



THE

Special Report: Homelessness in Ohio

Ohio Benefit

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Banker

Homelessness 101

by Melissa Will - Ohio State Legal Services Association

AUGUST 2007

VOLUME 2

ISSUE 8

WHO is Homeless?

When most people think of a homeless person, they picture a disheveled middle-aged man sleeping in the doorway of a building. What they don't envision is a group of children waiting for their school bus outside the shelter they stayed at the night before. The latter image is a more accurate description of the changing face of homelessness.

39% of the homeless population of the US are CHILDREN

A National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty study found that children under 18 make up 39% of the US's homeless population. Another 25% of homeless people are between the ages of 25 and 34. In rural areas, researchers believe that single mothers and children make up the majority of the homeless. Surveys consistently find that

nearly a quarter of homeless, single mothers left their last residence because of domestic violence. 25% of people experiencing homelessness are employed. 40% of homeless men have served in the military.

Homelessness is usually a temporary situation that an individual or family falls into because of a dramatic change in circumstances, such as a health crisis, loss of benefits, domestic violence, natural disaster or job loss. 80% of people experiencing homelessness will be homeless only once in their lifetime for a short period of time. The chronic homeless population (homeless for over a year or 4 times in 3 years with a disabling condition) makes up only 10% of the total homeless population.

WHERE are the Homeless People?

Another common misconception about homelessness is that it is an urban issue. However, when the definition of who is homeless is broadened to include people who lose their stable

continued on page 2

Special Edition:

This is a special edition of The Ohio Benefit Banker dealing with the issues surrounding homelessness. Melissa Will (Equal Justice Fellow at Ohio State Legal Services Association), Dianna Parker (Equal Justice Fellow at Equal Justice Foundation) and Amanda Lennon (State Support Attorney at Ohio State Legal Services Association) put this issue together to help you recognize and help overcome barriers homeless clients may experience when attempting to access public benefits. In 2006, the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio estimates that there were 150,000 people who experienced homelessness in Ohio. These are low-income individuals and families who need help accessing public benefits.

The Ohio Benefit Bank can be a powerful tool in aiding these families, but it is important that we understand their needs so we can advocate effectively for them. Homeless persons often encounter problems with identification, mail services, transportation, education, drug and alcohol problems and the growing trend of the criminalization of homelessness. By being aware of these issues and how we can work to overcome them, we can help more of our clients access benefits. We hope you enjoy this edition!

ATTACKS AGAINST HOMELESS ON THE RISE IN OHIO

by Melissa Will - OSLSA

This past May, a group of six young men attacked a homeless woman at her camp near the Flats in Cleveland. The men hit the woman with a bat, threatened her with a knife, and pushed her down, breaking her collarbone. When her husband returned to the camp, they beat him,

“ A lot of people are homeless because things happened in their life that they couldn't control but that doesn't make them evil people ”

-comment by Cleveland man attacked in May

too, cutting his head. The men took off with the couple's dog.

Unfortunately, stories like this are becoming more common in Ohio. The Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless documented two attacks against the homeless in Ohio for all of 2006. Since the beginning of 2007, six homeless people in Cleveland alone have been attacked. Ohio statistics reflect that the same national rise in reported hate crimes against people experiencing homelessness.

The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) reports that 68% of attacks on the homeless are committed by 13 - 19 year olds, mostly males. The director of NCH blames websites that promote attacking people experiencing homelessness. For instance, "Bumfights" is a video series and website that has a large following of teenagers and young adults. The producers of "Bumfights" bribe homeless people with money or alcohol to engage in dangerous acts, such as fighting with each other or jumping off buildings.

HOMELESSNESS 101 continued from page 1

housing, the problem expands beyond city limits. Doubling up with family and friends is especially prevalent in rural areas, where there are few shelters. Homeless youth often "couch surf" or stay with friends instead of going to a shelter.

At least every two years, most Ohio counties conduct a point-in-time count of how many people in their county are experiencing homelessness. The count is done over the course of one 24-hour period, when all the

county's shelters and transitional housing providers report the number of people staying in their facilities. Also, trained volunteers canvass the county on the point-in-time count day to count the number of unsheltered people (examples - people living in tents in the woods or under bridges). The following chart lists the most recent point-in-time statistics available for Ohio's eight largest metropolitan areas.

Ohio's 80 counties that do not contain major metropolitan areas are grouped together and called the "balance of state." In 2005, HUD reported that there were a total of 7,172 homeless individuals in Ohio's 80 non-metropolitan counties.

Of the 7,172 homeless individuals, 4,888 were sheltered and 2,284 were unsheltered.

WHY are People Homeless?

The steady rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness is fueled by a perfect storm of circumstances in Ohio - changing employment opportunities, stagnant wages, fewer public benefits available, and a lack of affordable housing.

Point-in-Time Homeless Statistics			
CITY	TOTAL	SHELTERED	UNSHELTERED
Akron	1050	855	195
Canton	615	435	180
Cincinnati	1,344	1,145	199
Cleveland	2,208	1,984	62
Columbus	1,869	1,807	62
Dayton	804	732	72
Toledo	739	597	142
Youngstown	364	266	98

As the number of people living in poverty increases, so does the number of people one paycheck away from becoming homeless. Because poor people struggle to pay their bills every month, they have no financial safety net to keep them from becoming homeless should a crisis arise. Ohio's rising poverty rate is attributable to many factors, including changing employment prospects and a decline in public benefits.

It isn't news that Ohio's job market has shifted in the last few decades. The well-paid, unionized manufacturing jobs that sustained previous generations of working class Ohioans are dwindling. Stable jobs with good pay and benefits are hard to find for people without a college degree.

Low-income people often work low-paying jobs with unreliable hours and no benefits.

When President Clinton declared that welfare as we know it was over in 1996, he failed to mention that poverty as we have never known was just beginning. Since the War on Poverty in the 1960's, welfare and other public benefits provided a safety net that kept many poor people from being

homeless. But the time limits for welfare, implemented in the 1990's, cut that safety net for millions of poor people in America.

Coinciding with the reform of welfare has been a drop in the number of public

housing units in Ohio. Many cities are demolishing housing projects, steeply cutting the stock of affordable rental housing. Projects are being replaced with vouchers that subsidize rent for low-income people; however, in most Ohio cities, qualified applicants must wait years to get one of these vouchers. Affording decent rental housing without government assistance is very difficult for most Ohioans living in poverty.

Many Ohioans find themselves ineligible for cash assistance, working a minimum wage job, paying more than half their wages toward housing, and living just one crisis away from becoming homeless. Any unforeseen health crisis, family break-up, raise in rent or utilities, job loss, or natural disaster drives these impoverished Ohioans into homelessness.

If you encounter people experiencing homelessness who have been attacked and believe they were targeted because they are homeless, encourage them to report the incident to the police. Also contact NCH, info@nationalhomeless.org, to report the incident.

It's Not a Crime to be Homeless

by Melissa Will - OSLSA

The rising numbers of homeless persons spending their days, and often their nights, on the streets of Ohio's cities were bound to collide with political leaders planning to reinvent their downtown centers. One result of this collision of trends has been city

ordinances "criminalizing" homelessness in an effort to drive the homeless out of the city centers.

Criminalization of homelessness involves the enactment of local laws against life-sustaining activities homeless people are forced to do in public, such as sleeping, sitting, or storing belongings. Criminalization can also be the selective enforcement of general laws, such as loitering or jaywalking, against homeless people.

A recent example of proposed law aimed against homeless people happened in early July. Cleveland City Council introduced an ordinance that would permit only walkers to pass through Public Square from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. The ordinance is obviously targeted at homeless people who spend their nights sleeping in Public Square. Cleveland's Public Safety Director said that they can't let people "camp out on the doorstep of our community."

The punishment for violating laws that criminalize homelessness may seem benign, since most infractions of these laws only result in misdemeanor charges. However, accumulating even minor offenses on a criminal record can severely hurt a homeless person's chances of securing subsidized housing, employment, and even some public benefits.

As an advocate for your homeless clients, it is important to vigilantly monitor the actions of your local government. Keep track of your city council's activities. If an ordinance is proposed that seems targeted at homeless people in particular, speak out against it and alert your local media. Listen to your clients when they tell you about being cited for jaywalking outside the shelter while people in the rest of the city are rarely ticketed for jaywalking. For more information on how you can combat criminalization in your community, check out this report: www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/crimereport/report.pdf

OHIO LEGAL SERVICES AND HOMELESSNESS

Many barriers to becoming and staying housed can be resolved with free civil legal assistance. For instance, a legal aid attorney can help someone fight an illegal eviction or get the public benefits they need to afford housing. Ohio's six legal aid programs provide free legal assistance to qualified low-income persons. Most people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless, are eligible for free legal help. Legal aid can help people with civil issues, such as evictions, lock-outs, utilities, public benefits, education, consumer, family or employment.

If your organization is interested in learning more about your local legal aid, Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA) offers a free workshop training for the staff of social service organizations that serve the homeless or people at risk of homelessness. The 1 - 2 hour workshop is presented at your organization's office, and will cover eligibility for legal aid, how to refer people to legal aid, what types of cases your legal aid handles, and other free legal resources in your community. For more information contact Melissa Will at 614.221.7201 ext. 123 or mwill@oslsa.org.

HATE CRIMES AGAINST AMERICAN HOMELESS

2005 - 86 ATTACKS, 13 RESULTED IN DEATH OF VICTIM
2006 - 142 ATTACKS, 20 RESULTED IN DEATH OF VICTIM

Assessment of the Client

by Amanda (Beck) Lennon - OSLSA

Lack of transportation, the prevalence of disabilities, and domestic violence are common problems for low-income families. A whole other set of barriers are added when these families become homeless. The CDJFS is supposed to be screening clients and noting the existence of these barriers to help the client overcome them. When clients have barriers, such as those listed above, the client may not completely fulfill their responsibilities to the CDJFS. They may be sanctioned for actions like missing appointments, not bringing in verification or not completing work assignments. However, these actions are merely symptoms of the barriers the client is experiencing. If the CDJFS does not do a proper assessment or screening of the client to discover these barriers, the client may be improperly sanctioned. Clients must be encouraged to disclose information in the screening, and must be empowered to demand accommodation in their self-sufficiency contract. In addition, advocates must be trained to seek state hearings to aid the client in removing sanctions or improper placements, most of these actions would constitute good cause and the sanction should be removed.

3

FAST FACTS

CDJFS Is Required To Help Homeless Clients!

In both Food Stamps and in Medical Assistance Programs, the county is required to provide special assistance for people experiencing homelessness, so don't be afraid to ask for help for your client!

Many Homeless Clients Don't Believe They Can Get Food Stamps Since They May Have No Place To Store Food. Not True!

Food Stamps are available for homeless families in the same way they are for other low-income families. Don't let your client believe these false rumors!

Many Homeless Families Are Separated By Children's Services.

For all clients, if there is an official "reunification plan" for when the children will be back in the parent's care, the parent can continue receiving cash assistance for up to six payment months after the removal date. Cash assistance should not stop until the end of those six months.

FAFSA FIX FOR HOMELESS KIDS ACT: IT JUST MAKES SENSE

by Dianna Parker - Equal Justice Foundation

About one year ago, 17-year-old Theresa Smith experienced a great loss when her mother passed away after a long battle with cervical cancer. Theresa was sent to live with her biological father, with whom she had never resided. The situation was unhealthy, and her father ultimately kicked her out of his home without taking any protective actions to ensure that she would be safe or stable. That summer before her senior year in high school, Theresa was homeless and left with virtually nothing.

Theresa's first concern was finishing out a very successful high school career in Columbus Public Schools. An honors student with broad musical talents, she knew she had the ability—it was the instability that threatened to prevent her from succeeding. After months of couch-surfing amongst relatives and friends, Theresa ultimately found a temporary refuge at the home of her pastor, after he obtained consent from her father, who wanted nothing to do with her. Six months later, Theresa had successfully applied to four colleges and had been accepted to all of them.

The remaining hurdle: how to pay for an education without any familial support—both financial and emotional. Theresa had not anticipated that her greatest obstacle would be to obtain independent student status for the purposes of filling out her free application for federal student aid (FAFSA). Her father initially refused to provide any information for her application, and when he finally disclosed his financial earnings, she was denied financial aid because he made too much money—money that had never been spent on Theresa.

Although her name has been changed, Theresa's story is representative of the circumstances facing many unaccompanied homeless youth who find themselves without familial contact or support when applying for college. Having surmounted the hardest task—actually gaining admission to their schools-of-choice, these students are then met with an entirely new obstacle.

Current legislation is pending in the U.S. House of Representatives to obtain a solution for these unaccompanied youth who must fill out their FAFSA without parental permission or information. H.R. 601, the “FAFSA Fix for Homeless Kids Act,” expands the defi-

inition of an “independent student” to explicitly include unaccompanied homeless youth for the purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) program under the Higher Education Act.

Under the current law, an unaccompanied youth can potentially submit a FAFSA without a parent if she qualifies as an “independent student” under the catch-all category of “other unusual circumstance” by applying to and receiving a designation from a financial aid administrator. The existing process—termed a “dependency override” amongst those in the field—is burdensome, particularly for a youth who already confronts seemingly insurmountable obstacles to educational success on a daily basis. Further, many financial aid administrators are reluctant to categorize unaccompanied homeless youth as “unusual” and therefore make such designations sparingly. As the process stands now, a youth who is accepted to multiple schools and unsure of where she will attend (perhaps based on tuition, etc.) must apply to each school's financial aid office for independent student designation.

In the world envisioned by H.R. 601, an independently homeless youth

could apply for financial aid with a certification from her school district's homeless liaison and successfully receive a federal loan that will enable her to attend college. She then has an opportunity to make great strides in her own life and exit the cycle of homelessness in which she has been constrained.

In the meantime, the “dependency override” process is a daunting one for youth who may be accessing certain services in your communities. A willing advocate to accompany them as they make trips to financial aid offices, request pertinent identifying information, and solicit letters of support is absolutely crucial to their successful navigation within the limited legal framework that exists today.

Theresa has not yet obtained independent student status from her first choice school. She has sent multiple letters from school personnel, family friends, and advocates attesting to the fact that she was homeless for her entire senior year, but she still awaits the discretionary opinion of a financial aid officer, who will decide whether Theresa may obtain the means to begin her higher education.

EDUCATION OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

by Dianna Parker - Equal Justice Foundation

Almost two years ago, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, children and youth from the affected areas were displaced to communities throughout the continental United States. The victims of an incomprehensible upheaval, these students stepped through the front doors of schools throughout the country. Lacking birth certificates, utility bills, immunization records, or transcripts, they were welcomed into these new locations and enrolled immediately. Those observers from outside the education and advocacy realm were puzzled at how smoothly the process played out—especially against a backdrop of other failed federal systems and policies.

The reason behind this well-functioning response to the widespread displacement of thousands of students was simple: the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act mandated that

public schools immediately enroll students experiencing homelessness, and as displaced children, the Katrina and Rita victims qualified almost categorically for services under the Act.

Children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” are considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. The scope of this definition expands beyond what we traditionally consider to be homeless. Included within this classification are “doubled up” students—those living with relatives or friends due to loss of housing, economic circumstances, or a similar reason. Also, unaccompanied youth—defined as youth living outside the physical custody of a parent or guardian—are McKinney-Vento-eligible. Last school year, 900,000 students qualified for McKinney-Vento services throughout the United States.

School districts are mandated by this federal law (and Ohio's state law that explicitly adopts all provisions of

McKinney-Vento) to immediately enroll students experiencing homelessness, so long as the enrollment is feasible for the district. Parents and youth have the option of (1) maintaining or re-enrolling in one's school of origin—defined as the school in the district where the family was last permanently housed; or (2) enrolling in the school of current location. Schools must enroll the students even when they lack certain necessary documentation, such as birth certificates, immunization records, or proof of residency.

Immediate enrollment is only one of the rights afforded to students experiencing homelessness. If eligible, students may also be entitled to transportation to their school of origin and equal access to services provided to non-homeless peers. Further, schools are under an affirmative obligation to review and revise any policies that act as barriers to the educational enrollment, retention, or success, of McKinney-

Vento-eligible students.

The message is clear: in the midst of the chaos impeding the lives of children experiencing homelessness, access to education should not be an added barrier. Keeping children safe, stable, and engaged in needed services is crucial to their healthy development and eventually escaping the homelessness in which they are trapped.

Our country as a whole realized the trauma experienced by families displaced by the 2005 hurricanes. Perhaps we are a few steps behind in our understanding of the daily distress facing families who experience homelessness for other, less visible reasons. A child who ends up at a homeless shelter because her mother lost housing due to a serious illness has no more stability than a child who leaves her home because of a natural disaster.

COMMUNICATING WITH HOMELESS PEOPLE:

WHAT YOU SAY NEXT COULD CHANGE THEIR WORLD (AND YOURS) by Jeff Brown - CNVC

Supporting people who are homeless presents a unique set of challenges for those of us who are involved in social service projects such as the Benefit Bank. On the one hand, people living without a stable home (or without a home at all) are usually focusing on their physical survival: the basic human needs of food, shelter and security. Those of us who wish to support people in this situation are often compelled – and rightly so – to address the immediate crisis of hunger and housing. At the same time, homeless people are each unique individuals with their very own dreams, interests and passions, and when we see a homeless person’s predicament only as a problem that needs to be solved, we are not as effective as we could be in assisting them.

Learning how to relate to the human being behind the label of “homeless person” is a very powerful, yet often elusive, task. In our efforts to help people in crisis, sometimes we are less successful due to assumptions or stereotypes that we carry in our minds, often unconsciously. The process of Compassionate Nonviolent Communication (NVC) shows us how we can relate to people in a way that increases our power to effect change in their lives... as well as empower them to take constructive action for their own well being.

When you are interacting a homeless person, the basic question I would ask is, “Are you seeing in front of you a homeless person or a person without a home?” The first term, a “homeless person,” or more broadly, “the homeless,” is one that I have concerns about, because it often leads to us relating to people’s life conditions rather than with the people themselves.

If you are like me, you were exposed to the media’s portrayal of homeless people and formed certain beliefs about this population of people, some of which are far from positive. For example, as a young person I was programmed to believe that homeless people were lazy; that they weren’t willing to get a job and work like everyone else; and that there was something wrong with them as human beings.

Later, I learned was that homeless people were more likely than the average person to have a mental disorder, and also that many people who are homeless previously had careers, raised children, or were well-educated... but due to life circumstances or simply failing to see any better options, ended up without a home.

While the second set of beliefs proved to be helpful information to have when interacting with a homeless person, still I repeatedly caution myself to keep from making assumptions about one individual person based on what I learned about the statistical averages of homeless people.

Instead, what I remind myself to do is to come into the present with the human being who is in front of me in that moment, letting go of relating their situation to anything I have heard about homeless people in general. From my experience with Nonviolent Communication, I know that whenever I label or diagnose a person, it’s like putting them into a box; unfortunately, when I do this, the box becomes like a coffin because the person becomes dead to me – they become an object of my problem-solving mind rather than the subject of my compassionate presence.

When you have a conversation with a homeless person in the context of the Benefit Bank or other social service project, here are some communication tips, based on the tools of NVC, that might help you:

1) First, make a specific observation about a person, without judging or blaming them for their situation. In other words, do you see yourself talking with a homeless person, or a person without a home? We can observe a person living on the streets; we can observe a person telling us they are homeless; and we can observe that a colleague who referred the homeless person to us told us that his or her food stamps ran out two months ago.

On the other hand, we cannot observe a person being irresponsible, or squandering the help that’s available; likewise, we cannot observe the system mistreating or abusing this person – these are interpretations that

weaken our effectiveness, because we become more focused on what’s wrong with the person or the system, and this saps our strength.

2) Next, ask open-ended questions with the intention of making a connection with the person on a human level. For example, I might ask someone, “So what has it been like for you to be without a home for the past four months?”, or, “What has been the most difficult part of not having a stable home?”, or, “What steps do you think you could take that would help you at this time?”

3) Then, be immediately prepared to communicate empathy to the person about whatever they say next. What I mean by empathy is showing a respectful understanding of what life is like for them. Listening empathically means to be grounded in yourself while understanding the other’s frame of reference, with the purpose of communicating unconditional acceptance.

For example, a person with whom you are speaking blurts out, “Our government doesn’t care about people! Nobody should have to go without housing, and I mean nobody!” Rather than rushing to “fix” their problem by giving them advice, commiserating with them, or worse yet feeling sorry for them through sympathy, if you have a few moments, try instead to communicate that you understand what they are saying underneath their words: “Sounds to me like you’re just fed up completely with how our government operates, and you’d like there to be caring for everyone regardless of who they are... is that what you’re telling me?”

If practiced sincerely, with the intention to simply understand what is in the person’s heart, most of the time this kind of relating will improve your relationship with the person, build trust, and greatly increase the likelihood that they ultimately will make the most of the assistance that is available to them.

4) Finally, Nonviolent Communication suggests that it can be very powerful to open up with such a person and reveal our own feelings and needs. While Benefit Bank

volunteers and staff are clearly not trained to provide therapy or mental health counseling, they are human beings – just like homeless people are. According to Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of NVC, all human beings share the same fundamental needs, beginning with basic survival needs as well as meaning, choice, community, connection, respect, and many others.

When we can communicate with people using a language of needs and feelings, once again we become powerful with them. Needs are qualities that we can all relate to, regardless of gender, age, race or life situation, so we can reveal to the homeless person our own needs and feelings: “Bethany, I know from before that you and your 11 year-old son have been homeless for over a month now, and I’m very concerned about you because I want both of you to be safe and be healthy... and now hearing that you don’t want to take part in this program that helps you get assistance, I’m discouraged because I also really want to help and support you. Could you tell me what you would need in order to give it a try?”

I predict that this honest and vulnerable expression from our heart will often go further with people than simply telling them they “should” participate, or that they would be crazy not to, or cajoling them into doing it, or any other such technique. This kind of response closes down the dialog, while the open expression of our own feelings and needs opens up the conversation and creates more possibility for finding solutions that meet everyone’s needs.

Many times, however, we can be more compassionate and also more effective in our mission to support people if we slow down, take a breath, and remind ourselves that we are speaking with a fellow human being, bringing along whatever tools of Compassionate Communication that might help us connect with them.

Jeff Brown lives in St. Louis, MO and is a certified trainer with the international Center for Nonviolent Communication, the nonprofit organization founded by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, the creator of NVC.

ASK AMANDA

by Amanda (Beck) Lennon - OSLSA



I have a homeless client who gets a check for SSI each month. The problem is that she does not have a bank account so when she cashes the check every month, she has trouble hanging onto the money. What can she do?

Many low-income Ohioans have problems accessing mainstream banking institutions. Many will not open a bank account (even if they are eligible) because they are afraid the money will be garnished. Clients end up going to payday lenders or to quick-cash places where they are charged a huge fee just to cash their checks. Without an account, they become vulnerable to theft and brutality each time the check is cashed. For clients who get a federal benefit (like SSI, Black Lung, Railroad, or Veteran's Benefits) there is an option to open an ETA (Electronic Transfer Account). This account costs no more than \$3 a month and (except for child support) isn't garnished. It is an account that they can access for free at least 4 times a month. This option would allow the client to just get the money they need for the week and leave the rest in the account. To open one of these accounts, clients need to go to a bank that offers it (23 bank names in Ohio with over 11 branches).

For more information, check out <http://www.eta-find.gov/Index.htm>.

Not all legal advice or information applies to all people in all situations. If you are concerned whether the information in this column applies to you, you should talk to your local legal aid office. You can find them by calling:

1.866.LAW.OHIO

Identification Verification

by Amanda (Beck) Lennon - OSLSA

One of the most common barriers people experiencing homelessness encounter is identification verification. Many public benefits programs require that an applicant prove their identity in order to get benefits.

The easiest way to do this is through a state-issued photo ID. For homeless clients who may not have a safe place to store important papers or identification, this can be a little tricky. Fortunately, counties are required to help homeless clients and alternatives can be devised. Clients can use several other items to verify their identity. Examples of alternative verification include: a work or school ID, an ID for health benefits or TANF, wage stubs, a birth certificate, divorce or marriage license, adoption papers, or a voter registration card.

Unfortunately, many clients will still not have access to these items. Different programs have other options to help clients prove their identity. Food Stamp Program- To prove identity, ask for the Food Stamp worker to talk with a "collateral contact" who can confirm you who are. Shelter workers and employers are examples of possible collateral contacts. If you have no paper documentation of who you are, ask the food stamp caseworker to call a collateral contact. Also, homeless households are not required to verify where they live for the food stamp program. If you are living in a shelter, however, it may be helpful to bring a letter to the food stamp office that is written by a shelter employee and says that you are living in the shelter.

Ohio Works First- Like in Food Stamps, collateral contacts are allowed. Also if identification verification exists (like a birth certificate) and the client cannot afford to get it, the Agency must secure it

Social Security- If you know your Social Security Number- you can give that to the worker. The worker can then access the database and ask you questions to confirm your identity (they might ask about where you were born or your parent's names). If your answers match those on the database, the worker should accept that as verification.

Legislative Alerts

OHIO

Ohio's FY 2008 - 2009 budget, recently signed by Governor Strickland, includes a provision to allow children aging out of the foster care system to keep Medicaid coverage until age 21.

Rep. Mike Foley of Cleveland will soon introduce a bill to increase the severity of punishment for persons who commit violent crimes against victims who are homeless. For instance, if the bill is enacted, a person who assaults a homeless

person would be charged with a first-degree felony, rather than the standard second-degree felony charge for most assaults. Typically, first-degree felony convictions carry harsher sentencing options than second-degree felony convictions.

The provisions of Rep. Foley's bill would protect Ohioans experiencing homelessness from violence by deterring would-be attackers who seek out homeless victims. The bill would also bring attention to the danger of

violence some homeless Ohioans face simply because they are not in stable housing.

US House of Representatives

On May 8th, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas introduced two bills: the "Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Enforcement Act of 2007" (HR 2217) and the "Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act of 2007" (HR 2216). If enacted, HR 2217

would include the status of homeless in the definition of who may be considered a victim of a hate crime for federal sentencing. HR 2216 would add crimes against the homeless to the list of crime data collected by the Attorney General.



The Ohio Benefit Bank is a program of the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks
51 N. High St., Suite 761
Columbus, OH 43215
614.221.4338