this year's Memorial Day, work with your local city council, mayor, state legislature, or governor. Encourage them to pass a proclamation or resolution that recognizes December 21st as National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day and describes homelessness as a continuing and serious issue that must be resolved.

(See sample proclamation and resolution on pages 11-14).

Working with Media

Media coverage of homelessness usually reaches its peak at the beginning of winter and the holiday season. **Make sure you publicize your event on social media and encourage local press to promote and cover your event.** Each group should:

- Make and circulate a flyer that includes important information about your event such as time and place (see sample on page 7).
- Update your organizational and personal social media pages to promote the event.
- Submit a press release announcing your event to local media (see sample on page 10).
- Write and submit an article or letter-to-the-editor for your local newspaper drawing attention to your event and to the issue of homelessness (see sample on page 15).
- Invite local media to your event, if you feel comfortable doing so.

Media coverage is a great tool to bring attention to governmental policies, or lack thereof, which can be a contributing factor to the homelessness in your area. As governmental policies can also be part of the solution for homelessness, make sure to give credit where it is due.

Material on current policy issues is available at www.nationalhomeless.org and www.nhchc.org.

Working With Us

Please provide the following information on the event form at

<https://nationalhomeless.org/homeless-persons-memorial> :

- A description of your event
- The number of people experiencing homelessness who have died in your community
- Photographs following the event



Sample Flyer


CANDLELIGHT VIGIL
ANNUAL HOMELESS MEMORIAL

Join us for a memorial service
for those who died with lived
experience of homelessness


TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2021
2:00pm on W. 30 St.

The memorial will be held outside the
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
2031 W. 30th St, Cleveland, OH 44113

ALL ARE WELCOME



PRESENTED BY
NORTHEAST OHIO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS
3631 Perkins Ave, #3A-3, Cleveland, OH 44114
216-432-0540 | neoch@neoch.org



SAMPLE PROGRAM

The Longest Night of the Year

Welcome to the Annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Service in Central Florida.

This service commemorates the lives of the homeless members of our community who died. Participants will join community groups, service providers and individuals in cities across the United States who are holding their own services today.

This candlelight service is held on December 21st, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year. Our goal is to memorialize the lives of those who have died on our streets or in our shelters from conditions directly related to their homelessness. In many cases, this service will be the only commemoration of their lives.

In Seminole, Orange and Osceola Counties, 33 people lost their lives while homeless this year. Advocates, friends, community leaders and service providers hope to bring attention to the need for more resources to provide affordable housing, emergency shelter and medical care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for attending this service. For more information about how you can help end homelessness, contact

Homeless Services Network of
Central Florida
www.hsncfl.org
(407) 893-0133

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

December 21st
9:00 a.m.

*A ceremony to commemorate the
lives of the homeless
members of our community
who died this past year*

Sponsored by

Hosted by
First Presbyterian Church
106 E. Church Street
Orlando, FL 32801

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Opening Prayer

Pastor Case Thorp

First Presbyterian Church of Orlando

Welcome

Cathy Jackson

Homeless Services Network of Central Florida

Proclamation from the City of Orlando

Alana Brenner

City Clerk

Eulogy

Robert Stuart

Commissioner, City of Orlando

Reading of the Names

Bakari Burns

Chairman of the Board, Homeless Services Network

Jackie Dowd Remembers George Crossley

Co-workers Remember Steve "Rocky" Cook

Musical Selection/ Poetry

Closing Prayer (Candle Lighting)

Pastor Case Thorp

First Presbyterian Church

THOSE WE HONOR:

Adrian Acevedo

Connie Asbury

Teri Lee Brookshire

Albert Capps

William Phillip Capps

Brenda Davis

David Dotterer

Jonathon Wayne Duck

James Evans

James Fisher

Arturo Miguel Garcia

Timothy Giedlin

Jay Girard

David Glenn

Lois Ann Gyermoti

Keith Hess (known as Stacey)

Heide Hewett

David Hills

"J.R."

Bernard King

Daniel Martin Jacobs

(known as Chief)

Alan Martin

Joe Mitchell

Gerald Ramsey

Susan Roa

John Robicheaux

Michael Self

Phillip Tanner

Jerry L. Thomas

Sherry Tyner

Bradley Watson

John Handzlik

(known as Mohawk)

Wendell Wright

Heather Young

Steve "Rocky" Cook

George Crossley



HSN thanks the First Presbyterian Church of Orlando for hosting this memorial service.

SAMPLE NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

December 1, 2021

CONTACT:

Connor Moriarty, Communications and Marketing
Administrator cmoriarty@cfhnyc.org

(646) 724-4025

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Honors New Yorkers Lost While Homeless

Care For the Homeless and Urban Pathways host virtual memorial to commemorate New Yorkers who passed away while unstably housed in 2021.

New York, N.Y. – Care For the Homeless (CFH) and Urban Pathways will host Homeless Persons' Memorial Day on Thursday, December 16th. The memorial is free and open to the public.

The ceremony begins at 5:00 p.m. and will be held virtually via Zoom. Those interested can [click here](#) to register.

During the memorial, service providers and friends will read eulogies in honor of those who have passed. These moments will be intertwined with the reading of the names of those New York City lost in 2021 as a result of the negative effects of homelessness. For many of the nearly 360 names mentioned, it will be the only commemoration they receive.

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day is a grassroots effort involving every member of the community, including those with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, advocates, and policymakers. For all involved it is a solemn event. However, it is also a call to action.

SAMPLE NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

We know the solutions to homelessness, and it is the hope of both organizations that this memorial not only provides those in attendance with the opportunity to reflect on the trauma that unstable housing inflicts on people, but also to recommit to advocating for policies that increase access to housing and quality healthcare for homeless New Yorkers.

“Homelessness is a public health crisis, a crisis that we have the tools to end,” said CFH President & CEO, George Nashak. “We hold this memorial to hold ourselves accountable. None of the people we recognize died because of a personal failure. We believe they died because the system designed to help them failed. We recognize these individuals and acknowledge the necessity to provide a measure of dignity and respect to our brothers and sisters who may not have received the benefit of such compassion when they were alive.”

Urban Pathways CEO, Frederick Shack commented, “This memorial recognizes the value and dignity of every New Yorker lost, regardless of their housing status. We must use this opportunity to not only honor them with remembrance, but also with action. We can end the crisis of homelessness by providing access to permanent affordable and supportive housing for all in need. We must work together to end homelessness so that the names of those passing without a home will be fewer next year.”

Care For the Homeless and Urban Pathways have hosted Homeless Persons' Memorial Day annually for the past several years. This year it is expected that over 180 cities will host a Homeless Persons' Memorial Day observance.

###

SAMPLE STATE PROCLAMATION



Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a proclamation declaring Dec. 21, 2020, as Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. Reynolds will read the proclamation at the Iowa Homeless Memorial on Dec. 21, 5:30 p.m., at the State Capitol. Organized by Joppa, the event will offer poetry, music and prayer in remembrance of those who died homeless in Iowa during the past year.

Read the full proclamation:
(picture of document on page 14)

WHEREAS, the winter poses extreme hardship for unsheltered and inadequately housed low-income men, women and children in the State of Iowa; and

WHEREAS, the spirit of the holiday season of giving provides an opportunity for affirmation and renewal regarding our commitment to end homelessness; and

WHEREAS, December 21st has been designated National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day by the National Coalition for The Homeless and the National Health Care for The Homeless Council and is so recognized by cities nationwide; and

WHEREAS, Joppa helps homeless people survive, find housing and rebuild their lives

SAMPLE STATE PROCLAMATION

and organizes the Iowa Homeless Memorial each year to honor and remember those who have died homeless in Iowa and to prevent future homeless deaths by raising awareness about fundamental solutions to homelessness; and

WHEREAS, in this season of generosity and sharing, citizens of Iowa are encouraged to commit themselves to promoting compassion and concern for all brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and homeless; and

WHEREAS, in remembering those who have died on the streets, the cause of ending homelessness is kept urgent as is the state's collective commitment to preventing such deaths in the future:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Kim Reynolds, Governor of the State of Iowa, do hereby proclaim December 21, 2020, as **HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY** in the State of Iowa and ask all citizens to take a moment of silence in remembering those who have died homeless and encourage our citizens to support all local efforts to eliminate homelessness in our communities.

Kim Reynolds, Governor of Iowa


State of Iowa
Executive Department

IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF IOWA
PROCLAMATION

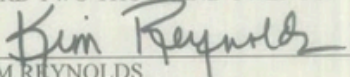
- WHEREAS,** the winter poses extreme hardship for unsheltered and inadequately housed low-income men, women and children in the State of Iowa; and
- WHEREAS,** the spirit of the holiday season of giving provides an opportunity for affirmation and renewal regarding our commitment to end homelessness; and
- WHEREAS,** December 21st has been designated National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day by the National Coalition for The Homeless and the National Health Care for The Homeless Council and is so recognized by cities nationwide; and
- WHEREAS,** Joppa helps homeless people survive, find housing and rebuild their lives; organizes the Iowa Homeless Memorial each year to honor and remember those who have died homeless in Iowa; and helps prevent future homeless deaths by raising awareness about fundamental solutions to homelessness; and
- WHEREAS,** in this season of generosity and sharing, citizens of Iowa are encouraged to commit themselves to promoting compassion and concern for all brothers and sisters... especially those who are poor and homeless; and
- WHEREAS,** in remembering those who have died on the streets, the cause of ending homelessness is kept urgent as is the state's collective commitment to preventing such deaths in the future:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Kim Reynolds, Governor of the State of Iowa, do hereby proclaim December 21, 2020, as

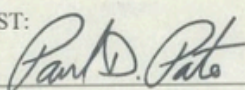
HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL DAY

in the State of Iowa and ask all citizens to take a moment of silence in remembering those who have died homeless and encourage our citizens to support all local efforts to eliminate homelessness in our communities.

TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I HAVE HEREUNTO SUBSCRIBED MY NAME AND CAUSED THE GREAT SEAL OF THE STATE OF IOWA TO BE AFFIXED. DONE AT DES MOINES THIS 16th DAY OF DECEMBER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD TWO THOUSAND TWENTY.


KIM REYNOLDS
GOVERNOR OF IOWA

ATTEST:


PAUL PATE
SECRETARY OF STATE

SAMPLE CITY/COUNTY RESOLUTION

The City of Lafayette, Indiana Resolution

Homeless Persons' Memorial Day Proclamation 2019

WHEREAS, December 21, 2019 marks the first day of winter and is the longest night of the year;

WHEREAS, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council have designated December 21, 2019 as National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day;

WHEREAS, thousands die each year without stable housing;

WHEREAS, homelessness continues to be a serious challenge for many Tippecanoe County residents who have the right to adequate food, housing, clothing, safety and health care;

WHEREAS, housing is a fundamental right and a basic human need; WHEREAS, homelessness raises one's risk of illness, injury and death; WHEREAS, LTHC Homeless Services is a leader in ending homelessness by connecting individuals and families with resources and housing solutions;

WHEREAS, the Homeless Person's Memorial service will take place on Thursday, December 19 from 4:30 – 6 pm at LTHC Homeless Services inside the Howarth Center to commemorate our neighbors who have passed away in 2019 as a result of homelessness;

WHEREAS, by joining together and remembering our neighbors, we can honor their lives by working to provide solutions to end homelessness within this community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY Mayor Tony Roswarski that December 21, 2019 is hereby named National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day in Lafayette to remember those who have died while experiencing homelessness and to encourage citizens to come together to celebrate their memory and address the factors that lead to homelessness.

Tony Roswarski, Mayor City of Lafayette

SAMPLE ARTICLE

Saying Good-Bye: A Story about Loss in a Shelter

By: Barbara Anderson, director, Haven House Services, Jeffersonville, IN; NCH Board Member

Charles "Cash" Brown. Cash was the first person to ever die in the shelter. He had pancreatic cancer and said that the shelter was his home and it was his right to stay there. At first we, including his daughter, tried to hospitalize him, but he adamantly refused. The staff and residents cared for him, as they would a family member, and he died 10 minutes before the ambulance arrived, that forced him to go to the hospital via a court order his daughter finally won. His daughter called us two months after his cremation and asked that his ashes be buried under the Japanese Elm in the front of the shelter. There are now six trees there. A plaque, donated by a local memorial company, bears their names. She said her father felt at home there for the first time in a long time and it meant something to him. He was an African American Vietnam Veteran, played in several bands, and retired from the Jefferson County Public School System as a maintenance man. They visit him and us, both she and her brother.

Jonelle Akers was our oldest in age, at 75, and our oldest in time at the shelter. She was a paranoid schizophrenic who I found sitting in the rain in 2006. We fought endlessly with the mental health system to get her placed but they said she was "lucid" and couldn't help her. She played the piano beautifully, cussed like a sailor, and looked over the children as if they were her own, while her own would not even claim her body. She too is under the tree.

Mike Kahafer was a Vietnam Veteran as well. He had constant pain and was a great guy, when he wasn't clouded over by the pain medication. His smile was the most infectious thing; you had to smile when he did smile on those rare occasions. His eyes were brilliantly blue, and he was a quiet man who really just wanted to get along. He died from heart failure after taking too much of his medication. He did not commit suicide, but was just trying to kill the pain.

Tommy Rawlings was an older man who drove his moped around town like a religion. He was struck by a car and died after 10 days. Tommy was a friendly, optimistic man. He didn't let anything stop him and just loved to ride his moped. There is a video about him on Facebook saying he didn't get hugs as a child, and until he became homeless he didn't feel loved. Once he entered homelessness he found an abundance of hugs. It was an odd statement because he felt more loved as a homeless man than a housed child.

"Cincinnati" John Anderson was an older man, a veteran, devoted to his deceased wife, Mary. They were nomadic in lifestyle and I really thought when Mary died two years ago that John would settle in and finally become housed because he had a substantial monthly income from veterans and social security. He did not. His nickname came from the travels at the first of the month to Cincinnati to get his money. He would come back around the third week of the month

SAMPLE ARTICLE

dead broke and stay for two weeks. The cycle was repeated monthly for as long as I have known him and that was about 25 years. He had dancing blue eyes and loved to spin a story. He never lived without his drink and would not even ask to come to shelter because he knew he couldn't bring a drink. He would tease me and say, "Someday you are going to let it rip and we will party at the shelter all night long."

Jean Ruel died at 57. She worked for me as a VISTA volunteer for 3 years when we first started the shelter. Once her VISTA time was up she worked for us until she felt she couldn't work anymore. Her back and chronic pain was taking its toll on her body. That was 10 years ago, and since that time, a healthy robust woman became an emaciated shell of her former self. The pain medication she was taking became something she couldn't control. She eventually became homeless herself and entered our shelter for the fourth and final time, three months ago. She thrived. It was almost like having the old Jean back. Her humor was contagious, her daughter had come with her, and Jean was devoted to her, who is now a young adult. Jean got sick right after Christmas, so her name wasn't mentioned at the Memorial, but we lost her on Dec. 29, 2012. We would want her remembered.

"Old Nick" was an older gentleman who took care of the other street guys in Louisville. Being one of the oldest and longest to live on the streets, he knew them well and would mentor the guys. While he would look out for them, they would look out for him in return. When he died in his tent, it was after many had taken care of him. He had been called their "daddy".

It was a tough year. You fight many battles to serve folks but this one is one you don't win. When you bury someone in homelessness you find yourself feeling the loneliness as well. We don't believe anyone should die without someone knowing or caring, each of our folks received a celebration of life.

Hosting a Virtual Event

As COVID continues to pose challenges for in-person events, virtual memorials are a way to honor those who have died without the risks associated with gathering in person. Additionally, virtual memorials allow people who may not otherwise have been able to attend in person, allowing your vigil to reach a broader audience. Following are recommendations to assist in planning a virtual event:

- Collect names and photographs that can be utilized to create a video or other visual to promote your memorial and highlight the people who have died without housing in your community. This can also be an opportunity to add faces to the names that are shown and read.
- Share the event information widely to increase attendance by sending personal invitations to homeless system service providers, consumer groups, and community allies. You can also ask community providers to stream the event in their communal spaces. Create a Facebook Event to crowd source the audience. Some meeting platforms, like Zoom, also allow for streaming live to Facebook.
- Determine the best platform to use based on your community's resources. If your community members have access to smart phones, a virtual memorial on Zoom may be a great fit. You could use Zoom meetings if you want everyone to see each other, or Zoom webinars if you want to limit who is visible to the attendees. Zoom can also be used for video or audio, if people only have the ability to call in.
- Gather a team to support the event, including people to coordinate event logistics, facilitate/moderate the event, and help with technology issues.
- Consider how to engage participants during the event by encouraging people to use the chat function to share their experiences and feelings related to grief and loss for community members experiencing homelessness who have died. Some online platforms allow for breakout sessions. This can be a way for people to be able to share stories and engage with one another in smaller groups that allow for more personal connections.
- Consider leaving a moment of silence for all those whose names were not able to be collected or unmute attendees for people to share the names of others who have passed. Focusing the event on eulogies and centering those who have died can set the tone for deeper awareness and understanding related to homelessness and advocacy to end it.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, PLEASE FEEL
FREE TO CONTACT US**

National Coalition For The Homeless
2201 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20037
www.nationalhomeless.org
Phone: (202) 462-4822 ext. 703
info@nationalhomeless.org