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Empty Condos Hold Opportunity in U.S. Housing Crunch

By Matthew Cardinale, IPS

Large cities like New York and Chicago, which have been grappling with a lack of affordable apartments combined with an abundance of vacant, unaffordable condos, are now trying to turn some of those empty condo units into rentals, with varying levels of affordability.

Recent changes in the U.S. economy and the housing market have presented challenges for low-income renters.

Many families whose homes were foreclosed upon have been forced into the rental market. While some efforts, like those going on in Atlanta, Georgia, are providing downpayment assistance to get new families into these empty homes, the new families are not necessarily low-income families.

Of course, many low-income families do not have the credit or the income to qualify for a mortgage to purchase a home, and therefore are forced to rent.

According to the National Low-Income Housing

Coalition (NLIHC), low-income families face the greatest shortage of affordable rental units among any income bracket.

"In 2010, there were 9.8 million extremely low income renter households in the United States, and only 3 million rental homes affordable and available to these households," the organization states in a recent report.

Approximately 14 percent of all housing units in the U.S., or over 18.8 million units, were vacant at the end of June 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This figure includes vacant rentals and single-family homes as well as seasonal units and units that are held off the market for various reasons.

In response, Chicago and New York have set up programs to convert empty condos into rental units.

The Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) also recently announced a program to convert empty single-family homes currently owned by the government-sponsored enterprise Sallie Mae into

rental units.

Denise Duncal, a spokeswoman for FHFA, told IPS that the agency will soon be announcing its decision regarding proposals submitted by investors to participate in the pilot program.

NLIHC submitted comments to FHFA prior to the beginning of the pilot program asking for some units to be set aside for low-income families. However, that does not appear to have happened.

"The available details of the pilot sale do not indicate that there will be an affordability component to this first stage of the program. It is possible that affordability will be a

component of future pilots or stages of the programme, although there has been no indication from FHFA that this will be the case," the NLIHC wrote on its website.

Other than the reports from Chicago and New York and the FHFA programme, the NLIHC does not see any national trend towards dealing with the juxtaposition of vacant housing and unhoused people, in terms of providing affordable rentals, spokeswoman Amy Clark told IPS.

In Chicago, an organisation called Community Investment

Continued Page 4

Page 2
INSPIre
news briefs

Page 3
Spanish Mayor
against austerity

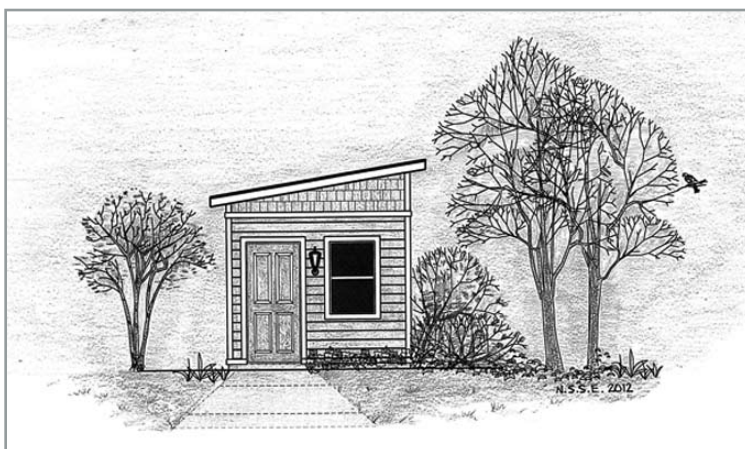
Page 4
Condos
conclusion
Anti-Poor
Laws

Page 5
Safe Ground
Cabins
Letters to
Editor

Page 6
Chongo
on Enviroment
and Elections

Page 7
McKinney-
Vento

Page 8
Homeless
Services
Info



Safe Ground will display its proposed cabins at a downtown Sacramento Park in September. Story on page 5.

CANDIDATE FORUM

Moderated by the League of Women Voters of Sacramento County

Wednesday
Sept. 19, 2012
Starts promptly at
7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Sacramento City Council
District 4

Featuring City Council Candidates
Steve Hansen and Joseph Yee

Where:
Pioneer Congregational United Church of Christ
2700 L Street across from Sutter's Fort

Accessibility: Location is wheel chair accessible.



Parking: Street parking is free surrounding the event after 6pm. Free parking is also available in a parking garage at 27th between Capitol and N.

Child Care: Provided by Pioneer Congregation UCC Church.



The Forum will highlight:
homelessness and affordable, accessible housing.
Other topics may include hunger, land use and community equity.
Questions on any topics will be accepted from the audience.

Candidate Forum Co-Sponsors:



For more information: Please contact Bob Erlenbusch at bob@sachousingalliance.org or (916) 455-4900 x 303.

Public Service Announcement

[inspiring the world]

1. Street papers reveal changing face of homelessness

Street papers have witnessed the consequences of the economic downturn since 2008 and help to give a voice to those caught up in the ravages of the recession. A recent survey, released by the International Network of Street Papers (INSP), revealed the scale of the problem.

Of the 89 street papers participating in the survey, 72% have seen a change in their vendor base, mainly in Europe and the United States, where more families and young people have become street paper vendors.

Street papers have also witnessed a change in the demographics of homeless people in their cities. Almost 40% says that more young people have become homeless or unemployed and 21% noted more elderly people in this category than before the crisis.



Above: Leon (right) seen here at an emergency shelter Klimaka, is one of the many effected by Greece's economic crisis. Photo: Myrto Papadopoulos

The economic crisis at large is quoted as the main cause of the changing demographic of homeless people. 40% say that a lack of employment specifically is the largest contributor to these changes, followed by a lack of affordable housing. (INSP)

2. Women's boxing rises from gyms to Olympic arena

For the very first time, female boxers were allowed to compete in the Olympic Games this year. Their presence in London reflects the sport's growing popularity, particularly in the USA, where more and more women are turning to boxing for both exercise and as a competitive outlet.

Even though women have boxed for more than a century, it was not until the 90's that the sport truly came to prominence, spurred by the success of Laila Ali and Jackie Frazier-Lyde, daughters of former heavyweight champions Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier who both won world championship fights.

Through the 1980s the United States

Amateur Boxing Federation, now known as USA Boxing, banned women from participating in sanctioned amateur fights until fighters Gail Grandchamp of Massachusetts and Dallas Malloy of Seattle sued for gender discrimination in the late '80s and early '90s. (Spare Change News)



Above Photo: Thomas Chevalier

3. Swiss buskers face ban on street music

Residents and passers-by are becoming less tolerant of buskers in Switzerland. In every city, strict rules are being enforced which will ensure that the only thing to be heard on the streets in the future is traffic noise.

In the city of Basel, the rules have already been tightened significantly. Local authorities have decreed that on Sundays and bank holidays, no-one is permitted to busk in public places. From Monday to Saturday buskers can only perform between the hours of 11 and 12.30 or 16.00 and 20.30. Musicians are only permitted to play during the first half of the hour, without any amplification.

Cyprian Kohut is a professional musician who busks while looking for a position in an orchestra and practices his art up to four times a day. On a good day, he can earn 100 Francs but Kohut says that, because of the new regulations, it takes him longer to earn any money, due to enforced breaks in play. (Surprise)



Above: Cyprian Kohut, a professional musician from Poland, plays the cello for passers-by. Photo: Lucian Hunziker

4. Malawi loses children to Tanzanian traffickers

Fuelled by extreme poverty, Malawi has

long been a hub for human traffickers. But local community leaders say some Malawians are now collaborating with Tanzanian traffickers to lure vulnerable children over the border, with the promise of earning higher wages.

One ten-year-old victim describes being made to fish in dangerous Tanzanian waters and seeing children being killed by wild animals and crocodiles, while others died of cholera due to poor sanitation. Many children from Malawi are also taken to Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa where they are forced into the sexual trade and domestic slavery.

Last year the US State Department reported that the Malawi government does not fully comply with the minimum standards required to eliminate trafficking but that it was making significant efforts to do so. But human rights lawyer Habiba Osman believes "the problem is that we don't have a human trafficking law in place so this makes it difficult for government to actively trace such cases." (INSP)

5. Canadian school bans Wi-Fi after health scare

A school in Ontario has banned the use of Wi-Fi internet connections after a concerned staff member learned of a recent study by the World Health Organization, which suggests a possible relation between cancer and Wi-Fi.

Abby Stec of Pretty River Academy says the ban will protect the students from the electromagnetic fields emitted by Wi-Fi access points, which she believes was the cause behind pupil's complaints of unexplained heart palpitations, loss of sleep and headaches. While few studies have been done on the subject, many scientists remain skeptical of the claims.



Above Photo: Sebastien Bertrand

Tony Muc, a professor of environmental health at the University of Toronto, believes that we must not sound the alarm. He maintains that "radiations from Wi-Fi access points are also present in microwave ovens. There has been no link between health problems and the presence of microwave ovens in our lives for more than 40 years." (L'itinéraire)

6. Rugby legend Francois Pienaar is "a big fan of The Big Issue"

Ever since lifting the World Cup Trophy in South Africa seventeen years ago, Francois Pienaar has continued to inspire not only Hollywood, but also 2,000 young people and one Big Issue vendor.

"I always buy my Big Issue," he says. "We live in Cape Town, on Clifton, and there is this beautiful lady that stands on the street corner. I always realize that she is there and that it is a job. And if you don't support her in the job, she can't support the family below her. It is wonderful. I am a big fan of The Big Issue."

Pienaar also runs a charity that aims to educate and coach a future generation of leaders: "If you look at every village, and every town, there is a bright child who could be a future leader. There are also people that want to make a difference, but don't know how. Imagine if you can connect them, what a powerful change that would be for South Africa." (INSP)

7. Eastern Europeans seek help from German street papers

Tens of thousands of Eastern Europeans are fleeing their homes because of poverty and violence, with increasing numbers seeking help from German street papers, like HEMPELS. Staff at the street paper, based in Keil, offer what help they can but they are struggling to cope with overwhelming numbers.

Every day they receive requests from Romanian, Bulgarian and Slovakian people hoping to sell the street paper. Many see it as their only chance of earning an income. "Recently we had a young Roma family with two small children, but unfortunately I had to put them off until later as we have no more vacancies for vendors at the moment," says office manager Reinhard Böttner.

In the last few years, since the EU opened up its borders, there have been tens of thousands of Eastern Europeans who, faced with poverty at home, have sought refuge in Germany. At first it was mostly Polish people, but they have since been joined by mainly Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Slovaks. (HEMPELS)

8. India to give free generic drugs to hundreds of millions

India has put in place a \$5.4 billion policy to provide free medicine to its people, a decision that could change the lives of hundreds of millions. From city hospitals to tiny rural clinics, India's public doctors will soon be able to prescribe free generic drugs to all patients, vastly expanding access to medicine in a country where public spending on health was just \$4.50 per person last year.

But a ban on branded drugs stands to cut pharmaceutical giants out of the windfall. Under the plan, doctors will be limited to a generics-only drug list and face punishment for prescribing branded medicines, a major disadvantage for pharmaceutical companies in one of the world's fastest-growing drug markets.

The initiative would overhaul a system where healthcare is often a luxury and private clinics account for four times as

Continued Next Page



Continued
From Page 2

much spending as state hospitals, despite 40 percent of the people living below the poverty line, or \$1.25 a day or less. (Reuters)



Above: A pharmacist gives free medicine provided by the government to a patient inside a hospital in Kolkata. Photo: REUTERS/Rupak De Chowdhuri

9. Colleagues' cover: Straatjournaal

'Elsje' - a well-known cartoon character from Dutch daily newspapers - features on the cover of Dutch street paper Straatjournaal. To tie in with local comic event 'Stripdagen Haarlem', Straatjournaal asked seven regional artists to create a unique comic about homelessness and street vendors for this colorful special edition. Launched in 1996, the monthly street paper is distributed in Haarlem, near Amsterdam, by about 70 vendors and is read by 48,000 readers.



Above Photo: Straatjournaal

Homeward Street Journal is a member of the International Network of Street Papers (INSP). The network supports over 120 street papers in 40 countries on six continents. Over 200,000 homeless people have changed their lives through selling street papers. The content on these pages is reprinted from our colleagues around the world. Learn more at www.street-papers.org.

Spanish mayor becomes hero — for robbing supermarkets

By Paul Day, Reuters

A Spanish mayor who became a cult hero for staging robberies at supermarkets and giving stolen groceries to the poor sets off this week on a three-week march that could embarrass the government and energize anti-austerity campaigners. (634 Words) -

Juan Manuel Sanchez Gordillo, regional lawmaker and mayor of the town of Marinaleda - population 2,645 - in the southern region of Andalusia, said food stolen last week in the robberies went to families hit hardest by Spain's economic crisis.

Seven people have been arrested for participating in the two raids, in which labor unionists, cheered on by supporters, piled food into supermarket carts and walked out without paying while Sanchez Gordillo, 59, stood outside.

He has political immunity as an elected member of Andalusia's regional parliament, but says he would be happy to renounce it and be arrested himself.

"There are people who don't have enough to eat. In the 21st century, this is an absolute disgrace," he told Reuters in an interview in the Atocha train station in Madrid, tugging on his graying Fidel Castro-style beard.

Sanchez Gordillo says he wants to draw attention to the human face of Spain's economic mess - poverty levels have risen by over 15 percent since 2007, a quarter of workers are jobless and tens of thousands have been evicted from their homes.

"There are people who don't have enough to eat. In the 21st century, this is an absolute disgrace."

The conservative government says an official has no business flouting the law.

"You can't be Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham," said Alfonso Alonso, spokesman for the ruling People's Party (PP) in the national Parliament. "This man is just searching for publicity at the cost of everyone else."

Media coverage of the supermarket stunt has made Sanchez Gordillo a national celebrity. While talking to Reuters he was approached by supporters who shook his hand and thanked him for his stand against the conservative government.

His home province of Andalusia is one of the

parts of Spain worst hit by its crisis: one worker in three is jobless.

He will begin his trek from Jodar, the town with Andalusia's highest unemployment rate, planning to march across the region in blistering summer heat to persuade other local leaders to refuse to comply with government reforms.

He plans to tell mayors to skip debt payments, stop layoffs, cease home evictions and ignore central government demands for budget cuts, a message that infuriates Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's government as it tries to convince investors in Spanish bonds that he can fix the battered economy.

The EU has demanded Spain shrink one of Europe's highest budget deficits to prevent the continent's debt crisis from spreading. Rajoy, in power since December, has ordered spending cuts and tax hikes. With poverty rising at one the fastest rates in Europe, protests have gained momentum.

Despite the small size of the town where he has been mayor for 30 years, Sanchez Gordillo has long been a fringe figure on the national stage, known for criticism of the mainstream political parties.

He has introduced a cooperative farming system in Marinaleda and has repeatedly tried to take over land for farming, the latest target being 1,200 hectares of land owned by the Ministry of Defense.

His message used to draw only a small following during Spain's boom years when many farm workers, especially in agricultural Andalusia, abandoned fields to work in the profitable construction sector.

But now he has won far more attention as the collapse of a housing bubble forced thousands of unskilled workers back onto farms, while the government sank billions of euros of taxpayer funds into weak banks.

"They say I'm dangerous. And the bankers who are let off for fraud? That's not dangerous? The banks which borrow from the ECB for 1 percent then resell that debt to Spaniards for 6 percent - they're not dangerous?" he said.

www.street-papers.org/Reuters

Empty Condos

continued from page 1

Corporation (CIC) noticed a problem with entire condominium buildings being foreclosed and vacant. CIC suspects that many of the condo buildings were the victims of condo fraud.

"In the course of going out on behalf of the City, looking at troubled buildings, we discovered this whole issue of condo fraud. There were buildings - it would be an empty building, trashed and totally destroyed inside, open to the elements," Jack Markowski, CEO of CIC, told IPS.

"And then when we did a little research, say it's a six-unit building, last year all these units were converted to condos and sold for 300,000 dollars a piece," Markowski said. "The owner - he's just gone - somebody walked away with 1.8 million dollars."

Markowski says that condo fraud was made possible by banks which would give mortgage loans without proper documentation from the person applying for them. Markowski refers to them as "phony straw buyers", who he believes may get a cut of the profits and then allow the unit to foreclose.

CIC identified over 260 condo buildings in Chicago where this appeared to have happened.

CIC and the city of Chicago worked with the Illinois

legislature to pass a law in 2009 called the Distressed Condo Act, which went into effect in 2010. The Act allows courts to reassemble a condominium building - which is legally listed as multiple separate condo units with multiple owners - into a single building.

Then the CIC works to find developers who are willing to rehabilitate the building into rental units.

Markowski acknowledges that none of the units they are producing are set aside for low-income families, but points out that this still adds more rental units to the total rental housing stock of the city. This could, in turn, relieve some of the pressure on low-income families to compete with middle-income families for affordable rental units in Chicago, by at least providing more rental options for the middle-income families.

Markowski says the new Illinois law is unique in the U.S., and that so far CIC has used the law to successfully petition the courts for the deconversion of 33 vacant, foreclosed condo buildings, which, when the new units come online, will produce 372 units of rental housing in Chicago, with more likely to come.

Markowski adds that the banks who own the vacant condo units typically do not object in court because they realise that what they currently own - a condo

unit in a vacant, foreclosed building - does not have any value but actually costs the banks in terms of tax liabilities.

Meanwhile, the city of New York in 2009 embarked upon its own pilot programme, called the Housing Asset Renewal Program (HARP), which invested 20 million dollars in city funds to turn stalled or vacant condominium developments into units affordable for middle-income families.

However, the programme got off to a slow start. According to a 2010 report in the Architect's Newspaper, after the first year of HARP, not a single developer had expressed interest in the funding being offered by the City. In part this is because of lenders' unwillingness to accept deep discounts required by the programme.

In March 2011, New York finally announced the first closing under HARP to convert 26 stalled condo units on Lefferts Avenue in Brooklyn into 46 rental units. The units had never been completed or sold on the market in the first place. All units will be affordable to middle-income, but not low-income, families.

www.street-papers.org / IPS

This Crow Won't Fly

WRAP Report

The United States has a long history of using mean-spirited and often brutal laws to keep "certain" people out of public spaces and out of public consciousness. Jim Crow laws segregated the South after the Civil War and Sundown Towns forced people to leave town before the sun set. The anti-Okie law of 1930s California forbade poor Dustbowl immigrants from entering the state and Ugly Laws (on the books in Chicago until the 1970s) swept the country and criminalized people with disabilities for allowing themselves to be seen in public.

Today, such laws target mostly homeless people and are commonly called "quality of life" or "nuisance crimes." They criminalize sleeping, standing, sitting, and even food-sharing. Just like the laws from our past, they deny people their right to exist in local communities.

In June of this year, Rhode Island took a meaningful stand against this criminalization, and passed the first statewide Homeless Bill of Rights in the country. The Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP)-a West Coast grassroots network of homeless people's organizations-is now launching simultaneous campaigns in California and Oregon. Rhode Island will only be the beginning.

Today's "quality of life" laws and ordinances have their roots in the broken-windows theory. This theory holds that one poor person in a neighborhood is like a first unrepaired broken window and if the "window" is not immediately fixed or removed, it is a signal that no one cares, disorder will flourish, and the community will go to hell in a handbasket.

For this theory to make sense, you first have to step away from thinking of people, or at least poor people, as human beings. You need to objectify them. You need to see them as dusty broken windows in a vacant building. That is why we now have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) with police enforcement to keep that neighborhood flourishing by keeping poor, unsightly people out of it.

We have gone from the days where people could be told "you can't sit at this lunch counter" to "you can't sit on this sidewalk," from "don't let the sun set on you here" to "this

public park closes at dusk" and from "you're on the wrong side of the tracks" to "it is illegal to hang out" on this street or corner.

Unless we organize, it isn't going to get much better soon. Since 1982, the federal government has cut up to \$52 billion a year from affordable housing and pushed hundreds of thousands of people into the shelter system or into the street. Today we continue to have three million people a year without homes. 1982 also marked the beginning of homelessness as a "crime wave" that would consume the efforts of local and state police forces over the next three decades. Millions of people across the country sitting, lying down, hanging out, and -- perhaps worst of all - sleeping are cited in crime statistics.

WRAP and our allies recently conducted outreach to over 700 homeless people in 13 cities; we found 77% of people had been arrested, cited, or harassed for sleeping, 75% for loitering, and 73% for sitting on a sidewalk.

We are right back to Jim Crow Laws, Sundown Towns, Ugly Laws and Anti-Okie Laws, local laws that profess to "uphold the locally accepted obligations of civility." Such laws have always been used by people in power against those on the outside. In other words, today's Business Improvement Districts and Broken Window Laws are, at their core, a reincarnation of various phases of American history none of us is proud of.

And they reflect a political voice now openly entering the political and media mainstream that dismisses social justice as economically irrelevant and poor people as humanly irrelevant.

This is not about caring for or even advocating for "those people." This is about all of us. As Aboriginal leader Lilla Watson said, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." If you are not homeless, if you are not the target now, then understand that you are next. Isolated and fragmented, we lose this fight.

But we are no longer isolated and fragmented. On April 1, WRAP and USCAI (US Canadian Alliance of Inhabitants)

sponsored a Day of Action in 17 cities. We are one of hundreds of organizations and allies, from Massachusetts to New York and from Tennessee to California, all separate but all working together to give meaning to social justice and protect the civil and human rights of all of us.

We can only win this struggle if we use our collective strengths, organizing, outreach, research, public education, artwork, and direct actions. We are continuing to expand our network of organizations and cities and we will ultimately bring down the whole oppressive system of policing poverty and treating poor people as "broken windows" to be discarded and replaced.

To join our campaign for a Homeless Bill of Rights in both California and Oregon contact WRAP at wrap@wraphome.org and we will hook you up with organizers working in both of these states or others as this movement continues to grow.

Western Regional Advocacy Project
www.wraphome.org



April 1st action in Nashville, photo by Al Levenson

Letter to Editor

Dear Homeward Editor,

I live in Affordable Housing and my grown son and his dog came to visit me. Mind you, I am not bad mouthing my wonderful housing! I love my home. I LOVE living indoors! Everyone should be able to live indoors if they choose. EVERYONE!

My story goes like this. My youngest son, whom I have not seen in years, and his dog, found their way to Sacramento from Oregon to visit with me for a few weeks. I was out of the State when they got here, so they stayed about a week at my house. This is far longer than my lease allows, so, when I got home, they stayed a night or two and I took them to the woods on the American River Parkway. I have been going to the Parkway to visit my son and his dog.

Jason would have been gone back to Oregon by now, but he got roused by the Rangers early in the morning on 7-24-12, he got a ticket and was told to move on within 48 hours. He actually asked the Rangers about helping clean the parkway - he was flat told "NO! Just take what you want and leave the rest!"

What kind of statement is that from a County Ranger? How does that in any way help to clean the woods? It does explain why there is so much mess on the Parkway and it does show that our homeless are not as dirty as we are led to believe. When homeless people are told by authorities 'take what you want and leave the rest', what do you think they will do??? Sounds like a mess waiting to happen on the Parkway to me.

Thank God my son was raised better than that and it stuck. I have pictures of what was left behind from several homeless spots as well as the follow up shots where Jason, against the Rangers wishes, cleaned up some real messes.

My son now has an "illegal camping" ticket to deal with before he can go back home. This is so wrong! People need a place to be that is safe and legal when they are homeless. I am not talking about a shelter bed because they will not take dogs. I am referring to a spot where homeless men and women can legally go when they have no place to go. Our City and County would best serve everybody if they designate a spot for homeless people to be. In the words of John Kraitz, "If you do not designate a legal place for homeless people to go, then by default, you have designated everywhere for homeless people to be."

We need to revisit the anti-camping ordinance and we should make allowances for poor people living in affordable housing so their family can come visit for two or three weeks without breaking any rules.

Sincerely, Tracie

Safe Ground Prototype Cabin to be Displayed at Downtown Park

Safe Ground has been working towards developing a community for people transitioning out of homelessness. They will be revealing their next phase by building a prototype sleeping cabin at Cesar Chavez Park in Downtown Sacramento on September 19. They will be giving demonstrations of the cabin and community designs through September 22 at the park.

Safe Ground volunteer professionals reviewed many potential designs from a structural, permitting and cost perspective. A structural modular panel construction that is both locally designed and built was selected. These cabins will be made to Safe Ground's custom design specifications and manufactured as component panels that can be assembled in the field and disassembled for moving in the future. Safe Ground's look at the many alternatives on the market was highly influenced by the requirements including local standards

for acceptable temporary habitats, extreme wet winter weather, hot summers and a strong desire to create the type of community environment that addresses the particular needs of the homeless individuals taking a first step out of homelessness.

The Safe Ground 10 x 12 foot sleeping cabin design has been developed by a Safe Ground Volunteer Cabin Design Team consisting of Kerrin West of Studio 81, Michael O'Brien of Pressey and Associates, and Kyle Wicky of Mogavero Notestine Associates, all three from the Sacramento area. Their unique design utilizes factory built, insulated panels as the major structural components. Each panel is manufactured to include predesigned electrical components, as well as windows and doors. The exterior is covered with durable hardi-trim siding and long lasting paint. The Cabin Design Team has consulted with local engineering and construction expert

Dan Wilson, the Construction Director at Sacramento Habitat for Humanity. Dan has been consulting with local colleagues on the design, and in locating local suppliers of the panels and other required materials, including solar panels for the roof.

Safe Ground will debut the sleeping cabin at Caesar Chavez Park on Wednesday September 19, starting out with the construction of the prototype cabin led by a Habitat for Humanity team at 2 PM. There will be a press conference that same day at 3 PM. The cabin will be on display, including presentations of the cabin and community design, from 9 AM to 7 PM on Thursday and Friday, and only until 2 PM on Saturday. You can schedule a group presentation and meet some of the Safe Ground members and supporters by calling Steve Watters at 916-769-8877 or emailing Steve at

swatters@sbcglobal.net.



Architects' Concept Drawing

Letter to Editor

Dear Homeward Editor,

Like to know what you're eating? Vote Yes on Proposition 37

"GMO" stands for Genetically Modified Organisms, and Monsanto doesn't want you to know if you're eating them or not. I want to know. I like to know how many calories are in my packaged foods, how much fiber per serving, and all that information is included in the food I buy from the grocery stores. But the food I buy does not include information about whether it is a GMO product.

This November we have the opportunity to vote on Proposition 37, the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act. This law would not prohibit genetically engineered food--it would only ensure that GMO's are labeled as such when sold in stores to human consumers. There would be a phase-in period allowing

food producers time to convert their labels. Ready to eat foods, such as meals served in restaurants would be excluded from the labeling requirement. Also, minute amounts of unavoidable gmo contaminants will not be required to be labeled. GMO producers would no longer be able to term their food "natural", because it isn't natural.

Organisms are genetically modified for various reasons, but most often seeds are inserted with properties that make them less susceptible to herbicides or pesticides. This gives the farmers the ability to grow their crops using more herbicides or pesticides.

The process of genetic modification entails genes being isolated and extracted from one species and inserted into another usually unrelated species. When they insert the genes into other organisms, there is no way to predict into what sequence of the organism's DNA or RNA it will appear next to. We do not know in each operation if the insertions may block, inhibit or release a genetic property of the recipient plant's functioning. Another possible

drawback is that if the public is not told what organism has been extracted from, this could result in unintended allergic reactions.

Fighting this proposition are the big biotech companies, big agribusiness, and food producers, outspending the proponents ten to one. You would think that if GMO's were a great and wonderful thing, these companies would be proud to label their products "New Improved! Now with GMOs!" but they do know it is nothing to brag about to the consumers, who are more and more conscious about what they are eating and striving for more truly natural ingredients.

If this proposition passes, we will be the first state in the US to require labeling of GMOs, but we will be joining 50 other counties in this important benefit to consumers. Vote YES on Proposition 37 this November in California so that you will know what you're eating.

Sincerely, Paula Lomazzi

POLITICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT, ELECTION YEAR 2012

www.chongonation.com

by the homeless science writer,

Chongo

Climate change, sea level rise, and our dying oceans are clearly not political issues of the upcoming election. The only widely publicized political action with respect to global warming in the U.S. of which I am aware occurred in North Carolina. The new law stated that values of coastal properties could not be reduced by any calculation that included the presumption that ocean levels change, despite the fact that ocean levels are in fact rising. They have been doing so ever since sea level began being measured, some hundred or so years ago when seas were well over a foot lower than they are now. Moreover and without question, the rise is accelerating and will start flooding populated coastal cities by the end of the decade. Nonetheless, in the state of North Carolina, global warming was legislated out of consideration for anything, by the elected officials of the state, surely agreeably, with the electorate.

Personally, I have no issue with anyone who lets wishful thinking determine their political decisions, and is wealthy enough to afford beachfront property, only to discover that they must move to higher ground. Unfortunately for us less narrow-minded people here in California, these same individuals vote in national elections, like the upcoming one. I myself wish that they didn't, but such is the nature - or perhaps the fatal shortcoming - of a secular, non-humanistic society based upon a democratically elected government that serves the privileged and wealthy, as ours is.

In any case, climate change, rising seas, and dying ecosystems (e.g. the ocean) has not been addressed in any real way, as an important issue by any mainstream political party, in any election since the presidential election of 2000, when Jebediah Bush (I think that's how his name is spelled) made sure that Florida voted for his Texan brother, George. Most deservedly - as his was the administration that the majority of Americans voted for (at least the second time), our country got eight years of the Bush cabinet, tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, and oh yes, a recession that holds promise to never end, again, most deservedly (especially for the majority of North Carolinas), because that is how we Americans voted, as a whole. No one can truthfully deny this wishful thinking without thinking very wishfully them selves. Tax cuts for the wealthy are a more motivating consideration than the quality of life for subsequent generations, although again, perhaps deservedly, because, in pleasing their parents, subsequent generations do not seem to hold promise that they

will think any differently.

Although apparently to a lesser extent here in California, as we voted slightly differently from how most of the rest of the country did, the issue that was clearly paramount on the mind of the voters throughout the country (and still, even here, remains so) was extending the Bush tax cuts. Even many poor people who derive no benefit from these cuts imagine that they could win the lottery, become millionaires, and then have to pay taxes. Many poor people have great admiration for the wealthy and powerful. Surely they must likewise assume that they too will somehow (again, the lottery) be wealthy and perhaps powerful too some day, and, in anticipating that they will want to keep as much of it as they can, keeping out of the hands of a government that just wants to waste it on something silly like healthcare for other, 'less deserving' poor people, those who never win any lottery (yet hardly have any other hopes except it for ever becoming wealthy in their lives), reduce the taxes that they imagine bearing with their new - albeit now only imaginary - wealth.

Providing a scapegoat for removing the blame for a huge deficit from the wealthy, and placing it upon the poor instead, as has been done in blaming the new health care bill for the rising deficit instead of the Bush tax cuts. We spend on two wars yet refuse to guarantee that all Americans have health care. While massive tax cuts are extended to 'all' Americans, many Americans are excluded from health care except for charities financed by the wealthy. Beyond the preference of the voting public to protect the economic power of the wealthy and in large part oppose a national system of universal health care for all, there are (among so many) two other factors that recent political changes will leave wholly unchanged and as a consequence, directly influence humankind's physical impact upon Earth's climate and ecosystems.

The first of these two factors is that the reduced financial regulation characterized by the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, a law that was an outcome the great depression, and a law that would have prevented the abuses that led to this current recession, will continue as before. Hence, wealthier people will become wealthier, while progressively more people will become poor and destitute. The second factor affecting our future effect upon the environment is that Americans will become progressively less educated, just as they have been doing already for decades now, despite publicized efforts to the contrary and irrespective of isolated exceptions here and there. We are the second lowest among industrialized na-

tions. (Turkey is a tough competitor for last place, though we are surely gaining and hope still remains) So, as Americans become less educated, the more easily their vote is influenced by unregulated power of the wealthy, which is why the interests of the same are served by this fact. Moreover, the political needle generally moves to the right with respect to political liberty (i.e. the capacity to make political innovation) as a nation becomes less educated. The rise of the right-wing, conservative Tea Party's impact upon the last election demonstrates this fact. The fact that a vice presidential candidate is a member affirms it.

The best example of the consequences of unregulated, free market economies is the classic third-world dictatorship of the last century. In the third world then, government was often monopolized by a wealthy, ruling class that numbers very few. This small group of people ruled the country, and hence, in this way, ruled in a way that would best serve them. Letting business regulate itself eventually leads to business regulating the regulator itself, that is, gaining progressively more control over the regulating system itself, namely, the elected government.

So, what does the fact that a great number of Americans, very possibly the majority, care more about not taxing the wealthy than the crippling of health care services for the children of the poor have to do with global climate catastrophe? How can a popular choice for slow, worldwide economic collapse, or the diminished education levels of the voting public and corresponding enormous empowerment of corporations to determine how this voting public votes, impact the titanic collapse of the entire ecosystems (half the forests of the world have been felled and are gone), everywhere across our fragile planet, that is happening right now, in fact, happening as the reader reads these very words? Why will the slow transformation of the American system into a third world one affect worldwide climate. The answer is simple.

An article preceding mid-term elections once ended with the following: "...prior to voting, you might ask yourself when you vote, are you unknowingly voting only for your today, or are you not also voting for your children's tomorrow and the world that you will leave for them."

In an economy based upon short-sighted markets and other immediate business interests, interests that thrive only as a consequence of constantly increasing the consumption of diminishing and irreplaceable resources, along with the capacity to process the discard, limitation upon increased consumption and its re-

sultant pollution works in contradiction to the market and business goals, unless limitation itself is legislated as being an actual commodity, instead of an irrelevant, non-market entity.

Keeping things as they are, unchanging, is, of course, the course that the corporations controlling the media seem to be orchestrating. This is because markets and business interests thriving as a consequence of ever-increasing consumption and the corresponding pollution it creates means that these corporations have the capital resources to convince a progressively less educated public, and hence more easily convinced public, that it need only consume more, and the world - particularly the consumer's - will be a better place. Needless to say, this notion will ultimately demonstrate itself as being incorrect, since it ignores climate change and the consequences that such change means. Yet, despite the what seems to be a clear lack of concern for the climate, and for the poor, we nonetheless, in an avarice for wealth that is changing our nation into third-world consuming capacity, our economy is failing, we are forced to consume less, and in the process, give the climate a slight reprieve from our indulgence, as third world people consume one tenth what an American does. From the point of view of the environment, America becoming third world may be instead, salvation.

For the most part, the voting public seems to ignore (at least when they vote) the serious consequences of climate change. This is evidenced by the general lack of mention of the subject anywhere in the public arena or media, and even less mention of the grave outcomes if it is ignored. Again, climate change is not a nice story, but because it is a story that might have irreversible consequences, it is very necessary to tell it. Unfortunately, telling it makes poor business sense - which, of course, is why the reader finds it being told in a publication distributed by homeless people, rather than a newspaper owned by some huge, autonomous corporation.

(Videos pertinent to the subject of this article can be seen by clicking on "Education" from the <http://www.chongonation.com> home page. Chongonation.com is a web site dedicated to educating those who have least opportunity for learning the scientific foundations that describe nature more accurately than any other body of ideas ever conceived. Chongonation.com has books and free videos that provide such opportunity, in lay terms.)

MCKINNEY-VENTO TURNS 25 AND HOMELESSNESS CONTINUES TO GROW!

by WRAP Comms

Passed in 1987, McKinney-Vento was intended to address the emergency needs of homeless people while the federal government worked to restore the funding which had been cut from HUD's affordable housing programs.

But it didn't work that way. McKinney-Vento has spawned an endless array of continuum-of-care plans, 5-year plans, 10-year plans - an endless system of writing, planning, and researching which "best practices" should be used to end homelessness. At the same time, the federal government has continued to defund, dismantle, and sell-off affordable housing units, thus ensuring that more and more people become homeless. 360,000 Section 8 and 210,000 Public Housing units have been lost since 1995.

It is a shameful trade that robs Peter to pay Paul.

McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs have increasingly become a catch-all system for people who were once permanently housed by mainstream federal programs such as HUD and USDA. Yet even as affordable housing has been decimated (over 800,000 units lost in 25 years), eligibility criteria for McKinney-Vento homeless assistance have been tightened.

And to add insult to injury, we are seeing a massive PR campaign by federal agencies such as HUD and the Interagency Council on Homelessness to convince everyone - or perhaps to convince themselves - that with just the right coordination, facilitation, and cooperation, they will actually end homelessness. This is self-deception. Anyone

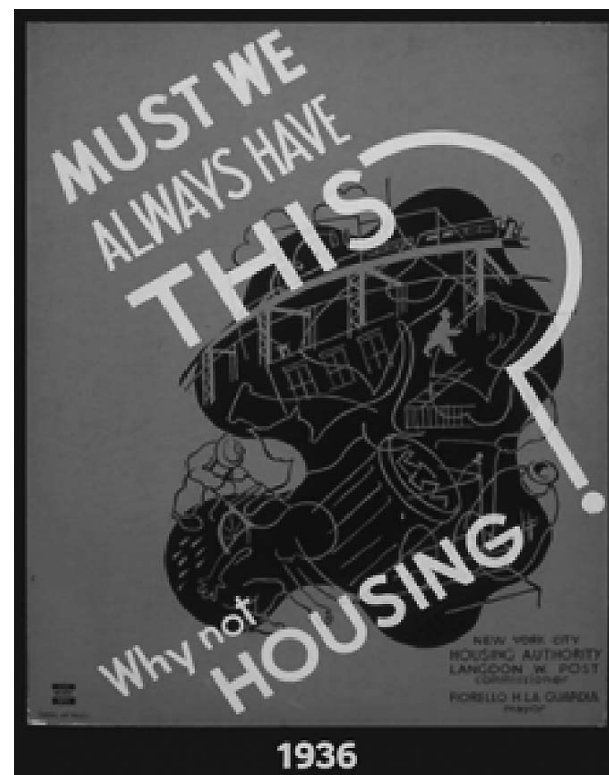
who has done the math would know. The ongoing new guidelines, new initiatives, and newly named target populations suggest that people overseeing this system clearly know it is not working.

To provide a context: in the 25 years since McKinney-Vento passed in July 1987, two major events severely impacted the numbers of poor people finding themselves homeless.

The first was the 1998 Contract with America during the Clinton Administration when the Housing Act of 1937 was changed from "remedy...acute shortage of decent, safe and sanitary dwellings" to declaring that "the federal government cannot ... provide housing of every American, or even the majority of its citizens."

The second was in 2009, the last time McKinney-Vento was reauthorized in Congress. Renamed the HEARTH Act, it instructed HUD to create a new bureaucratic definition of who is homeless. By implicitly admitting defeat that the McKinney-Vento model has any chance of stopping the growing wave of homeless people, the HEARTH act instead redefined "homelessness" out of existence for thousands of families and people without homes. A 105-page HUD memorandum describes who is homeless and establishes welfare-oriented criteria that determine who will qualify. It is particularly hard on families who live doubled up, tripled up, or in SROs.

Advocacy organizations - be they local, statewide or national - that continue to focus on McKinney-Vento will never be catalysts of the change we need. Their funding is too contingent upon being seen as legitimate by whatever administration is



Works Progress Administration Poster

in power, a dependence that moves those in power even further away from the actual lives and experiences of poor and homeless people.

Consulting and research firms have probably benefited the most from McKinney-Vento funding because HUD bureaucrats like justifying their proposals by paying researchers. We need no further consulting or research to understand the direct and obvious correlation between massive affordable housing cuts since 1978, the opening of emergency shelters in the early '80s, and the continued and growing existence of homelessness today.

In 2006 and updated in 2010, WRAP issued a carefully researched analysis on the systemic causes of homelessness called *Without Housing*. Other studies and research done on homelessness must have been able to gather the same information. Had they looked closely at the underlying cause-and-effect issues connected with massive numbers of people without housing, they should have been able to connect the dots. But they seem not to have looked. It's not a difficult correlation, but the dots have been left unconnected.

We need to be honest: too many organizations and departments, in and out of government, turn away from the simple connection between the absence of affordable housing (cause) and the increasing numbers of homeless people (effect). No amount of coordination or redefinition is going to end homelessness. McKinney-Vento was created to address the effects of homelessness and it is time for HUD and USDA to step up and address the cause of homelessness.

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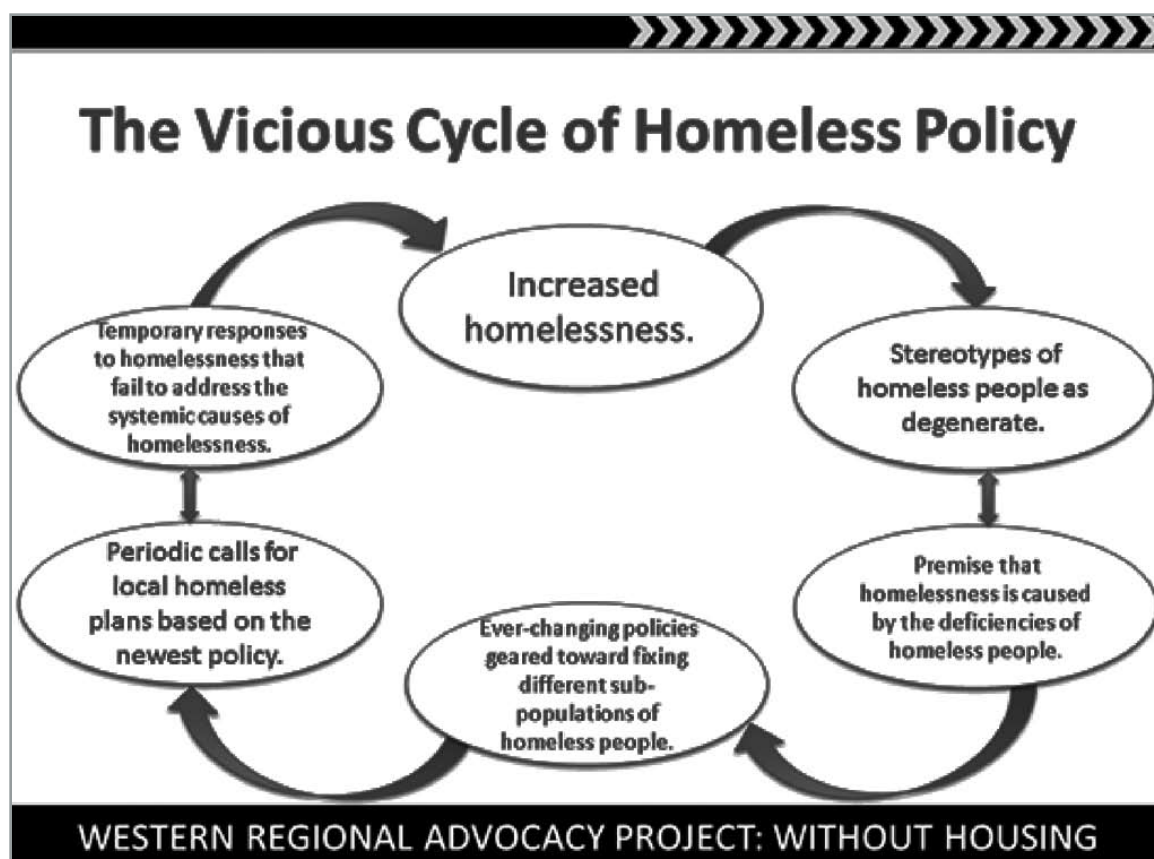


Illustration from WRAP's Without Housing Toolkit

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HOMELESS RESOURCES

Night Shelters

Salvation Army: 12th and North B St. 30 days per year: Dormitory living, C&S: Dinner, breakfast clothing for residents: Men/Women: Sign-up SA patio weekdays at 1PM. 442-0331

St. John's Shelter: Women and Children. 4410 Power Inn Rd. Call between 10am & 3pm for space availability. 453-1482

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St. Beds for Men Only, sign up 6:30pm at mission, Newcomers/Referrals have priority. 7:30pm Chapel Service with meal afterwards, 6am breakfast for residents. Showers / shaves 9-11am & 1-2:45pm. open to all homeless men: 447-3268

SAEHC, Sacramento Area Emergency Housing Center: 4516 Parker Ave. 24 hrs: Family Shelter: Families, single adults with children who have no other resource: Women's Refuge, single women, no children: Call for screening/space availability 455-2160

Day Shelters

Friendship Park: 12th St. & North C: Weekdays 7am - 2:30pm: open to anyone: Many services

Meals

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St.: 7 days, Evening meal, Men/Women: Church service 7:00pm required, dinner following 8:30-9:15pm. Sunday 11am service, lunch at noon. 447-3268

Loaves & Fishes: 1321 No. C St.: Lunch every day 11:30am-1pm. Tickets available 7 am- 12:30 pm at Friendship Park weekdays: at 8 am on Saturday and 10am on Sundays.

Women's Civic Improvement Center: Seniors Only: 3555 3rd Ave. 11:30-12:30 lunch M-F 452-2866

Helping Hands: 3526 5th Ave. Sundays, 8-11 breakfast, sack lunch, clothing

Food-not-Bombs: serves free food in Cesar Chavez Plaza, 9th & J St., every Sunday 1:30 pm. All Welcome.

Foundation of Faith Ministries 2721 Dawes St. Rancho Cordova. Every 4th Sat. 3-5 pm All Welcome.

Glory Bound Street Ministry 4527 Parker Ave. Sundays; breakfast 11:30 am after 10 am church service; dinner 6:30 pm after 5 pm church service: Fridays; dinner 7 pm after 6 pm church service. Must attend services. 452-7078

Women & Children

Maryhouse: 1321 No. C St. suite 32: Breakfast for Women and children 8am-9am. Day shelter 8am-3pm weekdays for women and families.

Wellspring 3414 4th St.: T&Th full breakfast: M-W-F continental breakfast for women and children. 454-9688

also see Wind in Youth Services for young adults

Free Clothing

Union Gospel Mission: 400 Bannon St. Men: M-Sat 9-11am or 1-2:45pm: Women and Children: Thursday. Signups start at 9am attend Bible study at 9:30am and get clothing at 10am 447-3268

Glory Bound Street Ministry 4527 Parker Ave. Clothes Closet, Sundays 11:30 am all welcome. 452-7078

Medical

Mercy Clinic: For homeless adults, children: Next to Fire Station on N. C St. 7:30am & 12:30pm. 446-3345

Sacramento Dental Clinic: 4600 Broadway (Primary Care Bldg) Walk-ins 8 am - 12:30 pm 874-8300

Mental Health

Guest House, 1400 N. A St.: Homeless Mental Health Clinic, M,W,Th,Fri., 8-11:30am Tues 8-11:30am only. Mental Health evaluation, medication if needed. Housing referrals for mentally ill, GA refs, SSI aps, refs to A & D counseling: 443-6972

TLCS Intake Offices: 1400 N. "A" St. Bldg.-A; Adults 18 yrs & up; Referrals to transitional living programs, independent living, mental health support services; SSI/SSDI application assistance; Walk-ins 8-11am M-F 440-1500

Genesis: Professional Counseling for life problems. Referrals. 401 12th St. (DeLaney Center). 699-1536

Youth Services

Diogenes: youth 16-21 yrs old. Hot Line call 1-800-339-7177

Wind Youth Center: 701 Dixie Ave. Serves youth ages 12-20. Breakfast and Lunch; Clothing; Laundry and Showers; Case Management. Drop-in Hours: M-F from 8:00am to 4:30pm and Sat 10am to 2pm. 443-8333

Crisis Intervention

WEAVE: Services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children. Referrals to court mandated battery intervention programs, Safe house, 24 hr. crisis line: 920-2952

Sacramento Mental Health Center (County): 2150 Stockton Blvd 24hr. Will evaluate anyone for voluntary or involuntary psychiatric care due to danger to self or others. 732-3637

AIDS / HIV

AIDS Housing Alliance provides residential care, transitional housing & permanent housing services to homeless persons living with aids. 329-1093 weekdays.

CARES (Center for AIDS Research, Education and Service): 1500 21st ST. Serves people with HIV and AIDS. Medical care, mental health, case mgmt, health ed and regional prevention/ed classes. 443-3299

Breaking Barriers: Homeless Outreach Program provides direct services to people living with AIDS and HIV. Transportation to social services, medical appointments, job interviews, and housing assistance. 447-2437

Harm Reduction Services: 4001 12th Ave.; High risk outreach; HIV, Hep-C testing; case management for HIV; free medical clinic, needle exchange. 456-4849

Alternative Test Site: Free anonymous testing, Wed /Thurs. Call for appt. 874-7720.

Legal Aid

Disability Rights, CA: Free legal services for people with disabilities. Call for appt. toll free: TTY:(800)776-5746

Tommy Clinkenbeard Legal Clinic: 401 12th St. (DeLaney Center) Free legal assistance and advocacy for problems related to homelessness. 446-0368

Legal Services of Northern California, Inc: 515 12th St. (at E ST.) M-F 8:30am-12pm, 1pm-5pm. Problems with public benefits, landlord / tenant, divorce clinic. Call for appt. 551-2150

Welfare Rights: 1901 Alhambra Blvd. (2nd floor) M-F 9am-5pm: AFDC, Food Stamps, Workfare and Medical rep at hearings. 736-0616

About SHA



Sacramento Housing Alliance is a network of concerned citizens who promote decent affordable housing for low income households and homeless people through advocacy and participation in public discourse.

For more info, or if you would like to participate, please call:

(916) 455-4900
<http://sachousingalliance.org>

1800 21st Street Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95811

***The SHA does not
itself provide or
manage housing.***

Social Security Disability / SSI Lawyer
Free Consultation (916) 658-1880

Miscellaneous

Francis House Center: 1422 C St. 9:00-noon walk-in - direct services resource counseling, vouchers for IDs, Dvr Licenses, Birth Certs, Transp Assistance; noon-3:00 - appts for in-depth resource counseling; by appt: Senior/Disability/Verteran's advocacy, notary service. Job Development Center open 9am-3pm M-Tu-W-F and noon-3pm Th. Motel vouchers for qualified families. 443-2646

Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services: 3333 3rd Ave. (south of Broadway) Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri 10am-1:30pm, and Wed 4pm-7pm. 456-1980.

Social Services: 28th & R ST. M-F 7:30am-5pm. Call for asst. 874-2072

Employment Development Department (EDD): 2901 50th St. (at Broadway) M-F 8am-5pm. Unemployment, job services. 800-300-5616

Medi-Cal: 1-800-773-6467, 1-888-747-1222. Or see DHA eligibility workers 1725 28th St. 916-874-2256

Social Security Office: 8351 Folsom Blvd (East of College Greens Lite-rail stop) M-F 9am-4:30pm 381-9410: Natl line 1-800-772-1213

211 Sacramento
Dial 211
for tele-info & referral service

Califorina Youth Crisis Line:
1-800-843-5200

Health Rights Hotline:
551-2100

VA Outreach:
1-800-827-1000
Homeless VA Coordinator:
(916) 364-6547

Welcome to Homeward:

Please help us make a difference!



Homeward Street Journal has been publishing since 1997 as a non-profit project of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee,

which is a member of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. The paper's mission is to alleviate miscommunication between communities by educating the public about housing and poverty issues, and by giving homeless people a voice in the public forum. Homeward also informs homeless persons of shelter and occupational assistance, and acts as a creative self-help opportunity for those individuals who wish to participate.

The opinions expressed in Homeward are those of the authors, and not necessarily the Sacramento Housing Alliance or SHOC or Homeward.

Submissions and Editorial Policy

We welcome any participation or contributions: Articles, poems and other writing can be submitted at our office in Friendship Park, or mailed to the address below.

All writing submitted for publication will be edited as necessary, with due respect for the author's intent. The editors will attempt to consult with an author if changes are necessary, however, the paper will go to print with the story as edited if the author is unavailable.

All Letters to the Editor must be signed to be published. If the writer wishes to remain anonymous s/he should so state, but the letter must still be signed.

Poetry and graphics will not be edited, either the paper will publish the submission or not.

In submitting articles to the paper, authors give their permission to print their submissions in accordance with the above stipulations, as well as possible reprinting in NASNA member papers, with due byline. Any requests for stories outside the above three will be referred to the author.

Subscriptions are available with a \$15 contribution. Make checks out to SHOC (Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee).

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