



NCAB Newsletter

Vol. 2 Issue 2

September 2006

National Homeless and Low-Income Voter Registration Week, September 24-30

The election on November 7th is one of the most important midterm elections in our Nation's history. There are major issues facing this country such as immigration, healthcare, the economy, the war in the Middle East, and the environment. Decisions made on these issues will affect all Americans and it is important that all people share their voice in the democratic process by voting.

We urge everyone to do what they can to help homeless and low-income people register to vote during this week. Anything from providing voter registration forms to finding out the rules for residency, identity, and felon status related to registering would help. You can find out more at www.nlihc.org/VOTE. Please report any projects at this website so they can track all of the activities going on around the country.

Census Reports Over 46 Million Americans Without Health Insurance¹

The US Census reports that both the number and percentage of Americans without health insurance has gone up from 2004 to 2005. This report showed that this is particularly true for children, whites, native-born Americans, those working full-time and those making \$50,000 or more. The Census data also shows that government insurance, specifically Medicaid, had no statistical change in the percentage of people covered from 2004 to 2005. Although the real numbers did go up some, the percent of the population covered by all government health insurance programs stayed the same at 27.3 percent for both years.

Among HCH clients, the percentage of uninsured changed very little from 2004 to 2005. There was a modest decrease in the percentage of HCH clients receiving Medicaid benefits, from 22.9% in 2004 to 22.2% in 2005 after 5 years of increases in Medicaid rolls for HCH clients². For more information about Uninsurance and how to respond, visit www.nhchc.org and look in the upper right-hand corner for "What's New".

¹ DeNevas-Walt, C., Proctor, B., and Lee, C. (2006). U.S. Census Bureau, Current Populations Reports, P60-231, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60-231.pdf>

² Uniform Data System, Health Resources & Services Administration.

Tara's Story

Tara Cole was pushed into the Cumberland River on August 11, 2006 from her sleeping place on a dock near Riverfront Park in Nashville, Tennessee. Two young men allegedly dared each other to push her in the river after a night of drinking and allegedly assaulting others as they slept by the river. Tara's alleged murderers have been arrested and will soon answer to charges of aggravated assault and criminal homicide. There is more information available at: www.homelesspower.org.

Father Strobel wrote this article published in Nashville's local newspaper, the Tennessean:

“Our city is shocked by the recent killing of Tara Cole by two un-identified men who pushed her into the Cumberland River. This random, senseless and heinous murder seems so unthinkable in a supposedly civilized society.

Her death, though, is not shocking to the homeless. From my experience, the homeless constantly live with the prospect of random violence. Long before Americans experienced the meaning of the word "terrorism," the homeless have known terror.

If classical terrorism includes fear, intimidation, unprovoked attack, unexpected assault and violent death, then the homeless have been victims of terrorism for years. Those terrorist acts are generally isolated and singular and often go unreported.

A vicious attack on an elderly man, robbing him of \$10, is not worth the victim pursuing a criminal investigation, especially if little comes of it or even worse, only a light sentence that leads to further retaliation.

Such violence should only underscore the great need the city has to provide affordable housing. The Mayor's Commission on the Homeless has a task force report calling for the creation of 1,000 housing units in 10 years at the cost of \$40 million in 2005 dollars. This is 10 percent of the \$400 million preliminary figures for a new convention center.

The Commission on the Homeless is Nashville's first joint effort of government, business, religious congregations and nonprofit organizations to address the homeless problem. Progress is painfully slow. For instance, not everyone on the commission believes that housing is a basic human right, as the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights Article 25, states. Still, the commission is a beginning.

What the commission needs is a massive campaign to educate the public about the need for housing as a fundamental right because public policy follows public education. Such education should have the scope and breadth of the Titans' NFLYes Campaign. Remember?

It seemed that every school, civic club, congregation, billboard, media ad, talk show and retail store was invested in creating the public policy. Likewise, 1,000 housing units will never be accomplished without a similar buy-in from all our citizens.

Meanwhile, our city will continue to shelter some of our homeless, while the Tara Coles remain sleeping on our streets.

If there is anything good that may come from Tara Cole's tragic death, I hope it becomes the "wake-up" call for all of the rest of us to educate ourselves about the terrors of sleeping on the streets and to create the public policy to eliminate it.”

The following story from the September 11 Worcester (MA) Telegram and Gazette newspaper tells about the work of Amy Grassetto, a member of the National Consumer Advisory Board Executive Committee.

Study finds challenges increased for homeless mothers

By Elizabeth Cooney

Amy B. Grassetto never expected to be homeless.

She and her husband lost their shuttle-driving business, their Fitchburg apartment and their sense of security four years ago. They and their two teenage children doubled up with relatives and lived in shelters until landing an apartment in December 2003.

That was the year researchers led by Dr. Linda F. Weinreb of the University of Massachusetts Medical School surveyed homeless mothers to see if there were any differences in their health and well-being compared with a similar group interviewed for the Worcester Family Research Project in 1993.

Homeless mothers were poorer and suffered from more physical and mental illnesses in 2003 than 10 years earlier, they concluded. The findings were reported in last month's American Journal of Public Health.

Dr. Weinreb is cautious about extrapolating the results beyond Worcester, but they ring true with people who know what homelessness looks like here.

That includes Ms. Grassetto, who began volunteering for the Homeless Families Project at Family Health in gratitude for the help they gave her family while they were homeless. She turned to the community health center for health care — she has advanced arthritis and her husband contracted tuberculosis while they were in a shelter — as well as housing assistance. She counted herself fortunate to have her husband to rely on, while many mothers she met in shelters were single parents.

Now she is paid for her work assisting people with applications for food stamps, coordinating donations to the homeless program and performing other duties for the health center on Queen Street. She also joined the consumer panel of the national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Homeless Families Project.

“There are more homeless families than people realize,” she said. “When people think of the homeless, they think of single people who don't want to work. So many families out there are struggling, either homeless or on the edge of being homeless.”

The national project sponsored research at eight sites across the country, including Worcester, to learn more about the difficulties facing homeless families, from poverty to hunger to physical and mental illness.

Ten years after the first SAMHSA-funded survey of 220 mothers, Dr. Weinreb found higher rates of poor health in 128 different mothers questioned in 2003. Mental health problems

included depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and alcohol or drug abuse. Mental health services were received by 50 percent of the women in 1993 but 37 percent in the 2003 study.

“It shows a relationship between poverty and depression and other stressors,” Dr. Weinreb said. “But this is still fundamentally a housing problem. If there was affordable housing, we wouldn’t have a problem with homelessness.”

The Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance estimates that 186 families, or 553 people, stay at emergency shelters or transitional housing programs every night in Worcester County. An additional 3,000 family members live in doubled-up situations because they have no homes of their own.

Frances M. Anthes, president and chief executive officer of Family Health Center, said Dr. Weinreb has clearly documented that homeless families are confronting a more daunting array of challenges in this decade than in the ’90s.

To her the issue is poverty, with stable shelter an important component of the solution but not the only answer to the challenges families are going to face.

“This study shows the difficulties faced by the homeless mother,” she said. “Obviously that’s got to have some implications on other members of that family, including the kids.”

The implication for service providers is to be aware of what families may need. Dr. Weinreb believes that primary health care can help families deal with physical and mental health problems, including substance abuse.

“It’s part of the routine,” she said. “In the same way that someone will get blood pressure checked, we’ll also screen for history of trauma and depression and we’ll screen the kids for learning issues.”

Amy Grassetto believes when people find housing again it leads to other good things.

It did for her.

“Not that I ever wanted to go through the experience of being homeless — it was very humbling — but it really changed my life in a very positive way,” she said last week about her work at Family Health Center and the national Homeless Families Project. “I share with lot of the girls in shelters, just because you’re homeless doesn’t mean you don’t want the same things out of life that everyone wants.

“Or that you don’t deserve them.”

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Final Tributes to Ellen Dailey

From Paul Boden, Western Regional Advocacy Project:

There are many, many beautiful people in the world of survival and compassion and brutality and pain that is homelessness and poverty. Maybe it is just the yin and yang of life, or maybe it's that challenge really does bring out the best and the worst in people. Anyone who lives and works this life for any sustained period of time will experience true beauty: an unmasked and fearless love that can only come from a person who has truly experienced and examined the depths of their own soul. It's a love for a whole community, that asks for nothing in return and gives simply to keep its own spirit alive. It is a love that gives to all with courage and tenacity. It is a love that speaks to truth.

It is the love of Arnette Watson and Ellen Dailey.

By Reginald O. Hamilton, member of the NCAB Executive Committee:

SHE WAS AN ANGELIC SOUL (Tribute to Ellen Dailey)

Like a meteor she expressed herself to Earth
She was groomed and nurtured so she could assume her berth
The path she would take afforded her an exploration of her worth
Within the embodiment that was to excel her to her perch.

Some saw her as a firebrand, confident woman living here on Earth
Some came to know her as a caring, loyal, compassionate birth
Others were fortunate to see beyond the exterior beyond the girth
Others became attuned to who really had been thrust onto Earth.

She was more than an earthly body, she was a loving Soul
She was an angelic soul sent to expand our goal
She was more than the Ellen, they knew a living Soul
She was and will forever be a guiding light communicating with our soul.

As an angelic spirit Ellen was sent to guide
As an angelic spirit Ellen spread love, caring, compassion
As an angelic spirit Ellen is forever within us
As an angelic spirit Ellen is one with all of us.

Website Resources:

National Healthcare for the Homeless Council: www.nhchc.org

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty: www.nlchp.org

National Low Income Housing Coalition: www.nlihc.org

National Coalition for the Homeless: www.nationalhomeless.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness: www.endhomelessness.org

Legislation Search: www.thomas.gov

National Homeless Persons Memorial Day—December 21, 2006

There will be a national day of remembrance for all those homeless persons who we lost this year on December 21, 2006. Please let us know if you are planning any events in your communities so we can include them in the next newsletter.

**The NCAB Newsletter is produced with support from
the Health Resources and Services Administration.**

Send Us Your Stories

We need you!!! Hopefully, in our upcoming issues you, the readers, will send in your personal stories, poems, and articles regarding how you started your board and how it is running today. Please send any helpful comments on what you would like to see in the newsletter that might help others to ncab@nhchc.org