

A decorative border of small house icons surrounds the central text. The top and bottom borders are complete rows of 16 icons each. The left and right borders are vertical columns of 16 icons each, with the top and bottom icons of these columns overlapping the top and bottom borders respectively.

How Can You Help To End Homelessness?

❖ Contribute

❖ Advocate

❖ Volunteer

❖ Educate

CONTRIBUTE

Needed items and services might include:

* Clothing. The lack of clean, well-fitting clothes and shoes causes great hardship beyond exposure to the elements-it hurts one's self-image and one's chance to get ahead. People experiencing homelessness must travel light, with few opportunities to safely store or adequately clean what they can't carry. On job interviews, a poorly dressed person has little chance for success. Give your clean clothes to those who could use them. Before you give your own clothes or start a clothing drive, talk to your local shelter and find out what items they really need. Most have limited storage space, and can't use winter clothes in summer or vice versa. Some serve only a certain group of people. Please clean the clothes before you donate them.

* In-kind services and materials. Service providers may be able to use copying, printing, food, transportation, marketing assistance, computer equipment and assistance, electrical work, building materials, plumbing, etc.

* Household goods or other items. Service providers may need items such as kitchen utensils, furniture, books, toys, games, stuffed animals, dolls, diapers, etc.

* Books. People experiencing homelessness may have limited access to a library and find that there is little for them to do when spending a night at a shelter. Find out if your local shelter would appreciate donations of books. Consider organizing a book drive to create a small library at the shelter if there is not already one there.

* Computers. Many non-profit organizations have a difficult time purchasing expensive but essential equipment such as computers. If you have a machine you no longer need, a local shelter or service provider might greatly appreciate the donation. Shelter guests might also appreciate the donation of machines for their use, although you should check if a shelter would have space to set up public computers.

* Homeless "survival kits." Create and distribute kits that include items such as cups, pots, pans, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and cosmetics. (Try coordinating this through a group that gives out meals from a van, for example.) During cold weather, organize drives for blankets, coats, hats, scarves, mittens, socks, and the like.

* Phone calls. Help people experiencing homelessness contact loved ones by offering the opportunity to make free long distance calls on holidays. Donate to or organize a cell phone drive for the homeless.

* Job opportunities. Encourage your company, school, or place of worship to hire people experiencing homelessness (if they are not already working). Most unemployed homeless adults desperately want to work, but need an employer to give them a chance.

* Support for a homeless person or family. As people move out of a shelter or transitional housing program, consider raising money to contribute for a security deposit, or assist by contributing household goods, babysitting, or moral support. See if your local shelter has a partnering program.

Other things you might do to contribute include:

* Raise funds for a program. Ask your group to abstain from one meal and donate the proceeds to a shelter or soup kitchen. Sponsor a benefit concert or coffee house featuring local musicians and poets (Don't forget to include homeless and formerly homeless performers!). Organize a walk-a-thon or a yard sale and donate the proceeds.

* Consider giving directly to people experiencing homelessness. Deciding whether or not to give to panhandlers is a personal decision. Some may not give money out of fear that it may be spent supporting an addiction. Although this is occasionally true, the money also may help someone buy a meal, afford housing, buy clothes, purchase an ID to stay in a shelter, pay for transportation to a job, childcare, healthcare, support a family member-the possibilities are numerous. In some cases, instead of giving money, people carry gift certificates to restaurants or granola bars, peanut butter crackers, sandwiches, or fruit to give to homeless people.

* Smile. Whether or not you choose to give change, please don't look away from homeless people as if they do not exist. Making eye contact, saying a few words, or smiling can reaffirm the humanity of a person at a time when homelessness seems to have stripped it away.

ADVOCATE

Advocacy is critical to creating the systemic changes needed to end homelessness. Advocacy means working with people experiencing homelessness to bring about positive changes in policies and programs on the local, state, and federal levels. It means working with various sectors of the community (e.g. city/county officials, members of Congress, direct service providers, and the business community) to develop workable strategies for responding to homelessness. It also means changing your language and behaviors in small ways that may contribute to larger changes in the way people experiencing homelessness are seen and treated in our society.

Here are some ways you might help:

* Get connected to a coalition. Volunteer at your local, state, or national housing or homeless advocacy coalition, or make a financial contribution to support their work. If there is no local coalition in your area, think about starting one!

* Write letters, e-mail, call, or visit public officials at the city, county, state and federal levels asking what they are doing about homelessness and/or mentioning relevant legislation. When legislators receive more than a few visits or letters about any subject, they sit up and take notice. Personal visits are the most powerful; letters, e-mails, and phone calls are next. Addresses for public officials are available at the local library.

* Follow local politics. Attend neighborhood and public meetings and speak up in favor of low-income housing, group homes, shelters, and homelessness prevention programs.

* Educate your leaders. Organize site visits for political leaders and the media to visit local homeless programs to highlight ways that your community is successfully addressing the many problems associated with homelessness.

* Involve the media. Call or write the media to inform them of your concern for people experiencing homelessness in your area. Write editorials when important issues related to homelessness arise in your community.

* Encourage those most directly involved to advocate. Encourage people experiencing homelessness, agency volunteers, and staff to contact officials at all levels of government. Use opportunities like special holiday meals to do this-provide paper, pens, stamped envelopes, and sample messages at every meeting and event. Have a "Call In Day." Try getting a few people with cellular phones to go to shelters or meal programs to get people experiencing homelessness, volunteers, and staff to call the Governor (Mayor, Council Member...) asking them to stop future cuts in essential services. Create a "reverse panhandling" activity-get people experiencing homelessness and other volunteers to hand out quarters and ask people to call their legislators.

* Register people experiencing homelessness to vote. The "You Don't Need A Home to Vote" nonpartisan voter registration/education/get-out-the-vote campaign occurs nationwide each election cycle. Find out how you can lobby for homeless voting rights written policy or law in your state.

* Get involved with a local street newspaper. Street newspapers educate the general public about homelessness while providing people experiencing homelessness with a creative outlet to have their articles, photos, artwork, and poetry published and providing employment opportunities as vendors and writers.

* Join the National Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project. NCH's National Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project (NHCROP) is organized at the grassroots level with nine regional field sites throughout the country. NHCROP tracks the growing trend of criminalizing homelessness, along with the recent increase in the number of hate crimes and violence against people experiencing homelessness. Local homeless activists are working to stop this trend by using litigation, lobbying, community organizing, documentation, and research.

* Sponsor a Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. NCH and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness (NSCAHH) co-sponsor an Awareness Week every

year during the first full week before Thanksgiving. Awareness weeks are organized in more than 500 campuses and communities nationwide.

* Recognize National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day. Every year, on or around the first day of winter (December 21), nearly 100 communities nationwide hold local memorial services to remember people who have died homeless during that year.

* Become more aware of your language. Try to minimize language in your own and others' vocabularies that refers to people experiencing homelessness in derogatory ways. By using expressions such as "people experiencing homelessness" rather than labels such as "bum," "transient," or even "the homeless," we remind ourselves that people who are in such situations are still people first-just people who are going through a difficult period in their lives. In a time when they may find it difficult to hold onto their sense of humanity, it is particularly important that we do not use language that further diminishes the dignity of people in homeless situations.

VOLUNTEER

Reaching out by volunteering your time to work directly with people experiencing homelessness is one of the best ways to learn about homelessness and help to meet immediate needs at the same time. There is a lot of "behind the scenes" work (filing, sorting clothes, cutting vegetables, etc.) to be done at shelters and other direct service agencies. Think about what you do best and the kind of setting in which you work most effectively-with individuals or groups, with men, women, or children, and so on. Then, call a few places, ask what help they need, and arrange for a visit.

Remember that service providers need help at all times of year-not just holidays-and will appreciate regular volunteers who can be counted on to show up.

Here are some ways you might help:

* Work at a shelter. Take an evening or overnight shift. Help with clerical work such as answering phones, typing, filing, or sorting mail. Serve food, wash dishes, or sort and distribute clothes.

* Help build or fix up houses or shelters. Check with your local public housing authority, or find the nearest chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

* Offer professional skills directly or assist in job training. Direct service providers may be able to use many services and skills, including secretarial, catering, plumbing, accounting, management, carpentry, public relations, fundraising, legal, medical, dentistry, writing, child care, counseling, tutoring, or mentoring.

* Share hobbies. Teach your hobbies to a group of people staying at a homeless shelter. Ask them about their hobbies and have them teach you.

* Invite people experiencing homelessness to a community event. Invite people who are experiencing homelessness to a worship service, public concert or picnic, city council meeting, etc.

* Organize an event at a shelter. Plan an evening program such as a board game or chess night, an open mic poetry reading, a guest storytelling or musical performance, or a holiday party.

* Work with children. Assist program directors that are coordinating events such as field trips, picnics or art workshops for children staying in homeless shelters. Find out if there are children who could benefit from tutors or mentors.

* Involve others! Encourage your classmates, co-workers, church/synagogue members, or civic club to join or support your efforts.

EDUCATE

*Learn about homelessness! There is a lot of information that can be found on the Internet.

Some suggested sites are:

- ❖ Annual U.S. Conference of Mayors Report on Hunger and Homelessness: <http://usmayors.org/publications/default.asp>
- ❖ The National Coalition for the Homeless: www.nationalhomeless.org
- ❖ The National Alliance to End Homelessness: <http://www.naeh.org>
- ❖ The National Low Income Housing Coalition: <http://www.nlihc.org>
- ❖ The National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness: <http://www.studentsagainsthunger.org/>
- ❖ The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty: <http://www.nlchp.org>
- ❖ Homes for the Homeless/Institute for Children and Poverty: <http://www.homesforthehomeless.com/>
- ❖ National Health Care for the Homeless Council (Formerly The Better Homes Fund): <http://www.nhchc.org/>
- ❖ Universal Living Wage Campaign: <http://www.universallivingwage.org>
- ❖ To find out other ways to help homeless people: <http://earthsystems.org/ways/list.html>

* Follow your local news. Read your local newspaper regularly to keep abreast of what is happening to homeless and low-income people and the policies that affect them in your community.

* Talk to children about homelessness.

* Read. Check out some of the many books published about homelessness in America. A few recommendations to get you started are listed below.

* Participate in or Host a Hunger Banquet or in a 24 hour Fast

* Coordinate and participate in a local Sleep Out

* Organize a "Faces of Homelessness" panel. Through panel presentations, the voices and faces of those who have experienced homelessness personalize the issue, dispel stereotypes, inspire involvement, and serve as a training, skill building, and empowerment tool for those who have experienced homelessness