
Press Release

For Immediate Release

For more information contact:

Will O'Brien, Project H.O.M.E., 215-232-7272
Cell: 215-990-5668, Email: willobrien@projecthome.org;
or Connie Naylor, (215) 452-5389



PHILADELPHIANS WILL GATHER TO REMEMBER HOMELESS PERSONS WHO HAVE DIED

[PHILADELPHIA] – Hundreds of Philadelphians will gather for the annual commemoration of **Homeless Memorial Day on Thursday, December 20, 2007, at City Hall-Dilworth Plaza (near the Christmas Tree) from 4:30 pm-5:30 pm.** Advocates, housing/service providers, homeless and formerly homeless people, and members of the general public will remember the lives and dreams of homeless men and women who perished this year in Philadelphia and will renew their commitment to end homelessness.

Over sixty homeless and formerly homeless persons who lost their lives this year will be remembered.

Since 1990, the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council have sponsored National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day on or near the first day of winter to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember our homeless citizens who have paid the ultimate price for our nation's failure to address the issue.

After declining in the late 1990s, the number of homeless persons in Philadelphia has been increasing for the past few years. A street census counted over 800 persons on the streets of Center City in the fall, the highest number in eight years. Additionally, there are almost 3,000 people living in emergency shelter, approximately 1,100 of whom are children.

"Homelessness is both a personal and social tragedy," said S. Mary Scullion, Executive Director of Project H.O.M.E. "As we remember our sisters and brothers who died this past year, we renew our resolve to end this tragedy, so that no more persons have to die homeless and so that our city can fulfill its promise as a healthy, safe, and economically vital city where all Philadelphians have a place to call home."

Among those being remembered is Erika Keels. Erika, a nineteen-year-old homeless transgender woman, was killed by a motorist on March 22, 2007. Her death gained notoriety when members of the transgender community accused the police of not filing sufficient charges against the motorist.

"To know Erika was to love her," said Lynne Collins, a formerly homeless mother of three, who now works to help others come off the streets. Lynne will be performing a praise dance at this year's candlelight vigil because "homelessness hits me at the heart. It's important once you survive something like homelessness that you never forget where you came from. I will perform as my way of giving back to the community."

More information and background information on National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day are available at <http://www.nhchc.org/memorialday.html> and www.projecthome.org.

If you see someone on the street in need of assistance, please call the Outreach Coordination Center at 215-232-1984.

Sponsoring organizations: Arch Street United Methodist Church – The Barbelin Center for Outreach Ministries at Old Saint Joseph's Church Philadelphia – Back On My Feet – Bethesda Project – Catholic Health East – Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office – Dignity Housing – Drueding Center/Project Rainbow – Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church – Episcopal Community Services St. Barnabas Mission – First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia – Hands of Hope – Homeless Advocacy Project – Horizon House – Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania – Northwest Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network – Overington House – People's Emergency Center – Philadelphia Health Management Corporation – Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center – Point Man Soldier Heart Ministry – Project H.O.M.E. – Ready, Willing & Able