HOMELESS VOICES FOR JUSTICE

The HVJ Newsletter

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You Don't Need a Home to Vote 2013
By: Mary Jo Skofield

Every year, HVJ works hard to make sure that the voice of every single person is heard. One of the ways we do this is through our annual You Don't Need a Home to Vote campaign. You Don't Need a Home to Vote is our longest running campaign, and started in 1995. Our goals for this campaign are to register and educate voters on their rights, and to get more people involved in the political process. To date, we've registered over 2,250 voters! This includes the 100 voters that we registered just this year. To help with our voter registration efforts this year, we held voter registration drives at the Preble Street Resource Center, Teen Center, Logan Place, Florence House, Amistad, at soup kitchens in Augusta and Lewiston, at the Tedford Shelter in Brunswick, and at the Long Creek Youth Development Center. We were very busy! But it was great to reach so many individuals, especially youth, who may not have registered to vote without our help.

In addition to registering voters, we also strive to educate people on voter rights, on issues of importance to our community, and on candidates who are running for local, state, or federal office. One way to do this is through our Candidates' Forums. This year we invited Portland City Council candidates to the Preble Street Soup Kitchen, where they were able to meet with advocates and people accessing the soup kitchen over breakfast and then answered questions from the audience. Four of the seven candidates running for office were present, including Councilor Ed Suslovic for District 3, Jon Hinck and Wells Lyons for a three-year At-Large seat, and Chris Shorr for a four-year At-Large seat. Absent from the forum were Gregory Blouin for District 3, and Greg Blouin and Jill Duson for the four-year At-Large seat.

(Continued on Page 2, VOTE)

MaineCare Expansion
By: Tom Ptacek

Health care is an important part of our lives. Many argue that it is a human right. For certain, it is essential to maintaining a good, quality life.

Earlier this year, the state of Maine chose not to strengthen the MaineCare system by declining federal dollars that were being offered to expand this program. As a result, 10,000 people with Non-Categorical coverage will be losing their MaineCare coverage on December 31. This includes me. Another 14,500, all with children, will also be losing coverage. In addition, another 45,000 that could have received coverage, including 25,000 currently on the waiting list, will be unable to get that coverage.

This past legislative session, HVJ worked with the Maine People's Alliance, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and many other groups as part of the Cover Maine Now! Coalition in an effort to secure this essential coverage for those who truly need it. We fell just a few votes short of the 2/3 majority needed to override the Governor's veto.

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2013 HVJ Team:

dee Clarke
Jim Devine
Judy Newell
Tom Ptacek
Mary Jo Skofield
Jeff Vane

HVJ Staff:

Ashley Gorczyca
Community Organizer
Amy Gallant
Advocacy Coordinator

VOTE (Continued from Page 1)

We also held a Candidates' Roundtable at the Tedford Shelter in Brunswick, where all four candidates for Brunswick Town Council attended: Alison Harris, Jane Millett, Stephen Walker, and David Watson.

Another event we hold each year to help with our voter education efforts is HVJ Day at City Hall. This year, over 20 HVJ members went to City Hall, where former Representative Herb Adams led us on a tour and gave us a history of the building. We also met with Bud Philbrick, the City Election Administrator, who explained the voter registration process to us, and Mayor Brennan and Doug Gardner, the Director of Health and Human Services for the City of Portland, joined us for lunch. We also had the opportunity to vote that day!

Personally, it has been an honor to be a part of the voting process for so many people.

Upcoming Changes at Oxford Street Shelter
By: Judy Newell

Hi, everyone. My name is Judy Newell and I'm one of the newest members of the HVJ team. We recently became aware of some recent changes over at Oxford Street Shelter, so we wanted to pass these on to our friends and neighbors. From our understanding, the staff at Oxford Street shelter will be implementing these changes to improve the safety of the space, manage emergency situations more efficiently, and to provide better services for those who are experiencing chronic homelessness.

As you probably know, the City of Portland manages four different sites to provide shelter for those who need it: the Oxford Street Shelter, Preble Street Resource Center, the General Assistance waiting room, and the Refugee Services conference room. According to Oxford Street staff, it has been very difficult to staff all four locations safely and hindered the quality of services. To cope with this challenge, the City of Portland will no longer be using the Refugee Services conference room as a warming center. Instead, the Day Room at Oxford Street will now be used as the warming center. This change is meant to increase efficiency and provide safer conditions for clients. ***Unfortunately, this move will result in the loss of about 20 shelter beds.***

Another change will be seen in the role of the Housing Counselors at Oxford Street. To address the needs of those who are chronically homeless, housing counselors will now be dedicated to working with those who have been experiencing homelessness for a long period of time. This shift in focus is intended to provide better services for those needing more support to leave the shelter and find a place to call home.

There will also be a change to security at the shelter. "Wanding" is now being implemented in addition to random bag checks. Staff at Oxford Street has said this will be randomized, so it should not slow down the check-in process too much.

If you have any questions regarding the above changes, we recommend reaching out to Josh, Rob, or your Housing Counselor. They have been very helpful explaining these changes to us, and will be able to answer the questions you may have. Also, we want to know how these changes are impacting you. We meet regularly with staff from Oxford Street Shelter, and we use this opportunity to pass your questions and concerns on. Please let us know how these changes are working out. We want to make sure your voices are heard.

MAINECARE (Continued from Page 1)

This coming January, the fight will begin again as we return to Augusta to give the State of Maine the opportunity to do the right thing.

Unfortunately, we've already lost the federal funds for one year. But it's not too late to bring this safety net back to those who need it the most.

For someone who is struggling to make it, the expensive bill incurred by illness or injury can mean disaster. It can be the difference between staying in your home or ending up at the shelter. The difference between going to bed at night with some semblance of hope that things will be alright or feeling defeated and hopeless.

HVJ will continue to fight for this essential part of hope and quality of life, as will our partners in Cover Maine Now. Health care being essential to a good quality of life is undeniable.

This coming session we will be keeping you informed as to the progress of this fight. As always, we will let you know when and where your voice is needed to bring to tens of thousands of Mainers the health care they deserve.

Did you lose your MaineCare coverage on December 31st? If so, please contact Ashley at 775-0026 ext 1220. Your story will help state legislators better understand the importance of expanding health care coverage to thousands of Mainers!

Our Work to End Hate Violence

By: Tom Ptacek

HVJ's campaign against hate violence began a decade ago as a response to the many serious injuries we were seeing in the community. With the help of The Center for Preventing Hate and Maine Attorney General, Steve Rowe, vital "First In Nation" legislation was passed. Take a look at Governor Baldacci signing these laws in the Preble Street Soup Kitchen (below).

These two laws mandate training for graduating cadets on working with the homeless community as well as allowing for aggravated sentencing in cases of hate violence. If you or someone you know has been the victim of violence because you are homeless, please contact us! ALWAYS remember to report these crimes to the police. We can help with filing a report.

In 2009, HVJ revisited this issue and began documenting discrimination faced by the homeless community. In January, we are co-organizing a community symposium with the Portland Police and Chamber of Commerce. The goal is to bring together different community members including business owners, police officers, and people who have experienced homelessness as in order to better understand the needs of everyone and work on solutions.

The need for a better understanding of the homeless community is vital in moving forward and creating an community that is inclusive and respectful.

Discrimination, judgment and the threat of violence are daily indignities and dangers for someone experiencing homelessness. HVJ believes they shouldn't be, and Portland is a community that should not tolerate any of the above.

What's Out There
This edition: Hope House
By: Jim Devine

I have recently been going to an interesting church that is in the parking garage next to the Eastland Hotel. It's called HopeGateWay, and they are involved with a couple of projects of interest to our community. Hope House is one of them. Located on Sherman Street, Hope House is a residence and community center for 13 asylum-seekers, most from Africa.

These people are new to our country and may have been staying at the Oxford Street Shelter, which can be difficult enough for people already familiar with our culture. Many services, such as English language classes, are offered. This effort can help relieve our overburdened shelter system.

Another resource provided through this ministry is called Justice For Our Neighbors, which offers free legal services to immigrants and asylum seekers. I've been volunteering at the clinic that meets at HopeGateWay and have met a lot of nice people. I never realized there were so many languages spoken that I have never heard.

Ten years ago, I went to Brazil and found out how difficult it is to function in a land where everyone speaks a language I don't know. I appreciate the efforts of HopeGateWay to welcome new members of our community.

Upcoming Events
By: Jeff Vane

Hi, everyone! My name is Jeff and I'm the newest member of the HVJ team. I was an advocate about eight years ago, and am happy to be working with the group again. There are a few important events coming up that I'd like to tell you about…

Event: Annual Homeless Person's Memorial Vigil
Date: Friday, December 20
Time: 4:00-5:00pm
Location: Begin at Preble Street Resource Center; March to Monument Square

Every year on the winter solstice, which HVJ refers to as the "longest night of homelessness," communities all over the country come together to remember people from the homeless community who had passed away. Here in Portland, everyone gathers at the Preble Street Resource Center, on the corner of Preble Street and Portland Street, at 4:00pm on Friday, December 20. From there, we will walk up to Monument Square where the vigil will take place. Once in Monument Square, a few speakers will share their reflections, and the name of each person who passed away this year will be read and a candle will be lit in their memory. This is an important day for our community, and we hope you will join us.

Event: MaineCare Rally at the State House
Date: Wednesday. January 8
Time: 8:00am—1:00pm
Location: Maine State House, Augusta

10,000 individuals will be losing their Non-Categorical MaineCare coverage on December 31. There is a rally at the State House on January 8th, as well as opportunities to speak with legislators about the importance of having access to health care. Transportation is provided from Preble Street! Please contact Ashley at 775-0026 ext. 1220 if you'd like to join us.

Event: HVJ Day at the State House
Date: TBD; late January-early February
Time: TBD
Location: Maine State House, Augusta

On our Annual Day at the State House, HVJ goes to the State House for a tour, lunch and meeting with the Governor. Herb Adams, a former Representative from Portland, takes the group on a tour of the State House and educates us on the legislative process. Keep an eye out for signs for this event. Transportation provided from Preble Street.

100,000 Homes
By: Jim Devine

On Monday, November 18, I took part in the 100,000 Homes Portland Campaign. This was part of a nationwide effort to access the health and housing needs of people experiencing homelessness chronically. The task was to take a rather lengthy and involved survey to people in the shelters, soup kitchen, and campsites and engage in a conversation about their homeless experience. The goal is to use the Housing First model to provide more housing. Housing First means that people are provided a home first, and then issues such as mental health and substance abuse are addressed after. A person really can't address these issues if they are stuck on the street.

The event was well organized by Amy Gallant, Preble Street Advocacy Coordinator, and Rob Parritt, Assistant Director of Oxford Street Shelter. An interesting mixture of volunteers from the business, faith, housing, provider, and political communities took part. A staff from the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce was on my team that went to the Preble Street soup kitchen. Representative Richard Farnsworth, the co-chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, was also a volunteer.

Given the rather lengthy nature of the survey, I was pleasantly surprised at how many people were interested and willing to participate. The most interesting part for me was meeting and doing the survey with a friendly fellow in the soup kitchen. His main language was French and he was just beginning to learn English. He was from Burundi and showed me the machete wound on his head he had received in the terrible conflict over there. Here was a situation I had only known about from the TV news right in front of me.

So far, this campaign has succeeded in housing 70,000 people across the country. I was happy to be working together with many people from different walks of life to help build a community with a place for everyone to live.

In Remembrance of Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela
1918-2013

Nelson Mandela was a true hero. His unrelenting passion for social justice, and his work in advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable human beings in the community, has inspired many. Homeless Voices for Justice hopes to continue the legacy he has left behind. May he rest in peace.

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice."
-- Nelson Mandela

Winter Word Search

I	D	W	Y	Y	J	F	F	S	C	G	F	P	H	E	E	I	S
S	W	E	A	T	E	R	N	I	F	L	R	J	E	S	N	O	W
T	N	R	G	Y	O	O	T	I	Y	O	O	L	K	P	F	E	N
S	T	T	R	L	W	C	R	X	X	V	S	X	A	B	R	Z	B
O	C	D	Y	B	R	E	W	H	D	E	T	T	L	J	E	Y	E
S	A	A	O	A	P	M	I	G	C	S	P	W	F	E	E	K	W
X	E	A	R	Q	Q	B	C	O	A	T	S	D	W	H	Z	Z	N
I	R	A	N	F	E	S	N	O	W	M	A	N	O	E	E	P	I
D	C	M	S	R	D	R	A	Z	Z	I	L	B	N	A	I	Q	N
Z	P	I	N	O	D	L	O	C	G	Q	U	B	S	T	S	C	R
M	E	A	C	J	N	Q	C	C	L	C	W	L	K	E	F	K	E
S	T	Q	Z	L	M	K	I	V	G	H	Q	P	I	R	B	H	I
E	R	C	D	L	E	O	N	R	I	L	U	R	I	U	W	L	L

ARCTIC
BLIZZARD
COAT
COLD
FIRE
FREEZE
FROST
GLOVES
HEATER
HIBERNATE
ICE
ICICLE
SCARF
SEASON
SKI
SNOW
SNOWBOARD
SNOWFLAKE
SNOWMAN
SWEATER

Taken from http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/quizzes/wordsearch/winter.html

Calendar of Events

January 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 **Happy New Year!**	2	3	4
5	6 9:30-11:30am HVJ meeting	7	8 8:00am-1:00pm MaineCare Rally	9	10	11
12	13 9:30-11:30am HVJ meeting	14	15	16 8:30-10:00am ESAC meeting	17	18
19	20 9:30-11:30am HVJ meeting	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 9:30-11:30am HVJ meeting	28	29 9:30-10:15 General Membership Meeting	30	31	

Weekly HVJ meetings are held on Mondays between 9:30 and 11:30am in the Preble Street Resource Center Group Room. These meetings are open to all members. Come find out what HVJ is up to!

January 8 - HVJ will be taking members up to Augusta to advocate for the expansion of MaineCare. Transportation and meals will be provided. We will be leaving from the Resource Center Courtyard at 7:00am and returning at 2:00pm.

January 16 - Every month, the Emergency Shelter Assessment Committee meets to discuss the issue of homelessness in the City of Portland. This committee is made up of service providers, local and state government officials, advocates, and community members. The meeting takes place at 190 Lancaster Street.

January 29 - HVJ will hold its monthly General Membership Meeting in the Resource Center Day Room. Come find out what projects the team is working on and share your concerns on .

Other Upcoming Events

HVJ Day at the State House - Late January/early February

Be on the lookout for more information in the Resource Center, coming soon!

HVJ Purpose Statement

Preble Street Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) is a grassroots group that works for social change on behalf of people who experience homelessness and poverty. HVJ is led by a board of people who have all experienced homelessness and is supported by Preble Street staff. The founding chapter in Portland has existed since 1995, with other chapters started in Augusta, Brunswick and Lewiston. Our goal is to build a coalition for and of homeless people throughout Maine, and to empower people whose first-hand perspective has often been absent in the development of policies and programs that impact their social and economic well being.

WHERE TO FIND US:

Every Monday from 9:30-11:30am, HVJ holds a weekly meeting in the Preble Street Resource Center group room. All are welcome to join!

You can also find us in the HVJ office, located in the Preble Street Resource Center, or by contacting Ashley at 775-0026 ext. 1220.

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Homeless Voices for Justice

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