



Close to the Edge

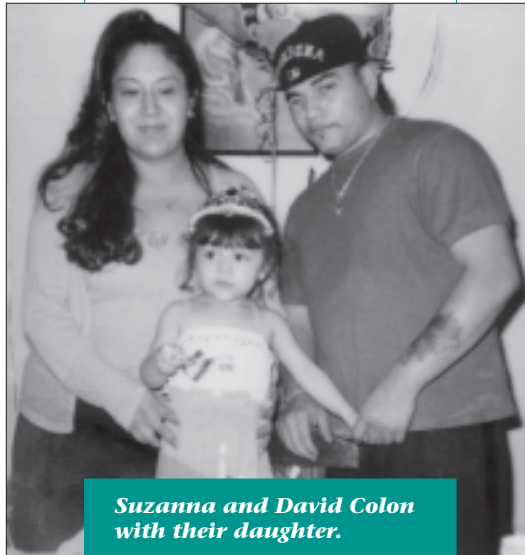
Colon family members never thought they would come so close to losing their home. The parents, David and Suzanna, had moved with their daughter to Des Plaines seven years ago, after getting good-paying jobs.

David, a native of Chicago working as a mechanic, was injured in February, when a truck he was repairing fell on him. The accident separated his chest by three and a half inches, leaving him temporarily unable to work. Also in February, Suzanna, who is from Mexico, gave birth to a baby boy.

With Suzanna on maternity leave and with the costs of taking care of a newborn baby, the accident could not have come at a worse time. The Colons' savings were quickly depleted. David applied for workers' compensation, but his first check took a month to arrive. Furthermore, David's workers' compensation checks totaled \$1,066 a month—their rent alone is \$904 a month, not including the cost of utilities. Add to that the other costs of living, and the Colons were in dire straits.

Having no family in the area who could help them until both were able to return to work, the Colons applied for food stamps. However, their application was denied.

David said, "I went to the public aid office. I am a taxpayer and have been paying taxes ever since I started working. I needed help, but I was declined because my workers' compensation checks put us \$33 above the limit to be eligible."



Suzanna and David Colon with their daughter.

"We heard about the Center of Concern, and when they helped us it turned our life around."

The Colons fell behind on their rent and were served a five-day eviction notice. Although Suzanna was going back to work and David was healing from his accident, the couple, very worried about their children's well-being,

were in need of some temporary assistance to get them through this crisis. David talked about that stressful time: "My wife and I would sit down and pray. We don't have family here. We were crying all the time. I was depressed because I was bringing a son into all of this." The Colons had never before asked for help; they had worked all their lives and never accepted charity. Then, "we heard about the Center of Concern, and when they helped us it turned our life around."

The Center for Concern is a social service agency in Park Ridge. Among other services it offers, the center implements the Homelessness Prevention Program to assist individuals and families in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Through this program, created by CCH's advocacy efforts, the center was able to help the Colons pay their past-due rent and access other assistance from area agencies.

Now that the Colons have averted a temporary crisis, things are looking up. David is healing well and is ready to start a new job, and Suzanna will return to work soon. They are grateful for the assistance they received from the Center for Concern. "We had a lot of tension for a couple of months, but in a matter of seconds they were able to help us," Suzanna said.

WE ARE ALL TAXPAYERS

Thousands of taxpayers deliver message to Springfield

More than 75 buses brought 3,500 people from all over Illinois to Springfield on May 9 to let Governor Ryan and state legislators know that they must stop proposed cuts and fund essential services at a level that meets the needs of working families. The "Rebuild Illinois—We're All Taxpayers" march and rally were sponsored by the Grassroots Collaborative.

"The people who pay the largest share of their income in taxes are also the people facing the largest proposed cuts," said Chicago Coalition for the Homeless executive director John Donahue, who also chairs the Grassroots Collaborative. "It's time to find the revenue to provide services that meet the needs of the working poor."

Jeff Newman, who came to Springfield with CCH, talked about the need for \$5 million

Continued on page 2

INSIDE

John Donahue:
Addressing Chronic Homelessness

Policy Paper:
Homelessness: The Causes and the Facts

News Briefs:

- Congress Debates TANF Reauthorization
- City Day Labor Ordinance Passes

WE ARE ALL TAXPAYERS

Continued from page 1

in funding for the Homelessness Prevention Program. Newman, a part-time construction worker who is homeless, said, "It's easier to prevent homelessness than it is to get off the street once you're there."

At least 500 of the group in attendance lobbied legislators in their offices on a range of basic needs that should be funded at a higher level, including the Homelessness Prevention Program. Also on the lobbying agenda was a living wage for all workers employed through state contracts in Illinois, equal treatment for families of tax-paying immigrants and U.S. citizens seeking public benefits, and access to driver's licenses for all workers regardless of immigrant status.

Lobbyists advocated for a package of revenue items that could raise more than \$1 billion and help avoid cuts proposed by the governor and Republican members of the senate, including

The Grassroots Collaborative takes action in Springfield.

increases in cigarette and gambling taxes, taking back unspent member initiative funds, and raising the income tax on higher-income households.

On June 11, 2002 a budget was passed which greatly reduced funding for human services while cutting important education, health care, and public safety programs. Without our collective advocacy and constant pressure, the cuts would certainly have been worse. However, this disastrous outcome could have been avoided if the Governor and our legislators had acted on behalf of the people and not their own narrow interests.

Members of the Grassroots Collaborative are the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), American Friends Service Committee-Great Lakes Region, CCH, Coalition to Protect Public Housing, Community Renewal Society, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Illinois Hunger Coalition, Interfaith Leadership Project, Metro Seniors in Action, and Service Employees International Union-Local 880.



Addressing Chronic Homelessness

When speaking about homelessness this past year, Mel Martinez, secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has focused on HUD's efforts to better address the needs of the chronically homeless.

The "chronically homeless" are generally defined as people with severe mental illness and/or substance abuse addictions who use a highly disproportionate percentage of social services available to the homeless and also have high rates of hospitalization and incarceration. Meeting the needs of this population must be a crucial part of society's efforts to end homelessness.

However, focusing on the chronically homeless ignores the majority of people who experience homelessness. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, no more than 20 percent of all homeless single adults fall into the chronic category. For the great majority of single adults who are homeless, their main problem is lack

JOHN DONAHUE

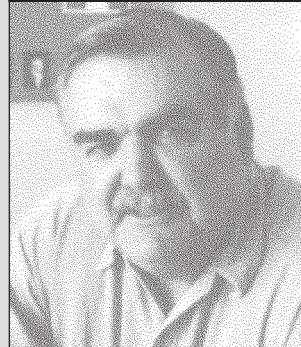


Photo by Julie Dworkin

of employment. Families account for about half the homeless population, and their problems are primarily economic. Unaccompanied youth also do not generally fit into the chronic category.

All people who experience homelessness

have one thing in common: a lack of housing. The kind of housing and income supports needed by low-income people to maintain housing are in extremely short supply. Until the lack of affordable housing is addressed, people living in extreme poverty will continue to become homeless. Unfortunately, next year's HUD budget is woefully inadequate in terms of actually creating new permanent housing for the chronically homeless or anyone else.

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, along with the National Low Income Housing Coalition and 2,000 partner organizations across the country, is calling for the establishment of a national housing trust fund to produce and preserve 1.5 million homes for the lowest-income households. However, the Bush administration is absent from the chorus, including nearly 200 members of the House and Senate, calling for creation of the fund.

It makes me wonder whether the Bush administration is really serious about ending homelessness.

"The people who pay the largest share of their income in taxes are also the people facing the largest proposed cuts."

Victory! HB1961 Passed the Illinois House & Senate!

After passing out of the Illinois Senate with a unanimous vote, HB1961 passed a vote of concurrence in the Illinois House. It is now on the Governor's desk to be signed into law. HB1961 provides Cook County judges with the authority to sentence women detained in Cook County jail who are convicted of certain nonviolent felony offenses, to a pilot Residential Treatment and Transition Center rather than State Prison. We must now work to secure funding to create the pilot program. A special thank you to everyone who advocated for passage of HB1961!

Congress Debates TANF Reauthorization

By September 2002, federal lawmakers are required to reauthorize the legislation that created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. The program originated in 1996, when Congress eliminated the cash assistance entitlement program AFDC. TANF gave states flexibility to design their own welfare programs and required people to move to work. Since TANF was implemented, thousands of people around the country have left the welfare rolls, but very few have moved out of poverty.

On May 16, 2002, a reauthorization bill passed the house. HR 4735 is very close to what President Bush introduced as his plan for TANF reauthorization. The bill would increase the number of hours that families need to work from 30 to 40 hours per week, and it would require states to have 70 percent of the caseload working instead of the currently required 50 percent. These new requirements increase the likelihood that states will force people into jobs without adequate preparation and will give families little time to improve their education level or skills.

Welfare reform advocates are hoping a more positive



proposal will emerge from the senate where a tripartisan (democrat, republican, and independent) bill has been introduced. The bill contains some provisions that are more supportive of the needs of working families. The bill keeps work participation rates at 30 hours per week, makes some positive movement toward poverty reduction as the goal of the program by rewarding states for moving people to employment and into higher-paying jobs, increases childcare funding, and increases the amount of time people can participate in education and training. Another bill introduced in the senate by Senators Olympia Snowe and Max Baucus would allow education to count as a work activity.

Ensuring that we have the best possible new TANF law will require a lot of advocacy. Through the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support and Midwest Partners, CCH is involved with advocacy for the provisions of TANF reauthorization. These websites offer ways to get involved: www.nationalcampaign.org and www.midwestpartners.org.

City Day Labor Ordinance Passes

On May 1, the Chicago City Council approved an ordinance regulating day labor agencies. The ordinance passed largely as a result of the public attention that CCH's Day Labor Organizing Project has brought to industrywide abuses of workers. Provisions of the ordinance include:

1. Requiring day labor agencies to get a special business license
2. Entitling day laborers to receive copies of their individual work records to discourage discrimination in hiring and give day laborers more resources for dealing with pay disputes

3. Banning agencies and client companies from charging for transportation they provide, and making agencies responsible for the "performance and conduct" of others providing transportation
4. Banning charges for clothing and equipment that is returnable to the agency

The Day Labor Organizing Project is working to educate workers about their rights under the new Chicago ordinance and will monitor agency compliance when it goes into effect on July 1.

COALITION

Updates

NEW STAFF

Mirna Garcia joins us as our new associate director of development. Mirna, a grant writer since 1998, worked most recently at the Infant Welfare Society. She is a native of Mexico and, when not busy raising funds for CCH, spends time with her 16-month-old son, Julian, and her husband and family.

Beth Lynch joins us as our new finance manager. A Chicago native, Beth grew up

in Beverly. She has a degree in sociology from UIC and in accounting from DePaul University. Beth enjoys walking to work and traveling with her husband (and high school sweetheart), Patrick.

Other Staff News: **Julie Dworkin** has been promoted to Associate Director of Policy and **Samir Goswami** has been promoted to Senior Policy Analyst.

Beth Lynch and Mirna Garcia



Photo by Julie Dworkin



Find us on the Web at: www.chicagohomeless.org

A Newsletter for People Concerned with Homelessness in Chicago

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DATED MATERIAL

Save the Date!

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