

House the Homeless, Inc.
Annual Report 2002-2003

House the Homeless, Inc. is an educational and advocacy group, founded in 1989 as a grassroots organization in Austin, Texas. Its work has become increasingly broad-sweeping and diverse, reaching across the nation and beyond. It 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% 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.” In addition to rendering aid and encouragement to individuals in need, House the Homeless strives for pragmatic solutions that will result in ending homelessness in our lifetime.

Leading to the current nationwide campaign, “**Bringing America Home**” and a pending Act by the same name, House the Homeless’ greatest accomplishment is tied to **Universal Living Wage** initiative. The desired outcome is to fix the federal minimum wage. The unique mechanism used is a single national formula to ensure that 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 and further the national debate, and ultimately, the political will to ensure living wages in America. Since our initiation year (2001), our interactive website has been visited nearly 35,000 times. Representing a voting power of one million, we now have **815** organizational endorsers of the Universal Living Wage Campaign in **50 states and Washington D.C.**, as well as Puerto Rico, Canada and Scotland! This includes at least two involved advocacy groups in every state! Visit www.UniversalLivingWage.org and www.bringingamericahome.org.

These supporters include unions, businesses, community-based organizations, and religious groups. We view this ground-swell of 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 America’ 11.8 million minimum wage earners.

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

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. We believe that overtime, people will be drawn to those businesses that support a living wage.

Other regular services continue as part of House the Homeless' Scope of Services:

1. Elimination of barriers. Year-round services provided to homeless individuals and families, including paying for identification documents necessary to accessing community social services.

a. Plastic Pocket Guide (5th Printing). For the past several years, we have prepared and printed an updated plastic pocket guide to local services, well researched by our volunteers. The June 2003 printing was accomplished by partnering for the second time with Community Action Network and Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

b. Direct Assistance. House the Homeless provides limited emergency assistance to some individuals known to the organization and who have exhausted all other possibilities for help.

Examples of this discretionary support includes checks for \$3 to \$10 made out to vendor for identification documents (birth certificates, non-driving IDs, etc.) as such is necessary to access other social services. Other types of help include bus passes, especially for the mobility impaired. Less frequently, one-time emergency help may be provided for a car repair, utility bill, or even lodging.

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. 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. As with many of the ideas conceived and incubated by House the Homeless, we are seeking other groups or churches to take this program and "run with it".

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. This year's service is set for sunrise, Sun., **Nov.16, 2003** (Gazebo area of Town Lake by Stevie Ray Vaughan statue)

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 for more information and/or to help. Donations of cash (including secured contributions on line), as well as new shoes, thermal underwear, and volunteer time are critically needed. Together, we can make lasting difference.

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