

House the Homeless, Inc. Annual Report 2001-02

House the Homeless, Inc. is an educational and advocacy group, founded in 1989, as a grassroots organization in Austin, Texas in 1989. Since then, its work has become increasingly broad sweeping and diverse, reaching across the nation and beyond. *House the Homeless considers all homeless and formerly homeless individuals to be members of this 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt not for profit corporation. At no time does the make up of our Board ever fall below 60% of homeless and formerly homeless people.*

The mission of this all volunteer nonprofit organization is to “Provide education and advocacy around issues of homelessness and homelessness prevention.” House the Homeless strives for pragmatic solutions that will result in ending homelessness in our lifetime.

The greatest accomplishments during this 2001 tie to the House the Homeless-sponsored **Universal Living Wage** initiative. Our GOAL is to fix the federal minimum wage. The unique mechanism used is a single national formula that will ensure anyone working a 40-hour week will be able to afford housing in whatever city or rural area that work is done. This builds upon a growing national movement to create the national debate, and ultimately, the political will to ensure living wages. The year 2001 was our initiation year for this initiative, including the development of premier website:

www.UniversalLivingWage.org.

Campaign Kits. The basic outreach mechanism for the Universal Living Wage Campaign became our campaign kits. Hundreds of organizations and individuals were reached with kits consisting of bumper stickers, yard signs, radio skits, sample letters to the editor, etc. These kits are mailed out to interested individuals around the country who use the materials to publicize the campaign. In turn, people are drawn to the interactive website where their names are collected and returned to the recipient of the kit who then uses the names for local grassroots organizing.

Results. By the beginning of 2002, we had more than 400 local, state and national endorsements for House the Homeless’ Universal Living Wage formula and advocacy efforts. These supporters include unions, businesses, community-based organizations, and religious groups. We view this support as strong evidence of the broad-based appeal of this initiative which will (1) end homelessness for 30-40% of our nation’s homeless citizens and (2) prevent economically-based homelessness for our nation’s 11.8 million minimum wage earners.

In 2002, House the Homeless introduced another concept and effort; i.e. **Enlightened Markets**. We find that certain businesses, nonprofits and municipalities – while extremely supportive and who would otherwise endorse the campaign – are resistant to do so while presently not able to pay a living wage. With that in mind, we have designed the Enlightened Markets component. It enables these entities to endorse the goal of fixing the federal minimum wage while they work over the next two years to align their pay patterns with our formula. This staged transition creatively allows them to lend their voice of support when they might not otherwise be in a position to do so. Simultaneously, this approach allows us to publicly recognize their support. More information is available on our website under the Endorsements button.

Our goal is to do outreach to the business community. Additionally, in an effort to further publicize the campaign and to establish ownership of the campaign by individual businesses, we have designed window decals as enclosed. The mutual benefits to the business are similar to those evidenced by the “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval”. We believe that overtime, people will be drawn to those businesses that support a living wage.

Other regular services continued throughout 2001 and 2002:

Organization Information - Scope of Services and Activities

1. Elimination of barriers. Year-round services provided to homeless individuals and families, including paying for identification documents necessary to accessing community social services. For the past several years, we have prepared and printed an updated plastic pocket guide to local services.

2. Nurturing Programs. Thanks to a grant from the Rachael and Ben Vaughan Foundation and by combining forces with the Lauterstein-Conway Massage School, *Heart and Sole* was launched in early 2000 and continued through 2001. As a nurturing program of massage and foot care for Austin’s homeless community, it has resulted in hundreds of new tennis shoes being donated by area merchants. In a continuing effort to promote the concept of a “hand-up” not a hand-out, a \$5 contribution is required from each participant.

3. Self Help Opportunities. Continuing its effort of education and self-help, House the Homeless sponsored the 42nd national street newspaper, the *Homeless Advocate*. Austin’s homeless citizens are encouraged to write and distribute their own newspaper locally. This initiative enables them to education others about their economic and social conditions while providing with them a first-hand entrepreneurial opportunity.

4. Annual Memorial. Since 1992, House the Homeless, Inc. has recognized the men and women who have died on the streets of Austin in an annual memorial service. Area dignitaries, including two past mayors, various city council members and local citizens have joined with Austin’s homeless community to mourn the loss of the young and old which numbered 40 last year alone. The sunrise service takes place every November on Auditorium Shores, where in 1993 House the Homeless first placed a memorial plaque and planted a Live Oak tree as a living memorial. The 2001 and 2002 memorials were well attended and publicized, however sobering in that more than forty men and women lost their lives on the streets of Austin each year.

There are numerous other projects that have been created and can be seen by going to our websites: www.HousetheHomeless.org or www.UniversalLivingWage.org. Please call Richard Troxell at 796-4366 with any questions.

House the Homeless, Inc. – There is an annual Board Meeting plus monthly phone meetings.
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Last Annual Board Meetings: September 28, 2002 and July 21, 2001
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