

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless

We are a unified, social action group, fully committed to our ultimate goal: the eradication of homelessness with respect for the dignity and diversity of our membership, the homeless, and the community.

The Coalition performs three areas of work: Coordinating services, educating the public and grassroots organizing and advocacy.

You can reach the following staff at
(513)421-7803

Georgine Getty Executive Director ext 14	Jimmy Heath Streetvibes Editor ext 12
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Brendan Goodwin
Administrative Coordinator
ext 13

Steven Shockley Vendor Coordinator ext 11	Andy Erickson Civil Rights Project ext 16
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The Homeless



1506 Elm Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

513-421-7803

www.homeless.cinci.com

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the Newsletter of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless

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SPRING 2003

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1506 ELM STREET, CINCINNATI, OHIO 45210 513-421-7803

Homelessness hit my heart during my first month at the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless. A woman who had become homeless that morning came into the office with her two young children. My mind knew that one in four homeless people is a child, but actually seeing a hungry child made the nightmare of homelessness truly sink in. This is a memory of fear that will stay with those children throughout their lives.

Every day at GCCH something happens that hurts. It may be seeing the face of someone who just lost their job. It may be the latest story in the paper about a low income housing unit closing and families being "displaced." It may be an ignorant comment made on the street, by a careless politician or by the press. Whatever the particular, every day in Cincinnati there is a need for education and advocacy about homelessness.

This is why I am so proud to be a part of GCCH. Our mission is clear: end homelessness in Cincinnati through education, advocacy and coordination of services. We work tirelessly at this goal so that not one more man, woman or child has to include the experience of homelessness in his or her life.

Every day at GCCH something truly amazing happens. A group of high school students may call and ask how they can stop homelessness. A *Streetvibes* vendor may come in with a grin to tell of their new apartment or job. A random donation may come in from someone who saw us on the news or read about us. A new committee may form to address a need in the community. Every day in Cincinnati small miracles of awareness and caring occur and attempt to counteract the horror of homelessness.

Homelessness is hard for many people to truly see. This is why GCCH, with your help, continues to be an important force in Cincinnati. There is nothing more difficult to look at than a hungry child, a desperate woman or a broken man. Yet there is nothing more important to see.

Sincerely,
Georgine Getty
Executive Director

Successes at a Glance

The key to ending homelessness is education and advocacy. As a grassroots organization, the Coalition for the Homeless is driven by these principles to fulfill our mission of ending homelessness. The final outcomes of our efforts are not easily measured in the short term. But each day, we can look at our programs and see how they are working to change social structures and ideas that lead to and perpetuate homelessness. We have three main focuses in our work: Coordination of Services, Advocacy and Education. The following is a small glimpse of what we have been able to accomplish as a coalition in each of these areas in the past quarter:

Coordination of Services

- GCCH staff and general body members have continued to meet in committees on a variety of issues including: Homeless Management Information System, the Homeless Individuals Task Force and the Homeless Respite Center which will create a space for homeless individuals who are too sick, injured or contagious to access area shelters.
- Our Minimum Standards Committee has also been hard at work to prepare for our bi-annual inspections, assuring that area shelters and transitional homes are safe, clean and protective of the rights of their clients.

Advocacy

- This past quarter, we have taken an active role in working with the English Woods Community Council in order to prevent the destruction of over 700 low income units in English Woods and the subsequent displacement of resident families.
- In late February, members of the Coalition for the Homeless' Civil Rights program and the PATH program teamed up to lead a civil rights training of Downtown Cincinnati, Inc.'s Safety Ambassadors. Their Safety Ambassadors are a combination cleaning and safety crew in the downtown area and often have contact with panhandlers and homeless people downtown. The training was a huge success and DCI has talked about it becoming a regular part of the Safety Ambassadors' training.

Education

- *Streetvibes*, continues to educate thousands of individuals each month. From January – March, 14,000 copies of *Streetvibes* were sold by our vendors and through subscriptions. Thousands more were distributed to outlying areas where our vendors cannot always reach to sell the paper. February also saw the reinstatement of *Streetvibes T.V.*—a cable access television show highlighting homelessness issues.
- Our Speakers' Bureau has been an important aspect of our education programs by providing a face and a voice to homelessness issues. This past quarter, our Speakers' Bureau, which includes homeless and formerly homeless individuals and a staff member, spoke to more than 500 individuals at schools and community groups throughout Cincinnati about personal experiences of homelessness and the causes and solutions to the problem.



40% of homeless men served in the armed forces

I am the Face of Homelessness

by: David

What is it like being homeless? That's like asking what it's like living in a house—there are many diverse experiences. Being homeless is like being a suspect and a potential victim. Homeless people are the most vulnerable people to thugs and cops alike. We are constantly followed in stores, malls, museums—we are seen as undesirable and dangerous. It's like being ignored. People see you bedding down on the sidewalk and don't seem to notice—like it's normal for folks to be sleeping on the sidewalk or in the park or on a steam grate. It's like really appreciating the coming of springtime. It's like paying special attention to the forecast to see if and how much you'll suffer at night. It's like the sinking feeling you get when you have no blankets and your call to the hypothermia hotline goes unanswered because the overnight low is a balmy 45 degrees and the people who staff the hotline are all in their warm houses. It's like being rejected by the local shelter for lack of a Social Security card, because the shelter has a strict I.D. policy to keep the riff-raff out. It's like being ashamed of begging, or depending on charity for food, shelter, and clothes; like being ashamed to tell your family where you are, ashamed of no pay-check, ashamed of neglecting your child. It's like being lonely every day. It's like being humiliated every day, like grasping for dignity. It's not like being miserable every day. It's like experiencing life more vividly since you had to leave that warm house. It's like finding joy in small things such as random and daily acts of kindness. It's like taking pride in who you are, in spite of your circumstances.



Mother of Mercy students meet with a graphic designer to discuss the layout of their book

Wish List

- **Time** - volunteer to sit on our Standdown or Annual Dinner planning committees or help us with Newsletter preparation or data entry
- **Supplies** - Desktop Paper Folder, Blank CDs, Floppy Disks, Cream, Sugar, Styrofoam cups, Cleaning Supplies
- **Members** - become an individual member of GCCH, call us for more information
- **Donate** in honor of someone for Mother's Day, Father's Day, Birthdays, Holidays, World Peace, etc...

!!!! Action Alert !!!!

Support the National Housing Trust Fund

1. Call your Representative's DC office by dialing 1-866-864-NHTF and ask to be transferred to your Representative's office.
2. Ask to speak with the staff person who works on housing issues.
3. Request that the Representative be a co-sponsor of the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act, HR 1102. Tell the staff person to contact Warren Gunnels in Representative Sanders' office if they have questions.
4. Report back to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition with the results of your calls by emailing Julie@nlihc.org.

GCCH to Publish Book

GCCH, in collaboration with Mother of Mercy High School, received \$5,000 from the Xavier University Youth Grantmaking Council to publish a book based on interviews of homeless individuals. The project, which was the top grant winner, has brought more than 30 high school students together with homeless individuals to learn about homelessness. GCCH and the students of Mother of Mercy plan to hold a book-release party in mid May. The book will be combined with a documentary, *Streetvibes* subscriptions, speaking engagements and Homeless Reports as an educational package for local schools in an effort to bring the issue of homelessness into school curriculums.



Cheers N Jeers



Cheers to:

- Member agency, McMicken Dental Center (352-6363), for winning a grant in the amount of \$183,000 to purchase new dental equipment to serve homeless clients and being featured in *People Magazine*.
- Member agency, Health Resource Center (357-4602) for making it to the final round of funding decisions for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for their Homeless Respite Center, hopefully to open soon!
- *Time Magazine* for the photo-essay "The Real Face of Homelessness" (January 20, 2003).

Jeers to:

- The fact that almost 30% of homeless children have been homeless more than once.
- On the national level, 50% of the homeless population are African American. In Cincinnati, 70% of the homeless are African American.
- In Ohio, a low-income worker must earn \$11.79 per hour—more than twice the federal minimum wage—afford an average two-bedroom apartment.