

ISSUE BRIEF: Homelessness Today

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There are over 100 million homeless men, women, and children in the world today.¹ They include single mothers raising children in homeless shelters and hardened 'rough sleepers' who have spent decades on the street. In the wake of the global economic crisis, particularly in the United States, the homeless also include increasing numbers of families and young people.

Homelessness is not a new problem, however, and it plagues rich and poor countries alike in both rural and urban areas. Homelessness can touch anyone, and may be only "an illness, an accident, or a pay check away."² Fortunately, charities worldwide are working through shelters and soup kitchens, and newer initiatives such as street papers, to house the homeless and help rebuild their lives.



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What is homelessness?

Homelessness is closely linked to poverty, domestic violence, mental illness, war, famine and substance abuse to name a few factors. Lack of education, unemployment, and family upheaval can also play a role. Homelessness is broadly defined to include those who live in "any place not meant for regular sleeping accommodation by humans; a supervised temporary shelter; and those people who are at risk of losing their housing because they are being evicted from their residence or they are being discharged from institutions, such as hospitals or prisons." In addition, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements defines homelessness as "a condition of detachment from society," and thus includes those who are socially removed or rejected from society and living in unstable conditions.³ The element common to all homeless persons is lack of a stable residence to call home.

The Recession and Homelessness

Unemployment resulting in reduced income, lack of affordable housing, and losing one's home due to not keeping up with loan repayments (foreclosure), are contributing to the

Fighting Homelessness with CAF America

CRISIS

One of the United Kingdom's largest homelessness charities, CRISIS, has been helping the homeless since 1967. CAF America grantee CRISIS provides housing advice, education and training, and campaigns to end homelessness.

In 2009, CRISIS was chosen as the recipient of an exciting new CAF America Donor Advised Fund which will donate royalties from singer Bob Dylan's new Christmas album, "Christmas in the Heart," to the charity. With \$125,000 already raised in royalties from the Christmas album, CRISIS will be able to distribute free meals to hundreds of thousands of homeless adults and children. At Christmas, CRISIS estimated that the funds already raised would provide 15,000 meals for homeless people in the U.K. over the holidays, and 500,000 meals for schoolchildren in the developing world.

CAF America CEO Susan Saxon-Harrold said: "We are thrilled that CAF America is assisting Columbia/Epic and Bob Dylan in supporting grants to CRISIS and other charities in the United Kingdom and the United States. Bob Dylan's generosity, lending both his name and his music to this noble effort, will ensure that many thousands of people do not go hungry during future holiday seasons."

To learn more about CRISIS and their programs to fight homelessness, visit www.crisis.org.uk.

Nellie's, Canada

Another highlighted CAF America grantee, Nellie's, works specifically with homeless women and children. Based in Toronto, Canada, Nellie's provides emergency shelter and support for women and their children who are fleeing violence, poverty and homelessness.

Named after Nellie McClung, a Canadian feminist who fought for women's rights, Nellie's was one of Toronto's first women's shelters. When Nellie's was founded, there were 400 beds for homeless men and only 40 beds for women. Today, through government aid and donor support (over \$300,000 annually) the nonprofit operates a 36-bed emergency shelter and 24/7 crisis line. If there

recent rise in homelessness. For example, home foreclosures in the USA and Europe are a relatively new and growing contributor to the problem. Three years ago, foreclosure was a minimal factor for homelessness in America.⁴ According to a report from the National Coalition for the Homeless and six other advocacy groups, about 10 percent of homeless Americans helped by social service agencies in 2009 lost their homes to foreclosure.⁵

The recession is changing the face of homelessness as more families and young people turn to relatives' or friends' homes or the street for shelter as their resources dwindle. Between October 2007 and October 2008, over half a million family members in the United States stayed in an emergency shelter or transitional housing. During this same period, the number of homeless families in America rose by 9%; by an astonishing 56% in rural and suburban areas.⁶ The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that based on the expected duration of the current recession, an additional 1.5 million Americans will experience homelessness over the next few years.⁷

Rising unemployment rates and foreclosures are taking an especially heavy toll on young adults, both in the United States and abroad. In the United Kingdom, nearly one in five young adults under 25 are unemployed, the highest number in over a decade. Rising unemployment will drive more people into homelessness, according to Britain's largest youth homeless charity DePaul UK.⁸ This past Christmas, an estimated 50,000 young British people spent the night homeless or 'sleeping rough' in improvised shelters or on the street.⁹ In the United States, the unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds is 15.4%;¹⁰ 18-to-24-year-olds represent 12% of the U.S. homeless population, the fastest growing segment of the problem.¹¹

Global Homelessness

Even before the recession expanded their numbers, millions of men, women, and children around the world were made homeless by war, famine, natural disaster, or failed government policies. It is difficult to gauge with precision the homeless population of a country since estimates often don't include the 'hidden homeless.' These are people who don't fit the conventional image of a homeless person. Estimates, for example, often miss anyone who moves continuously from a friend's couch to a squatter's residence to other temporary accommodations. Another factor masking the true extent of the problem is increasing short-term homelessness. Transitional, short phases of homelessness, like sleeping in caravans and cars, or squatting, are now "the most common conditions of the 'new' homeless."¹²

Lack of affordable housing is a problem globally, but most severe in the developing world where populations are growing the fastest.¹³ Homelessness has increased in countries experiencing rapid urban growth, in particular, India and China. In Mumbai, India alone, there are over 250,000 "pavement dwellers."¹⁴

In Western Europe, the homeless population has reached the highest level since World War II.¹⁵ In 2009, the British government estimated there were over 4,500 rough sleepers in London, nearly half of them not from Britain, including many from Eastern Europe.¹⁶ Australia is battling an increasingly severe crisis. Charitable groups including Homelessness Australia and the Salvation Army estimate that over 100,000 Australians are homeless on a given night, a figure largely accepted by the Australian government. The recession and rising unemployment, as well as the effects of drought in rural regions, appear to be major factors.¹⁷

What is Being Done?

As homelessness becomes increasingly difficult to ignore, individuals, charitable organizations, and governments are responding. In January 2007, then French president Jacques Chirac was forced to act on behalf of France's widespread, largely ignored,

is inadequate space at Nellie's, the charity refers women and children to other shelters. Currently, demand for services is double the shelter's capacity.

Nellie's also offers crucial support to shelter residents, advocating on their behalf with the police and to secure social services. The charity also provides information and referrals for counseling, permanent housing, legal aid, day care, employment, and education. For women and children who have left the shelter, Nellie's provides follow up care through a Community Support Program.

To learn more about Nellie's, visit www.nellies.org.

Support Homeless Charities

To give to any of the organizations listed here or another international charity of your choice visit CAFAmerica at: www.cafamerica.org/dnn/Home/DonateNow/tabid/148/Default.aspx

Visit charities working in the field of Homelessness

If you or other donors would be interested in visiting any of the projects and/or charities mentioned in this brief, please contact CAFAmerica Chief Executive Officer, Susan Saxon-Harrod at 703-549-8931 or susansh@cafamerica.org for further details.

Resources

Foreclosure to Homelessness 2009: the forgotten victims of the subprime crisis.

National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009. This joint report from homeless advocacy groups, including the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, explores the rise in homelessness in the United States over the past two years and the factors behind it, namely the foreclosure crisis. To download this report, visit www.nationalhomeless.org/advocacy/ForeclosuretoHomelessness0609.pdf

Fundamental Issues to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness.

National Alliance to End Homelessness, August 2006. This concise and informative issue brief summarizes the main factors behind youth homelessness, and its policy implications. The brief also includes a list of ways communities can prevent youth homelessness. To download this brief, visit www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/1058.

homeless population, when protestors in Paris set up tent cities on the banks of the Saone River. Despite subsequent legislation to aid the homeless, the protestors were back with their tents three years later to protest a situation which had only become more severe.¹⁸

Recently, the U.S. administration earmarked \$1.5 billion through the 'American Recovery and Reinvestment Act' to prevent homelessness. In Australia, the government aims to reduce national homelessness by 50% by 2020. Initiatives will include an approximately \$140 million stimulus package for emergency relief and financial counseling, and the creation of nearly 10,000 homes for at risk or homeless Australians.¹⁹

However, overarching government initiatives are not always sufficient to address homelessness. Charitable organizations are therefore vital, working to alleviate homelessness through community programs supported by donor and government funding.

Homeless shelters provide basic services and may offer job training, counseling and alcohol/ drug rehabilitation, and legal or financial aid. Other charities focus exclusively on raising awareness and funds to feed and house the homeless. Habitat for Humanity is an international charity that mobilizes volunteers and involves the homeless to build homes. The French charity *Les Restaurants de Coeur* (Restaurants of the Heart) distributes food to the poor and homeless. The success of the charity is in part due to continuing support from French celebrities. Since its establishment in 1985 by French comedian Coluche, the charity has expanded to other European countries and broadened its services to include emergency shelters, job training and assistance, and literacy programs.

Charitable organizations also offer innovative ways to help the homeless. Street newspapers, sold and often written by homeless people, raise awareness and generate income for the homeless. The concept, which originated in the United States, has since spread to Western Europe and some cities in Canada, Africa, South America, and Asia. Other charities aid pets of the homeless. In the United Kingdom, the Dogs Trust works to develop pet friendly policies for homeless shelters and hostels, and provides free veterinary care to dogs whose owners are homeless. Throughout the United States, mobile medical vans offer a vital service by canvassing areas where the homeless congregate to provide free medical care. ■

This CAF America Issue Brief presents a synopsis of facts, research and funding opportunities for causes you care about. It isn't meant to be a comprehensive report, and for that reason, provides a list of resources and websites where you can learn more.

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Websites

Centrepoint

www.centrepoin.org

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless

www.feantsa.org

Habitat for Humanity

www.habitat.org

Homeless International

www.homeless-international.org

Homelessness Resource Exchange

www.hudhre.info

National Alliance to End Homelessness

www.endhomelessness.org

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

www.nchv.org

The National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness

www.npach.org

The Salvation Army

www.salvationarmy.org

SHACK/Slum Dwellers International

www.sdinet.co.za

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements – Habitat (UNCHS)

www.unhabitat.org

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

www.portal.hud.gov

ENDNOTES

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