

## **House the Homeless, Inc.**

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Greetings:

This is our Year in Review 2009 by Richard R. Troxell  
Thanks for continuing to support our efforts to end homelessness as it exists today.

This year began on New Year's Day when we had yet another great party for our friends experiencing homelessness. For the 9th year, we protected folks from the extremes of winter with Thermal Underwear, hats, gloves, socks, rain tarps, and scarves for the ladies. We devoured turkey, ham, and pies. We were entertained by the South Austin Rockin' Gospel Band, and managed to complete a survey about our desire to work (if it paid a living wage).

Later, we coupled that survey with three other surveys about panhandling all exposing our disdain for panhandling but at the same time our desire to work if the wage would pay us enough to secure basic food, clothing, and shelter (including utilities).

From there, House the Homeless joined the Prevention Committee of the Ending Community Homelessness Organization, ECHO. I then chaired the low wage sub-committee. Once positioned, I presented the four surveys about panhandling; one was produced by the City of Austin, one by the City of Houston, and two by House the Homeless.

House the Homeless then assembled the forces of the Texas Homeless Network, Mobile Loaves and Fishes, and ECHO. From there we decided to hold a city-wide best practices work Forum called; "Let's Get to Work. It involved four mayors, and County Commissioner Judge Sam Biscoe. Sara Hickman sang to us. Guests from New York City, and Corpus Christi shared information, while I presented our vision for the future. We also assembled 100 of the "right" people. Slapping each other on the back, we then moved on to form a Task Force to give life to our plans.

Today, after half a dozen Task Force meetings, we move ever closer to our goal of moving people through a continuum of care, freeing up bollixed up transitional housing units for the next guy in line, getting our folks a little bit of education and placing them into Living Wage jobs. This is called the Let's Get to Work Initiative. We have great hope for success. We are now looking for individualized Faith-based community sponsorship for our participants.

Back in January, House the Homeless joined forces with Legal Aid and ADAPT to successfully defend against Capital Metro's attempt to begin charging the elderly and the disabled to ride the bus.

In April, we again promoted the Universal Living Wage by going to the Post Offices across America with the message that if businesses paid fair living wages, we could reduce our excess reliance on food stamps, TANF, general assistance, EITC, Welfare, etc. and let those programs return to the emergency bridge programs that Congress had originally intended.

Personally, I've made dozens of presentations regarding the ULW throughout the country this year, but my proudest moment was being invited to speak before MENSA when my host twittered, "Richard Troxell is amazing" to all her brainiac friends.

We got a letter to the editor published in the Statesman and we were quoted in the Chronicle several times concerning our perspective on the expansion of the no Panhandling Ordinance and what it would take to end homelessness nationwide.

In September, on the day after Labor Day, we again gathered on the bridges across America for Bridge the Economic Gap Day calling for a Universal Living Wage. Once again, we were on at least one bridge in every state including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C.

We later asked the citizens of Austin to “take a breath,” while HTH researched the expansion of the panhandling ordinance. After two weeks, HTH issued a paper that showed that the businesses promoting the expansion of the No Panhandling Ordinance from 7pm to 7am to a complete ban around the clock, were actually causing people to become homeless or at risk of becoming homeless due to the low wages that they pay. We showed that not only were they not paying living wages, they were only paying \$2.13 per hour and relying on their patrons to bring the workers base pay up to the Federal Minimum Wage of \$7.25 per hour. We asked how the patrons would feel if they realized that their “thank you tips” were going to subsidize these businesses. Shocking! Within two days, I was approached both by the City Council co-author and the author of the expansion ordinance and told that based on the House the Homeless position paper, they would not be going forward with the expansion efforts!

House the Homeless has encouraged them and all others to support the “wet housing” exploratory efforts of Front Steps, the Habitat on Wheels Mobile Home Project, and the “Let’s Get to Work Initiative” as viable alternatives. We believe that these fresh approaches to some of the yet unmet serious components of homelessness may well make the whole panhandling question moot once we offer a “pathway” for people to exit homelessness permanently.

House the Homeless also reprinted and reissued 10,000 Plastic Pockets, our informational laminated resource card serving the entire Austin Metropolitan Area with guidance as to where folks experiencing homelessness can get help.

I was also presented with the Community Service Award 2009 from the Texas Homeless Network for my work to end homelessness.

Last, but not least. Please, please give generously as we launch our annual Thermal Underwear Drive. Again, we’ll fight to prevent any more deaths this winter. Just \$10 purchases a thermal top and bottom and \$25 will outfit folks with thermal top/bottom, hat, gloves, socks, scarves for the ladies and rain ponchos for everyone. The event is again scheduled for New Years Day 2010!

Let’s get out there and stir up some dust! Together, we can end homelessness.

Richard

Richard R. Troxell