



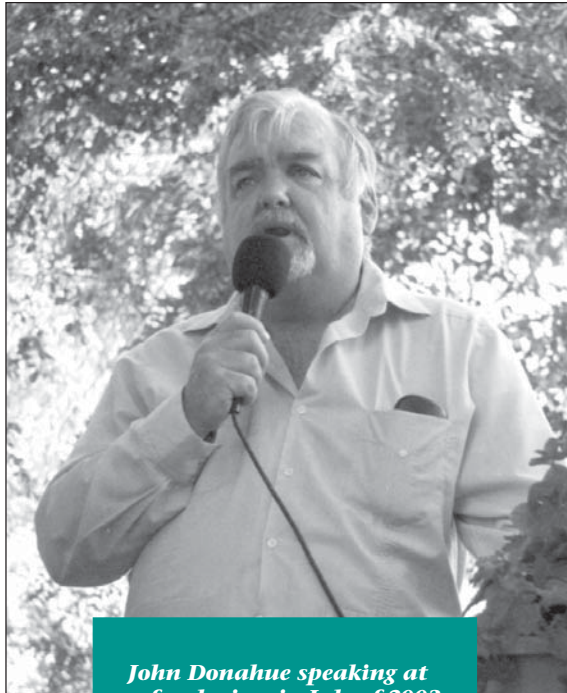
Hope Never Dies: John Donahue Remembered

In mourning the death of John Donahue, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless has heard from many people influenced by the remarkable life of our longtime executive director.

John "Juancho" Donahue died November 17, shortly after he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Edward Shurna, CCH's director of organizing, has been asked to serve as acting executive director.

John joined CCH in 1990 after 25 years working as a Catholic priest, and later a community organizer, in Chicago and Panama. Under his leadership CCH pushed for new ways to prevent and end homelessness. During his tenure the coalition launched new projects working for and with people hurt by homelessness, including families with children, students trying to access public schools, day laborers, and survivors of prostitution.

"He created an atmosphere here that motivated people and gave them a feeling that they could take risks. They could go after people; they could confront and make change. And he



John Donahue speaking at a fundraiser in July of 2003.

Photo by Andy Kim

would be there and back you up, do whatever you needed him to do," said Les Brown, a CCH founder and its director of policy.

Known for his charisma and keen sense of humor, friends recall a man who was generous and hardworking. John was an organizer able to get the media and public officials to pay attention to homelessness, and an administrator who expanded the reach of the coalition through his many ties to labor unions, community organizations and others.

"He was a man who was on a mission," said State Sen. Miguel Del Valle (D-Chicago), "and his mission was to improve the quality of life for those individuals whom society—not just American society but society in other parts of the world—leaves behind. He dedicated his entire life to doing that, first as a priest and then as a community activist, a social worker, and an organizer.

"What I appreciate most about Juancho is he

showed if you're going to make a difference... you have to work for societal change," the senator added. "You can't have change unless you organize, unless you advocate... That's what Donahue understood very clearly, and it always involves taking risks and stepping on toes. He was very good at calculating and making sure the right toes were getting stepped on at the right time."

Former CCH office manager Steffani Francis recalled advice John gave her "that I keep with me always. It made a profound impact on how I think

Continued on page 2

ALLIANCE OF YOUTH ACHIEVES VICTORY IN SPRINGFIELD

A coalition of youth ages 13-22, some of whom had experienced homelessness, successfully advocated to restore \$500,000 in funding for programs serving homeless youth in Illinois. Governor Blagojevich had vetoed that amount out of the state budget in July.

The youth coalition, organized by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, traveled to Springfield on November 4 to hold a rally and press conference and to lobby state legislators.

The Latino caucus of the state legislature was instrumental in the passage of the override. In July that caucus vowed to override the veto, claiming that the governor had reneged on a budget deal, made with their caucus, that included the increase in homeless youth funding. The young people stepped in to support the caucus's override efforts.

Continued on page 2

INSIDE

May We Meet Again

New Staff

Policy Paper:
Making Rents More Affordable

News Briefs:

- Senate Candidates Forum
- Law Project Victory

HOPE NEVER DIES

Continued from page 1

about the world. He said, 'Real love is not giving what you have left over or what you don't need. It's giving away what you yourself also need—giving what you have.' I know you all agree that is how Juancho lived."

John was profiled in Studs Terkel's new oral history, *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Troubled Times*. Mr. Terkel's new book includes stories from John's life as a Catholic priest working in Central America in the 1970s. While vicar of the archdiocese of Panama, he lived eight years in a squatter's community. There he organized a national preschool project, a credit union, a housing project, and various cooperatives. He also met and married his wife, Chelin.

"Broad-shouldered and robust with a magnetic

personality, he loved the nickname given to him by his Panamanian parishioners, 'Juancho,' which he used for the rest of his life," the *Chicago Tribune* wrote.

"I'm not practicing as a priest," John said in *Hope Dies Last*, "but my ministry, remember, is organizing. My job is organizing hope. There are people in the community who have lost everything, even hope. But there are people in the community who still have hope. That's the last thing they lose. I'm organizing the hope for change."

Survivors include John's wife and their five children, Belen, Maricela, Lisa, Daniel, and Megan. Memorials may be sent to the John A. Donahue Family Education Trust Fund, care of O'Keefe Lyons & Hynes, LLC, Suite 4100, 30 North LaSalle Street, Chicago 60602, and/or to CCH and its Juancho Esperanza Fund.

VICTORY IN SPRINGFIELD

Continued from page 1

"Ever since I hit the streets, I wanted to do as much as I could to help my peers," said Crysten Dixon, 21, who has been homeless for five years. "I am glad I finally got the opportunity."

Justin Johnson, an eighth grader from Lincoln Elementary in Chicago, has never been homeless but feels that showing support is important. "We are kids just like the youth that become homeless, so we can really relate to their problems. If the legislators see that and see our concern, they will see how much we want to help other youth in Illinois."

The existing \$4.2 million in state funding for homeless youth programs had not been increased for the past five years, despite the fact that four programs closed recently due to lack of funding. CCH

estimates that 84 percent of the approximately 26,000 homeless youth in Illinois do not receive services.

The success of the override means that at least two new programs can open in Illinois to serve youth in areas that are severely underserved or have no services.

"Now that the money is back in the budget, we can get more kids off the street and give them the proper help that they need," said Robin Hart, a 22-year-old mother who has experienced homelessness.

"I wanted to make sure I informed as many people as I could about this issue because it is something that could happen to any one of us. Knowing that my actions and the actions of the other youth lobbyists made a difference gives me a great deal of satisfaction," said Joe Mullen, a student at Francis Parker High School.

MAY WE MEET AGAIN

By Larry Hamilton, Single Adult Empowerment Project

John "Juancho" Donahue and I met 38 years ago when he was in the priesthood. Juancho and attorney Jeff Haas were among the many who assisted me in serving free breakfast and

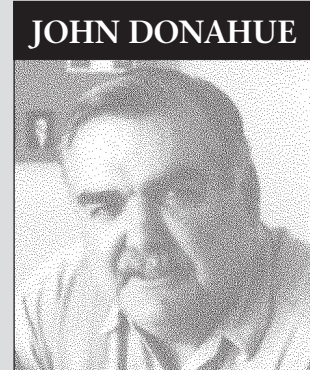


Photo by Julie Dworkin

distributing free clothes throughout the community. I was 16 years old and the youngest member of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Juancho's commitment to serving the poor and homeless was prevalent then. Who would have thought our roads would entwine again through my own homelessness in 2002? As fate would have it, Jeff Newton and Wayne Richard recruited me from Sousa Shelter to volunteer for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH).

Meeting Juancho again rekindled a fire in my spirit that will be everlasting: His impact on my transformation reinforces my commitment to the service of

people. Juancho's wisdom, affection, humor, and intellect all inspired me. His character conveyed to me the true sign of brotherhood. I count myself fortunate

to have been graced with his presence. It is to him that I am grateful for receiving the CCH award on October 29, 2003.

Ed [Shurna] and Wayne stated that Juancho had initiated the award and written "for his continued commitment of service to the community." Ed and Wayne also stated that Juancho had more to add but by then had become ill. So he has left me to complete the writing (on the plaque). Those words will dictate my commitment and action with CCH. But, for now, I say to you, Juancho, "With Hope, All People United Will Never Be Defeated." And I hope we meet again.

May the Spirit of Juancho Continue to Live!

COALITION

Updates

NEW STAFF



Andrew Haas-Roche joined CCH in September as coordinator of the Coalition Café and development assistant. A Chicago native, Andrew

holds a BA in English from the University of Michigan and served as an Americorps Volunteer with Northwestern University Settlement Association in the West Town neighborhood. He is an assistant coach for the Noble Street Charter High School varsity football team. Andrew is a self-described "coffee connoisseur."

Photo by Samir Goswami

CCH Hosts Successful U.S. Senate Candidates Forum

The Annual Meeting of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless drew 150 people to a forum for candidates running for the U.S. Senate in 2004.

With all active candidates for the Illinois seat invited to participate, six Democrats joined the October 29 forum moderated by author Alex Kotlowitz. Answering questions posed by CCH homeless leaders were State Sen. Barack Obama, Gery Chico, Blair Hull, Joyce Washington, Nancy Skinner, and Timothy Beushausen.

All six said they would support creation of a National Housing Trust Fund that would build and preserve 1.5 million units of rental housing for low-income families. Among other issues, they agreed that the federal minimum wage should reflect the cost of housing.

Sen. Obama said he was moved when he found a



Photo by Andy Kim

Author Alex Kotlowitz moderating CCH's U.S. Senate Candidates Forum.

homeless mom and her kids sleeping in their car one winter night. "I looked and thought, 'If I can't do something about this, then I shouldn't be in public office,'" he said.

"There is a thread running through this [Bush] administration," Mr. Chico said. "It's not hard to figure out what it is. There's a basic lack of concern for people of modest means or of no means...It is only compassionately

conservative overseas, not here on American soil."

Mr. Hull said the hourly minimum wage should keep pace with inflation. Though the state minimum increased to \$5.50 on January 1, Hull said he would back federal and state rates of \$7.53—the dollar amount adjusted to 1978's rate of \$2.65.

CCH gave out several awards. Dr. Blondean Davis was honored for leadership in developing the Homeless

Education Program for the Chicago Public Schools. She was chief operating officer when CPS created a nationally recognized model that served 8,000 homeless students last year. The coalition also honored leaders Dorothy Yancy and Larry Hamilton, and the late Rene Maxwell, a leader for the Coalition to Protect Public Housing who was profiled in Studs Terkel's book, *Hope Dies Last*.

Law Project Victory

On October 15, 2003, Anita Sellers won \$167,076, plus interest, in a housing discrimination case in the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. Anita, a victim of sexual harassment by her landlord, Felix Outland, was represented by CCH's Law Project. "Unlawful discriminatory practices by landlords contribute significantly to homelessness," noted Rene Heybach, the Project director. "The landlord here preyed on the mother's fear of being homeless with five small children—to attempt to coerce her. With our help, Ms. Sellers could fight back."

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mimi@chicagohomeless.org

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