

# HOMeward

## Street Journal

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Homeless Resources

## Put Your Foot Down (to end homelessness) Walk at California Capitol

Sacramento Capitol, November 6, 2004 - Over 200 people gathered near the Vietnam Memorial for the 2nd annual *Put Your Foot Down* (against homelessness) fund raising walk. Organized by Cottage Housing, the annual event is designed to raise awareness of homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing in the Sacramento area while raising funds for participating programs.

Attending were members of the Volunteers of America, Salvation Army, Francis House, Self-help Housing, Women's Empowerment and many more organizations who daily have to deal with finding

housing for Sacramento's poor.

After the initial get-together, participants walked twice around the California Capitol with signs and chanting slogans. The most vocal group was Women's Empowerment who shouted "What do we want? Housing Now!" the whole way around the Capitol.

Advocates maintain that the shrinking supply of affordable housing, and Sacramento's apparent unwillingness to encourage rental housing growth or provide shelters, is one of the leading causes of homelessness in this area.



## Voices of the Lost and Forgotten- *The Invisible People*

By Jay Shaft- Coalition For Free Thought In Media

*The Invisible People: The Precariously Housed and Doubled-Up Families. Part two in a five part series on the alarming increases of homelessness, poverty, and hunger in America. For those who have not read it, Part One of this series is archived at <http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0408/S00133.htm>*

I have spoken to over 300 families that have lost permanent housing. They tell horrifying tales of not being able to find emergency shelter for weeks or months at a time. They tell of the long housing list waits of two years or more, and how in many circumstances they don't even qualify by HUD's definition of homelessness.

This article highlights the growing number of families who have now

lost their homes and are forced to look for alternatives to being on the streets. Many can not get any kind of help, no matter where they go.

**Precariously Housed:** Those who are in doubled up or tripled up living conditions of shared residency or spending more than 50% of their total income on housing.

In 2003 and 2004 the number of the so called 'precariously housed' has gone up. The federal government uses the term to define those who do not have permanent stable housing. Those who are considered precariously housed include people who are sharing shelter with others, sleeping on someone's couch or floor, or spending part of the month living in a motel room or other type of temporary residence.

Often those who work part time, or work for day labors and temporary agencies find themselves

in this situation. Without sufficient savings, many jobless or under-employed people slip into debt and lose their houses or apartments. Instead of living out on the streets, they often double up in cramped, overcrowded dwellings or become "couch-hoppers", people who go from one friend's house to the next.

A severe lack of affordable housing in the United States combined with growing poverty is largely responsible for a major rise in the number of homeless and precariously housed families over the last few years. Affordable housing is defined as a person paying no more than 30% of income for rent or mortgage payments.

No where in the United States does a full-time minimum wage job enable a family of four to pay fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment. Based on the national average, a family would need to earn a wage of \$15.21 an hour, an income of

\$31,636 a year, to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the average fair market rent. That is three times the current minimum wage earnings for someone working full time.

If you pay only 30% of income for rent, a minimum wage earner can afford monthly rent of no more than \$268. An average minimum wage earner would have to work 89 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom unit at 30% of their income.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that 65 million low-income workers are experiencing housing problems such as being behind on the bills, or having an eviction notice or utility shutoff notice. 56 million low-income workers are paying more than 30% of their income for housing costs. Fully one-third of the U.S. population, 95 million people, are now reporting some

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# The Invisible People

type of housing problem.

There are now record numbers of families and single mothers reporting that they are sharing overcrowded or inadequate accommodations with others. At least 5.3 million people described themselves as precariously housed when applying for food stamps and other forms of public assistance in 2003. (USDA, HUD)

Families often have a hard time getting access to emergency assistance programs if they are still in some form of housing. Many shelters have eligibility rules that prevent certain groups of people (two-parent families, those families who still have some form of shelter, families with boys over the age of 12, people with addiction disorders, disabled people, people with no incomes) from accessing shelter.

While the McKinney Act official government definition includes many of the literally homeless population, it allows many people to fall through the cracks. It may or may not include the precariously housed, depending on the interpretation of "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This ambiguity makes the McKinney definition difficult to use for purposes of getting emergency aid for families sharing housing or those about to lose stable housing.

Children often appear among the precariously housed population because parents who become homeless may place their children with friends or relatives in order to avoid literal homelessness for them. Because some individuals and families choose to share housing as a regular, stable, and long-term arrangement, distinguishing the precariously housed from those in stable sharing arrangements is difficult.

The use of a definition such as doubled up or precariously housed is very controversial among service provider agencies and advocacy groups. The term for people who are living one-level above the street brought out some very angry responses from agencies and workers that were interviewed for this article series.

Chance Martin of the San Francisco Homeless Coalition is

especially critical of it. "You know it's a dodge, it's one of those euphemistic dodges," he stated.

"How do you quantify that?" he asked. "If you're homeless three weeks out of the month, you're not 75% homeless, that's ridiculous. Saying precariously housed is about as ridiculous, and about as useless as saying 50% or 75% homeless. So is differentiating between stable and unstable housing, if you facing homelessness there's nothing stable about it."

"Many times when people share shelter, they either don't pay rent, or they don't get a receipt to prove residency. This makes it impossible to get help at most of the city and state agencies, because you can't prove that you are even living in the area," he further clarifies. "Almost every agency you go to makes you prove residency of six months to a year, and have all the bills and financial documentation. Without that they can't even begin to help you, forget about getting utilities or rental help. This whole precarious, doubled up definition is like putting a sheet over a chair, you can still tell something's there, but you can't really tell what it is."

He says this is having a definite impact on the ability to develop long range plans to aid homeless families.

"When it comes to planning any kind of reasonable humane response to meeting the needs of people, 'Precariously housed' is a totally a useless connotation."

"In San Francisco the emphasis of GW Bush's Chronic Homelessness Initiative is on really dysfunctional, very visible homeless people," he explained. "They are missing the really desperate cases among the uncared families."

By definition, the "chronic homelessness" initiative excludes children who are homeless or precariously housed with their parents, parents who are homeless and who have children with them, youth on their own with disabilities who do not fit the federal definition, and youth on their own without disabilities.

Martin believes this is creating a situation of an invisible section

of society. "It's like they are shadow people. To the public officials, the families have just ceased to exist if they don't fall into the official categories to be considered homeless."

"As long as we see the major government emphasis on the chronically homeless, I don't think we're going to make any real progress helping homeless families, homeless immigrants, or people with mental illnesses who don't fit a recognized criteria," he said. "It's just not happening."

Trever, 28, and Melanie, 25, have been living with Trever's brother in Oakland, California for almost a year. Trever was fired from an assembly line job paying \$19.50 an hour in 2003, and still has not found another full time job.

Melanie is working for a temporary staffing service, but spends most of her time at home with her two young children. She is lucky to get more than 20 hours of work a week, and some weeks she doesn't get any work at all.

"For over two years I've been working part time jobs at \$6.50 to \$8.50 an hour," Melanie explains. "I can barely afford to pay part of the rent and utilities here, and I can't even think about getting our own place. We owe almost \$1300 in utilities bills, and we would have to pay that off before we could even move into our own place. I think we'll probably end up on the streets, and then they'll take my little girls away."

"I had a good job offer from a bank, but I couldn't afford day care, and there is no way the state's going to give us child care, even with a job offer on the line. I would have had a salary of \$32,000, but they told me I would make too much and not be eligible for any day care assistance," Melanie says angrily.

Trever is extremely angry about all the problems he has trying to get help for his family. He has applied for public assistance twenty seven times, and he is completely fed up and exhausted with the very process of trying to get help.

"I spend about forty hours a month going back and forth to all the appointments. They cost me at least a weeks pay every

month, but they still keep turning us down," he says with a grim look. "I live with my brother in a two bedroom apartment, and it's not working that well. They keep telling me that I have a stable residence, but I could be out on the street tomorrow. My brother lost his job five months ago, and we are almost three months behind on the rent and utilities. We lost our own place just like this, it's happening all over again, and I can't stop it."

"Damn it, I can't even get on any of the temporary housing lists, because they are all full. I was told that if we get kicked out we can go to a shelter, but that's only if they have beds," he adds dejectedly. "We're homeless right now, if you really think about it. That's what really burns me up, that we just don't count, it's like nobody knows what to do with us."

"I watched my whole life just fall apart, does anybody even care if we get back on our feet? Is my family worthless or something?" he asks irately. "I really think that no one gives a sh\*t, because nobody could really care and not try to help us. How can you let the children become homeless, how can you let that happen?"

Today more than 28 million people, about a quarter of the workforce between the ages of 18 and 64, earn less than \$9.04 an hour, which translates into a full-time salary of \$18,800 a year, the income that marks the federal poverty line for a family of four. Overall, 63% of U.S. families below the federal poverty line have one or more full time workers, according to the US Census Bureau.

Nearly 40% of American children live in families with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level, the amount needed for most families to be economically self-sufficient. Low-income families face material hardships and financial pressures similar to families who are officially acknowledged as poor.

In most cases, it is not until a family of four reaches twice the federal poverty level (\$37,700) that parents can adequately provide their children with basic necessities, like housing, food, clothes, and health care. After family income exceeds the poverty level, access to govern-

ment assistance programs is cut off. At the same time expenses such as food and clothing, utilities, childcare and health insurance increase.

This means that parents may earn more without a family experiencing greater financial security. In many cases, because of income ineligibility for food stamps and emergency assistance programs, earning more actually leaves families with fewer resources after the bills are paid.

For most of the 1990's the number of children in poverty was declining. Then between 2000 and 2002, there were an additional 546,000 children who slipped into poverty, and social service agency estimates indicate that as many as 250,000 more children might be included in the poverty figures for 2003.

Here is something shocking that should really give you an idea of how truly pervasive the poverty problem is in America. In 2002 about one in three people in the US was poor enough to be classified as living in poverty for at least two months of the year, according to recent data from the US Census Bureau.

Charity, 36, and Robert, 35, have three young children. They share a five-bedroom house in Kansas City, Kansas with eight other people. Because of the high housing costs and low wages in their area, it takes four people working full time to cover the rent and all the monthly expenses.

"We all have to work forty hours a week just to keep up with the bills. Every one of the adults living here had a good job and their own home," Robert says. "This was our house for fifteen years, but we were six months behind on the mortgage, and all the utilities got shut off. We had a notice posted on the door that said the house was unfit for human occupation, because we didn't even have running water. It got really bad for a few weeks, and we had to put the kids in the car and live on the street."

Robert and Charity explain how they ended up with four adults and ten children under one roof. Robert says he stands on a firm belief in family always helping family, no matter what.

"We had to take in Charity's sister Karen and her four kids because they were living in a truck with a topper on it. Her unemployment ran out and she lost her house and everything else," he chokes out, with a look of weary dismay. "We couldn't let them stay on the streets, I mean they're family, we take care of our own. She couldn't get any help from the government, and they were in that truck for over two months."

Charity still has nightmares of

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# The Invisible People

losing custody of her children if anyone finds out how overcrowded her house has become. She has a fierce sense of self-determination and pride, and is very hesitant to apply for any kind of government assistance.

"I gave up when it got really bad and asked them for help. That was a big mistake because they made me feel like trash, and then they told me I wasn't eligible because I owned my house. So the hell with them, I'll do it by myself and if they won't help my family, by God I will," said Charity.

"When Karen moved in she had a just taken a really crappy job, so she was able to put all the power and water bills in her name. If we hadn't all moved back into the house the state would have taken our kids away," Charity says heatedly. "I think about how close we all came to losing our kids! I just can't believe this all happened. We went to every place we could find, and none of them could give us any emergency help. We just didn't fit some box they had to check off. We came down to a check mark on a government form. How the hell could they screw us like that?"

"Let me tell you something, if we hadn't let Sandy move in we wouldn't have made it," Robert says. "Between the four of us we can barely make it, and food gets real short sometimes, we really stretch our shopping to feed everyone. We have to live on rice and beans for weeks at a time, but we give them food to eat, our kids aren't gonna go hungry, even if we have too."

He wants to make one final statement, because he feels so ignored and unheard.

"You know this is really wrong, it's just not something my parents generation would have let happen. They worked hard, and we didn't have much, but we had a decent life. There is no way you can call living in this house a decent life. It was for a long time, but now all our kids know is fear, hunger, going without, not ever really feeling safe, a whole lot more things like that, you know, something they should never have to go through."

Cynthia Larcom, Director of the Homeless Services Coalition of Greater Kansas City, MO knows a lot about the frustration of the families seeking help. She was able to explain why so many precariously housed and doubled up families were not able to access HUD shelter and other government emergency housing aid.

She says that not being able to include anyone who is precariously housed in the official HUD Homeless Management Information Strategies (HMIS) survey figures makes it impossible to provide for any unforeseen family emergency assistance needs.

"It's definitely keeping people from being able to access emergency help. For the HUD grants you can't count people who are precariously housed, you can't count people who are doubled up. You can only count the homeless people, the ones living in the shelters and actually out in the streets. Unless a family is in a shelter or on the street, we can't even grant a request for HUD assistance."

Larcom is the coordinator for the Jackson County/Kansas City, Missouri's Continuum of Care. The CoC is the cooperative effort of more than 60 local organizations dedicated to creating and maintaining a continuum of care that responds to the complex needs of homeless individuals and families. They have an extremely difficult time trying to develop emergency assistance planning for precariously housed families, because of the lack of proper survey figures.

"We have real good point in time figures from when we go out and do a street count of the homeless, we try to find all the families living in cars and abandoned buildings. Even having those figures does not take into account for all the families that really don't have permanent shelter," she explains. "We just miss them completely, in many cases the only time we even know they are applying for assistance is when they go through an agency that's records HMIS figures. Most of the HMIS tracking agencies don't even really have a way to record a family that doesn't fit within the homeless criteria and assistance profiles."

"Even if we knew exactly how many families were in precarious housing or living doubled up, we still could not get any funding or assistance. There is just not an official way to deal with the eventualities of the loss of housing many of these families will face. It's just so aggravating to know there are families that you won't be able to help until they become homeless. It's just so frustrating to watch them fall through the huge gaps in the program."

Many families who would have been able to access HUD Section 8 grants and public housing assistance find that it is no longer available, or the waiting lists are well over two years long, and most local housing authorities are not taking any new applications.

If they can get past all the red tape and actually qualify for any HUD assistance, they are often homeless long before their name comes up on the waiting list. Many families are facing imminent eviction or loss of housing, so the assistance is needed immediately, not in two years.

Martika, 33, is a single mother of three. She had a high paying

job, but after she was laid off she had to take a minimum wage job in a grocery store. She lives with her mother, her two sisters, and their seven children in a very bad neighborhood in Miami, Florida. They all sleep on the floor in case any bullets come through the house at night.

"Look at the kind of living conditions we are forced into. All of us living in a four bedroom house, and they call that proper shelter," she says. "Proper my ass, they haven't tried to live with all these people, much less try to feed and clothe the kids with such a sh\*tty little paycheck. We hear gunshots every night, and they killed a boy up at the corner just the other night. That was the sixth murder in this neighborhood in three weeks, and a whole sh\*tload of other crimes go on here everyday."

"I had my own house with a good mortgage, and two cars. I could buy everything my kids needed, and they got lots of things they wanted. The other day I couldn't even buy my son a new pair of shoes for school, we found a used pair at Goodwill," she says, with tears running freely down her face. "I always prided myself on being able to dress them nice, and now I have a hard time even buying stuff from thrift stores. I get most of their clothes from the clothes closet at the Catholic Church, and some of the other places around here."

"I have some really good work experience in a management position, but it was in a customer service call center," she continues. "We all know what happened to those kinds of jobs. I think my employer laid off over 35,000 people in the US, but they didn't do sh\*t to make sure we all got new jobs. I know my job went to India, that was in the middle of 2002. I just can't find any decent paying jobs, and I need the money really bad, we have to get our own place."

Martika's oldest sister Del has found something positive about their current housing situation.

"I have a little bit of hope, because this house we're in is almost paid for. We were going to take out another mortgage, but we can't really afford the payments right now, so my mother probably saved us from a real big mistake. She wouldn't sign the papers, but I was so desperate for extra cash I almost fell for one of those slick commercials, then my head cleared when I realized this home meant more than a getting quick fix solution."

"I have a new job that pays \$11.50 an hour, but right now it is only part time with about 25 hours a week. I am going to lose most of my food stamp benefits, because I will end up making about \$200 more a month, which just puts me over the full benefits limit," she pauses and almost breaks down, but then she gives

an ironic laugh.

"Hey I am making progress, yeah well, that's what my case worker said anyway, progress in gaining significant economic betterment. Wow! I didn't know whether to shake his hand or cry when he said that. I just knew they were cutting my benefits down, and I haven't even got a full paycheck yet. Yeah that's progress, and just wait till I get a raise, then I lose all my benefits, but I am still in debt for over \$25,000."

"Just that alone is going to keep me from getting a house or a good apartment," she says with a wounded tone. "I am never going to get it all paid off, but I go back to work for more money but less hours and then they cut my food stamps off. I have four kids to feed, and there is no way an extra \$200 dollars a month makes up for that."

Her situation is a prime example of the loss of necessary benefits as a low-income workers pay goes up.

"I still have to pay for daycare, and everything else, and the pay raise is going to affect my child care benefits, which are getting cut by \$300 a month. It costs over \$600 a month for the kids to get after school care, and that's with all the TANF help. I

just lost half of those benefits with this new job, so it adds up to me losing at least \$100 more a month, and I'll probably sink deeper into debt."

Due to the widespread layoffs and millions of jobs being outsourced and sent overseas, people are being forced to take low paying jobs with no benefits. Many people who used to be in the middle class earnings level have now taken a pay cut when they were able to find another job.

According to recent US Department of Labor figures, 57% of workers who had found another job after a layoff took a significant pay cut of 10-20%, 62% of workers returning to the job market said they had taken a new job with little or no benefits, and 43% said they had taken a severe cut in pay of at least 30% below their income at their last job. Even more troubling is the fact that three out of every five new jobs pays below the federal median income level.

Melvin, 42, and Brenda, 46, have five children, and they live in Davenport, Iowa with Melvin's mother and a younger sister and her three children. Melvin and Brenda had worked for a chicken

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## MILLIONS OF FAMILIES WORK HARD BUT STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET

### New Report Finds That One in Four Working Families Are Low Income

#### PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – More than one in four American working families now earn wages so low that they have difficulty surviving financially, a new report concludes. The report finds that too many jobs pay poor wages and provide no benefits, and that American workers are poorly prepared and supported to move into better paying jobs.

"Those who work should be able to support a family with confidence that continued hard work will lead to a brighter future," the report states. "For far too many American families, that notion remains appealing but remote. In this exceedingly prosperous society, we can and must do better."

The report provides a unique and in-depth look at conditions affecting working families with children in the U.S. as a whole and across the 50 states. In doing so the report finds that too many working families are insufficiently served by federal and state policies in such areas as education, training, health care and tax and wage policies.

The report was conducted as part of the Working Poor Families Project. Supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations, the Project spotlights issues confronting low-income working families and makes several recommendations to improve their economic standing.

Entitled "Working Hard, Falling Short: America's Working Families and the Pursuit of Economic Security," the report concludes that greater national and state-level attention is needed to address the problems confronting low-income working families, including access to need-based college scholarships, job training and subsidized child care.

"Working Hard, Falling Short" stresses that the prevalence of low-income, low-skill workers is particularly alarming given the increasing demands the nation's economy is putting on higher-skilled workers.

"As a country, we must act now to ensure that our investments generate enough skilled workers to keep the economy thriving. Doing so will lead to an increased tax base, in effect a return on our investment, and reduce the costs imposed by low wages and poverty," the report notes. Among the key findings in the report:

- o Millions of working families with children are struggling to make ends meet. More than one-fourth of working fami-

lies can be classified as low-income. To be considered low-income, a family of four earned less than \$36,488 in 2002, significantly less than the median U.S. income of \$62,732 for a family of four.

- o The education and workforce development systems inadequately prepare many workers for today's economy. Low-income workers are almost three times more likely not to have finished high school than those who earn more; nationally, 27 million adults do not have a high school degree. Current federal and state education skills training efforts do not meet workers' needs and fall short of businesses' growing demands for skilled labor.
- o The economy has too many jobs with low wages and insufficient benefits. One in five jobs in the U.S. is in an occupation that pays less than a poverty-level wage for a family of four. These jobs often do not meet workers' needs and fall short of businesses' growing demand for skilled labor.
- o Conditions for low-income working families varies significantly from state to state. The percentage of working families with low incomes varies significantly among the states, from 15 percent in two states, to more than 35 percent in seven others. Similarly, while some states have enacted policies that benefit low-income working families, many have not.

Addressing these issues will require a concerted response from federal and state policy-makers, as well as businesses, labor, and other concerned groups. In its recommendations, the report calls for:

- o Greater investments in education and training programs to benefit low-income working families.
- o The improvement of income, benefits and supports for low-income working families, and for the creation of more family-supporting jobs.
- o A nonpartisan national commission to examine why so many families struggle financially and to evaluate how government policies and private-sector practices can better aid low-wage families.

The new report builds on ongoing work by the Working Poor Families Project in 15 states. To date, the Project has released reports on low-income working families in nine states and will issue six more. Information on the Project and copies of the state reports are available at [www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/workingpoor.htm](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/workingpoor.htm). The views expressed in "Working Hard, Falling Short" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the supporting foundations.

## Hopper drives Craig home

by Lillian

One of Craig's favorite people to drink with was Ponytail Jim. Some people called him Gentleman Jim. Jim lived in his vehicle and was one of those guys who always looked neat and trim no matter what time of day or how much he had drunk the night before. He was also one of those guys who befriended women in need of help out in the streets in a kind way. Maybe that's why they called him Gentleman Jim. With big blue eyes and a neat pony-tail tucked behind his ears he was very attractive to the ladies. You could count on him to be polite with good manners ready to render potentially dangerous situations harmless.

He was equally popular with the men. He was the one who stopped his buddy Craig from making a fool out of himself one day when Craig was drunkenly waving a knife around, unaware of the danger he was putting himself in. I developed a great respect for Jim as I watched him gently convince Craig of the need to put the knife away. Many times he would fill his car with all of us and take us all to the free dinners at night which were too far to walk to. Jim was a good mechanic. So inevitably, the cars that wouldn't run anymore would end up with him. Right there, at a park, he would work on the engines with all of us crowding around, peering over his shoulders, the men giving him instructions he didn't need on what to do next.

Jim had served in the armed forces during Vietnam. There were a lot of homeless veterans on the streets: ex-marines, ex-navy seals, ex-servicemen of all kinds and I found them to be the most thoughtful and helpful of men. They seemed to have a deep sense of responsibility within them that would not allow them to ignore a fellow camper unable to see to their own needs, whatever the reason. They were an amazing group of men. I watched Jim pop his own joints into place when they had become disjointed. He would pull his own teeth out as others did.

Jim had a wonderful dog named Hopper who was a cross between Australian Shepherd and Doberman. He was given to Jim as a pup and Jim would carry him in his shirt which he would roll up into a pouch, like a kangaroo carrying his young.

Hopper could jump six feet straight up in the air at one year of age. He could run 35 miles an hour chasing rabbits at one and a half years of age. Jim would time him.

Hopper could take care of Jim and his buddies when they became too inebriated. One day, Jim was cruising in West Sacramento with his buddy, Flint. They were pulled over by the cops. Unfortunately, they were both thoroughly intoxicated and so Jim was hauled off to jail and the car was left in Flint's charge. The police wanted to shoot Hopper but Flint pleaded for him and Jim told him to take his belt off and tie Hopper up with it and take him out of the car, which Flint did. Flint could hardly walk, he was staggering back and forth, so Hopper proceeded to drag Flint away from the car and the police. He knew the way home. Later on, Flint could not remember what had happened. But Jim remembers well the sight of Hopper pulling on Flint as he drove off in the police car.

Another time, Jim got completely wasted with Craig on alcohol. They got in the car and drove home. When I saw Craig the next day he told me "We got so drunk last night that Hopper had to drive us home." I said, "What! The dog drove you home? You're kidding!" Craig swore up and down that Hopper had driven them both home. So did Jim. Years later, Jim told me how he had sat Hopper on his lap and how Hopper had put his own paws on the steering wheel while Jim had his own foot on the gas pedal ready for the brake. Jim helped Hopper balance himself as Hopper steered with his big ears flopping in the breeze and his head stuck out the car window. Yep! Hopper had driven them home.

Jim reflects, "Hopper was extremely intelligent, a damn good dog."



# 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 the homeless a voice in the public forum. Homeward also informs the homeless 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 authors' 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).

Loaves & Fishes is not affiliated with the Homeward Street Journal in any way. Participants with the paper are not allowed to solicit for donations, nor make any reference regarding the relationship between Loaves & Fishes and this newspaper whatsoever.

All correspondence can be sent to Homeward Street Journal, 1122 17th Street, Suite B, Sacramento, CA 95814

The paper may be reached at: (916) 442-2156

The paper may also be E-mailed at Homeward2@yahoo.com

## Vendors Support Street Paper Movement Success

Street newspapers throughout the world continue to grow - New publications arise; existing papers increase distribution and improve their quality; reader - ship increases. All these wonderful improvements that benefit our homeless community in so many ways have been made possible by the vendors of these papers. They are the on the street promoters of the homeless news. They are the ambassadors of the homeless populations and of the newspapers that they sell, putting the news about homeless issues directly in the hands of the readership that most needs to be aware of the crisis usually ignored by the mainstream press.

Street newspapers are publications that report about homeless issues and other community concerns and that benefit homeless communities. Most street papers feature local, national and international homelessness news, articles and poetry written by writers who are homeless, services directories and opportunities for homeless and poor people. Many papers are involved directly with grass roots homeless advocacy efforts. Street papers throughout North America support each other with their membership in the North American

Street Newspaper Association. Currently there over 35 papers from different cities throughout the U.S. and Canada participating in NASNA, each paper having an active vending program.

The vending programs of fer homeless people an income from their distribution of the papers. Every city has their own unique program. Some offer the papers to the vendors for free, some charge the vendors anywhere from 10 cents to 45 cents per copy. Then the vendor takes the papers and sell them mostly in public locations throughout their regions. Some have designated territory, some follow 'first come first serve' policies. Most vendors sell their papers for \$1 each, but many papers sell for more. All papers ask vendors to follow a code of conduct to insure the public are met with courtesy and legitimacy.

Homeward Street Journal began in 1997, offering news, prose, poetry and art about homelessness and written mostly by homeless writers. In the beginning the papers were distributed to subscribers and free to homeless service agencies, coffee shops, other public places and at events. A few years ago, Ed Spencer, a Sacramento Homeless

Organizing Committee volunteer, started selling the paper in order to earn a little money and to test the receptability of the public to paying a dollar for the paper. Finding the public eager to read the paper and help him earn some money, Ed began our first vendor program, offering the opportunity to others. At the program's beginning, Homeward was only printing 3,000 copies by-monthly. The program became very popular with Sacramentans at the lowest income range in our community, and it also remained popular with the readers. Over the years Homeward has doubled the number of papers printed and has a good many regular distributors.

These vendors are the backbone of the growing street newspaper movement. They are the ones on the frontlines that bring the news about homelessness to the public at large. They are out there spreading the message that homelessness can no longer be ignored. They bring to the public the information needed about what is being done to improve the conditions of people experiencing homelessness, and what still needs to be done, how they can turn their humanitarian concern to action. And most importantly, the vendors bring themselves to the public, an opportunity for the public to meet a person with first hand knowledge about the plight of homelessness, and the vendors offer the public a way to help at least one homeless person earn a little money by buying a newspaper.

Giving a dollar to a vendor is not a hand out, it is a reward for a valuable community service. It is their job to distribute this important news and the voice of the homeless community that is rarely heard. It is their job. They are new entrepreneurs exercising their 1st Amendment Rights and in effect, preserving that constitutional right for you and our nation. It is extremely important work. And it is work that will also determine the success of the Street Paper Movement.



Some Homeward Vendors (L to R): Virginia, Vinia, Douglas, Brenda

### 1st Amendment of the US Constitution states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

### Joining SHA

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

The SHA does not itself provide or manage housing.

You may call for info: (916) 442-1198

Annual Membership dues: Standard, \$35; Low-income, \$15

### Organizations:

Full, 0.1% agency budget; Associate, \$100

### Send donations to:

Sacramento Housing Alliance 1122 17th Street, Suite B, Sacramento, CA 95814



# Making a Joyful Noise

Reverend Linda runs a spiritual counseling center in Friendship Park called "Side-by-Side, where she offers compassionate listening and morning prayer to Loaves & Fishes guests. A little past 2pm every Wednesday, Reverend Linda closes her office, and announces over the loud speaker "Attention all musician!". Musicians, some aspiring, some accomplished, gather at the service center for their trip to the North Sacramento United Methodist Church for the weekly open jam sessions. Reverend Linda provides a ride and back, sometimes one car load, sometimes two, to musicians and music appreciators for the jam sessions held every Wednesday from 2:30 to 4:30pm.

June 2002 Lonnie Smith and Reverend Linda got permission from the North Sacramento United Methodist Church to hold the open jam sessions in one of their community rooms. Lonnie Smith had spent much time as a guest of Loaves & Fishes, experiencing

homelessness without a place to hang his guitar, and realized the great need for homeless musicians to have a place where they could practice and perform their creative craft. Reverend Linda also understood this great need and what a wonderful opportunity it would offer the community. Lonnie had facilitated musical sessions at Loaves & Fishes, a most remarkable talent contest where everyone was the winner, and was an accomplished and guitar toting musician and advocate.

For 2 years the jam sessions provided an opportunity for homeless and non-homeless musicians a place and venue for jamming to any tunes anyone happened to instigate. Lonny provided a great collection of instruments, amplifiers and such to accommodate the musician visitors at the beginning. Donations of more instruments and equipment came in from the community until presently there are guitars to play, keyboards, drums of all kinds,

violins, a mandolin, shakers and jingly things, and other whathaveyou. Sometimes there have been only a few jammers on Wednesday, but usually a whole room full of variously talented musicians — some beginners and some amateurs and some that you might have heard on the radio if they just happened to not be homeless and unfamous. Once in awhile a well known local musician will drop by to jam.

The jam sessions have gotten a lot of support from the community and the jammers have given a lot of support to the community. The group have offered their talents at two different community roundtable events and performances at 2 different congregations. The group made the big time when Jackson Griffith wrote a 2 page article about the music sessions and players for the News & Review, titled "Home is where the guitar is" (1/15/04).

Every Wednesday, musicians without the benefit of roadies, would have to truck all the equipment from an upstairs storage room to the downstairs community room, and after the session, haul it all back upstairs again. Not anymore. Last month the jam session musicians were given their own music room upstairs, with an adjoining storage room. Its big and its dedicated to music. The drum set can remain assembled and a piano helps furnish the room. This room is part of by the Spirit in the Arts Center, a new art center that provides a place for spiritual expression through the arts, serving the North Sacramento community.

The jam sessions are open to the



Rev. Linda & Lonnie

public, so come on by some Wednesday, or see Reverend Linda if you need a ride from Friendship Park. For more information or to make a donation call (916) 443-4362.



Paul on the base, Mark on the Drums



Eddie with Tamborine

## The Invisible People

processing plant in Oklahoma, but after being laid off, they moved to find better paying jobs.

"I don't think it's any better up here, not really, just a bit more work if you really look hard," Melvin says. "We lost our house in Tulsa, so we figured we'd come up here and start over. We sold all our furniture and a lot of family heirlooms, and then we found out we only had enough money for a tiny one bedroom apartment. We stayed in a motel for about two weeks before we even found a place at all."

"We all crammed in that place for a month, and then we ran out of money. Neither one of us figured we wouldn't find a job, we thought one of us could at least find something," Brenda says in a troubled voice. "I didn't find work for almost two

months, and it's part time and only pays \$7.25 an hour. Melvin finally found full time work, but it only pays \$7.50, with no benefits at all. I don't really have any benefits at my job either, and I only getting 15-20 hours a week, that's just not enough to live on, not for a family of seven."

Melvin says that they have never worked for such low wages before. "I made \$23 an hour before, and Brenda made \$18 an hour, so we were doing alright. Now look at us, we live with my momma and sister, all bumping up against one another in this little house. We probably won't ever get out of here; there ain't no way we can even get a decent apartment right now. A house is definitely not in our future, we probably won't ever own one again."

Despite all this he considers his family luckier than some he knows.

"When the plant laid off, practically everyone I worked with lost their house, and a lot of them took off and are still moving from place to place. We at least have somewhere to sleep, and it's with family," he says with a thankful smile. "I mean it not all bad, it's just kinda sticks in my craw to be over forty and have to live with my momma. At least my kids get to be around their grandma, aunt, and all their cousins. We are all trying to make it together, and it has really brought us closer, and really made the simple things seem grand. My kids know we'll make it, we tell them that all the time."

His eight-year-old daughter Kelly really sums it up for him with her simple statement. "I don't live in my old house or see all my friends anymore, but I'm still safe with my mommy and daddy," she says

with assurance in her voice. "They won't let anything happen to us, they promised. I know we don't have much, but my mommy told me we have love and hope. I just want to be safe, I don't care where we live."

For many families living in precarious or crowded housing, their only wish for is a safe home and security for their future. Unfortunately in these troubled economic times, they have little hope for anything beyond the next nights shelter, and their greatest fear is that they won't be able to pay all the bills.

Often one missed paycheck, or one unpaid bill, results in a family going out on the streets. For far too many families the threat of a permanent loss of shelter is now an ominous presence in their day to day existence.

# All the Faces

by Michael Evans

can you see the faces  
 they're everywhere you look  
 saddened and disheartened  
 maybe a simple "have a nice day" was all it took;  
 they're very souls have been shaken  
 their joy and spirit taken  
 faces once bright and cheerful  
 now dark and full of despair; faces full of sorrow  
 faces so tearful  
 I see faces of disappointment and torment  
 I see faces of unbelief  
 I see faces of bewilderment  
 I see faces of grief.

a world gone astray  
 a people gone to ruin  
 I see the faces of the children  
 do you see what we're doing?  
 I see the face of trouble  
 I see faces with no esteem  
 can you see the faces i see  
 and yes it's like a bad dream  
 I know it's more than just me  
 is the world coming to an end

I see unhappy faces at every turn  
 hoping to find that one friend!  
 look at the faces as you go from day to day  
 these are some strange times and things go in some  
 strange ways  
 no joy no life no peace no cheer  
 faces from far and faces from near  
 blank stares, empty gazes angry frustrated and  
 paranoid  
 faces no longer looking to God who can certainly fill  
 the void  
 In high places  
 In wide open spaces you'll see the tearful traces on  
 our very own faces

everywhere I look I see  
 the saddened faces, Oh the faces I see!  
 the sorrowful and disenchanted  
 the face I see is me;  
 I am not alone for we all can attest  
 the times we live in are surely not the best!  
 we wonder what we can do to help someone else  
 I must change my face  
 and set it to the hills  
 this hole in my soul  
 I know only God fills

Time to fix the gazes the blank and empty stares  
 of that man woman or child standing on the corner  
 over there  
 Let us return to God  
 for we all at one time were lost  
 the price has been paid He covered the cost  
 I must strive to do this One thing and by His grace  
 when it comes time for me to leave this place  
 and i am no longer to occupy this earthly space  
 my prayer today and i must state my only case  
 is to look upon My Lord and Savior  
 and See His wonderful Face!

God bless You  
 Scripture; Daniel, 12:1

# ELECTION RESULTS

Well, the votes are in. Who won? We'll probably find out soon enough if the majority of American voters made wise choices or not.

SHOC participated in the National Homeless and Low Income Voter Registration Week in October. We spent the week working a voter registration table at Friendship Park and had a table at Quinn Cottage on Saturday. Channel 3 came out for a news story. It was very heartening to learn that so many homeless people cared deeply about participating in this election.

We found out November 1 that there was no polling place in an area where many homeless people live. People staying at the Mission and Salvation Army were automatically given absentee voter ballots instead of a polling place to vote. It caused much confusion and maybe further disenfranchisement. Next election advocates plan to help insure a polling place is set up for this area.

Although some of the propositions are still being counted and may change, here's the results for the central city district.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| President           | George Bush (R)   |
| US Senate           | Barbara Boxer (D)   |
| US Representative   | Robert Matsui (D)   |
| State Assembly      | Dave Jones (D)  |
| Sac City USD        | Manuel Hernandez<br>Karen Yound<br>Rick Jennings II<br>Miguel Navarrette<br>Jerry Houseman<br>Peter Keat<br>Virginia Moose<br>Derek Minnema |
| SMUD                |   |
| Amer.Riv.Flood Cntl |   |
| Prop. 1A            | Yes (local revenue protection)  |
| Prop 59             | Yes (open records)  |
| Prop 60             | Yes (closed primary)  |
| Prop 60A            | Yes (surplus prop. sales pay of f bonds)  |
| Prop 61             | Yes (bonds for Children's Hospital)   |
| Prop 62             | No (open primary, top 2 advance)  |
| Prop 63             | Yes (tax for mental health funding)   |
| Prop 64             | Yes (unfair business limits)  |
| Prop 65             | No (local revenue protection)   |
| Prop 66             | No (3 strikes limit to serious crime)   |
| Prop 67             | No (phone tax for emergency medical)  |
| Prop 68             | No (expand casinos beyond tribes)   |
| Prop 69             | Yes (DNA samples of felons)   |
| Prop 70             | No (tribal casinos tax)   |
| Prop 71             | Yes (stem cell research funding)  |
| Prop 72             | No (employer health insurance)  |
| Measure A           | Yes (tax for transportation funding)  |
| Measure K           | Yes (affordable housing)  |
| Measure X           | Yes (library tax)   |

# Obituary

Samuel  
 Washington  
 d. 3/11/04  
 age 61  
 died in sleep

Ramona  
 Greene  
 d. 8/5/04  
 age 42  
 possible homicide

Alisson  
 Eckstrom  
 d. 8/30/04  
 age 34  
 heart failure

James  
 Rollins  
 d. 9/5/04  
 age 61  
 died in sleep

David  
 Phillips  
 d. 9/10/04  
 Complications  
 of Cancer

John Santos  
 d. 10/15/04  
 age 64  
 died in hotel room

Chris  
 Rambalt  
 d. 10/28/04  
 age 21  
 homicide

