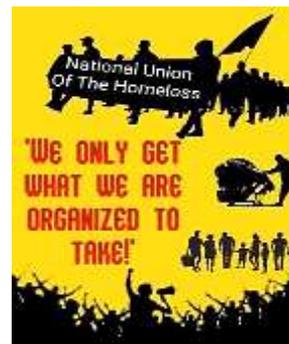


National Union of the Homeless Coronavirus Crisis Update No. 2 March 23, 2020

www.facebook.com/NationalUnionoftheHomeless



In California and across the nation: Homeless Union survival campaigns take on the virus and a system that has failed to stop it.

Thirty years ago, we built the National Union of the Homeless through survival struggles. Taking homes, organizing for the basic necessities, against death in the streets. Before that, the Free Breakfast Program initiated by the Black Panther Party brought immediate relief to thousands of poor children while exposing the failings of an entire economic system. Today, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, our locals are learning and applying these lessons from the past.

Inside: Sacramento Homeless Union saving lives, drawing widespread support; Updates from Washington State, Rochester, New York, Santa Cruz, Ventura County, Mobile, Alabama. Feature stories from Vietnam veteran Bruce Parry, Alabama's Tonny Algood and the Western Regional Advocacy Project.



Sacramento Homeless Union drawing widespread support, changing the narrative

Volunteers, food, soap, water, clothing pour in as officials face pressure to stop police sweeps, provide housing.

The Sacramento Homeless Union is building a powerful grassroots army of volunteers, community groups and the homeless, themselves, to do what the City of Sacramento has so far failed to do: protect the most vulnerable—the homeless.

Crystal Sanchez and other Union leaders have mobilized scores of people to bring survival necessities to the camps and all but stopped the police from conducting sweeps and breaking up encampments in violation of CDC guidelines. Donations of food, water, clothing, sanitizer and other survival items are pouring in; local and national media are recognizing and reporting the leadership of the Union; students, nurses, doctors, have joined the Union-led team.

The Sacramento Homeless Union' has initiated a broad survival Coalition "Supporting Our Unhoused People" (SOUP):

Sacramento Homeless Union
M.H. First
Perfect Union
Sacramento Women's Council
Mad Love Underground
Trans & Nonbinary Housing Collective
Godmothers
Help Fight Poverty,
Clothes and Food for Everyone (CAFFE)
Mental Health First;
Reckless Charity Entertainment

Students for a National Health Program
Old Valley Home Loans
Sacramento Safe Space for Unhoused Youth
ENGAGE (Engaging Neighbors to Generate Action via Grassroots Efforts)
Sister Grace, Elk Grove
Josh's Heart
Lifting Spirits Higher
916 Feeding the Hungry
Black Zebra Productions
Recovery Advocacy Project (RAP)

Contact:

sacramento.homeless.union@gmail.com

Call (text preferred): 916-495-9026 or 916-904-4343.



“We are reorganizing the Union!”

By Rev. Tonny Algood

In the Civil War during the Battle of Mobile Bay, the Confederacy ships had blockaded Mobile Harbor. Torpedoes (floating mines) were strung across Mobile Bay from one side to the other to prevent Union ships from getting into the bay. After the Union’s plan was routed and chaos arose, the Union’s Admiral David Glasgow Farragut shouted the order, “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” When it comes to the poor and homeless in Mobile and other cities, the position taken by the city governments when it comes to the interest of businesses or the wealthy is “Damn the poor and the homeless, full speed ahead”.



In 1993, homeless and non-homeless founded the Mobile Union Chapter for the Homeless (MUCH). At that time there were no services for the homeless including day centers, jobs programs, no designated housing or shelters for homeless men, women or families, MUCH was able to bring pressure on a sympathetic Mayor and his immediate successor to address the needs of the homeless. Loaves and fishes, the Homeless Coalition (that subsequently changed its name to Housing First during the Obama Administration), Family Promise, Health Care for the Homeless, McKemie Place shelter for women, and a host of other agencies to serve the needs of the homeless were created. Unfortunately MUCH literally faded out of existence as homeless members went into housing and the majority of the non-homeless put efforts into supporting the newly created agencies or dropped out. Today there is a “new Admiral” (mayor and administration in town) and, like Phoenix rising from the ashes, **it is time for the Mobile Union Chapter to be reorganize but on a *different* program.** When the present mayor and his administration came into office, the heightened attack on the poor and homeless began. He made his position clear when he said the homeless were not a city government responsibility but the community’s responsibility instead. However, he believes that taking care of private businesses *is* a city responsibility. The mayor has gone so far as to cut funding for agencies serving the poor and homeless; have the homeless arrested and jailed for “wandering abroad” on public property; had the City purchase a vacant lot near downtown to prevent a local agency from purchasing it to build a state of the art center for homeless women; and he went so far as to personally purchase property near downtown that had been the site of a homeless camp for men (there aren’t shelters for single men in Mobile) and then evicted them from the property!



Reverend. Tonny Algood

We know that what is happening to the poor and homeless in Mobile is happening in cities all over our county. Those in power are saying “Damn the poor and homeless, full speed ahead”. This is why we are in the process or reorganizing the Mobile Union Chapter of the Homeless but this time it will be on a different basis. MUCH will be organized not to seek charity, but we will be organized as a political organization that will work with other homeless organizations to seek justice and make the systemic changes necessary to end homelessness forever.

(Editor's note: The National Union of the Homeless Union and WRAP have been in the same trenches on the front lines for many years. Below is their statement on the covid-19 crisis.)



WRAP Statement Regarding COVID-19

With the spread of COVID-19, we must remember that our communities' health is interconnected — it is critical to ensure adequate medical care and hygiene for every person, especially those who are unhoused. Many houseless people are immunocompromised or disabled due to the difficulties of living without shelter. Many are elders. We should resist any further stigmatization of those living in encampments or shelters and demand they are provided the resources to prevent infection and further spread of the virus. We demand that public officials work to ensure the health of both our unhoused and housed communities.

Moratorium on encampment sweeps, closures and vehicle tows. Encampment sweeps and closures shall be ended due to the necessity for sustained public health outreach and disease control as has been done in cities such as San Jose. Sweeps pose a serious health risk as they disrupt consistent access to services and ability for outreach and health workers to provide continuous care. These services are critical at this time. Shelters are not a solution for many people as they pose an increased risk of contracting illnesses due to close contact with others. Many will choose to stay on the streets where one can have more space, open air, and better ways to avoid contact spread of the virus. Forcing people to live in close quarters is not an acceptable solution.

Moratorium on evictions. Halt all eviction processes immediately and put a moratorium on evictions. Preserving existing housing is necessary as it allows self-quarantine and prevents more people from ending up on the street. It is also unsafe for many people, especially those who are elderly or immunocompromised, to appear in crowded courts in order to defend against their evictions.

Moratorium on RV and vehicle tows. Vehicles house people which allow them to self-quarantine. No vehicles shall be towed due to unpaid parking violations or debt collection. Moratorium on arrests for crimes of poverty. Arrests shall be halted for loitering, camping, criminal trespassing, or other crimes of poverty.

Access to health and hygiene. Regularly maintained bathrooms or portable toilets and handwashing stations shall be placed in areas accessible to large unhoused populations and encampments. Hand sanitizer shall be distributed to unhoused people along with information about avoiding and preventing COVID-19. Medical care shall be provided on-location for those who are unable or unwilling to enter hospitals due to substance use or mental health concerns.

Access to safe spaces. Vacant city, state, and county-owned buildings and other public land shall be utilized immediately in order to provide access to public health workers, hygiene supplies, garbage pickup, bathrooms, food, water and other supplies necessary to slow/stop the spread.

Housing accommodations. Housing accommodations shall be arranged immediately for anyone infected who does not have the ability to self-quarantine, as has been done in the Seattle area. Hotels or other contained living quarters shall be used for people to quarantine. This shall include safe parking programs for people who are vehicularly housed.

Shelters. Existing conditions and risk of illness are exacerbated by being forced into close contact with others, including shelters. Staff shall regularly sanitize and disinfect surfaces to prevent contamination. Additional space should be made between mats/beds. Individual accommodations shall be arranged immediately for anyone infected and anyone who is known to have been exposed to the virus. Those staying in shelters shall have access to harm reduction tools and shall not be denied service for any rule violations short of violence. Shelters shall be opened 24/7.

Consider this a wake-up call. Many of these services are necessary to maintain public health and should continue to be offered until every person has a stable home. *These demands are adapted from recommendations from health professionals, outreach workers, and both unhoused and housed advocates and organizers.*

(Editor's Note: For two years, the Rochester Homeless Union and the House of Mercy have led the battle to re-open the Cadillac Hotel where dozens were made homeless after it was closed down by a local speculator. Now, as the coronavirus crisis has unfolded, the Union has forced the City to house those most at risk at the Radisson Hotel.)

“Take a stand and protect our people!”

By Patrick Braswell, Co-Chair, Rochester Homeless Union

ALL CLEAR OF THE VIRUS AT OUR BASE OF 193. WE KEEP SAFE.

This has been and obviously to become even more so an *Event* in the lives of our Union Members regardless of Positioning. WE MUST TAKE A STAND AND PROTECT OUR PEOPLE; nobody else will do so.

I speak for the Rochester and Syracuse (New York) Local Homeless Unions: Be Safe! Thanks to our Union Co-Chair, Mr. Tyrone Hodge for taking a STAND and Helping to assist in organizing the placement from Shelter to Hotel paid by the City of Rochester while we are under [State of New York's "shelter at home" order].

WE FOUGHT FOR IT, WE GOT IT: Instead of the Cadillac, we have been upgraded to the Radison Hotel.



Our UNION MEMBERS though will continue to stay at the desk, in the TRENCHES and CONTINUE to CLEAR SHELTERS AND PLACE OUR PEOPLE!

"WE WILL NOT TAKE A SINGLE STEP BACK" LOVE AND PROTECT, STAND BEFORE GOLIATHS, SHARPEN YOUR SWORD AND FIGHT FOR JUSTICE, LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND..."



May everyone understand our prayer. May everyone understand our prayers are just a link to the necessary education needed to prevail. If ever we get an opportunity from the reward Solomon will say "I told you so." Reality will say "I'm telling you so." And I say, "You already knew 'cause you are being taught and you realize it is written: "WE ARE FAMILY!"

**"NATIONAL UNION OF THE HOMLESS"
Same heart, Same mind, Same Fight!**



Imperial County, California reaches out to Homeless Union to help combat coronavirus:

“Give us a plan.”

El Centro Homeless Union President Daniel Ochoa, Jr. reports: “The President of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors has asked me to write a plan for washing stations throughout all of Imperial County.”

Inspired and guided by the Sacramento Homeless Union (SHU), where the Union took the lead in establishing hand washing stations and other direct survival support to the homeless, our El Centro members are expected to move quickly, reaching out to the broader community of El Centro, Brawley, Calexico and other impoverished Valley cities to bring urgently needed protections to the homeless.

Contact Daniel at: ochoajrdaniel100@gmail.com

Homeless Union Local 805, Ventura County, California



The virus is actively spreading in Ventura County. Like other places, the essential services that the unhoused depend on are closed. There are no services being offered to the unhoused, other than that the restrooms at one of the county campgrounds is open 24/7 and the RVs can dump and get water there. Those in the river bottoms are suffering. It's been raining, so they're losing space to the river, and with the services closed, they're running out of food and water. They have no access to bathing or laundry facilities, or even just handwashing stations.

Me and my family and neighbors are ok. We're in RVs, and so we have the basic necessities taken care of. I've become the designated shopper for our group since I'm still at work due to being in an essential industry. I worry about those without shelter, but don't know how to support them with my limited time and income. I've reached out to my church this afternoon and another group providing relief efforts to see if we can support those in the river bottoms better.

Rachel Uhrenholdt
Ventura County Chapter
805-666-5117 r.uhrenholdt@gmail.com

Chaplains on the Harbor, Washington State

Reported by Aaron Scott

In rural Grays Harbor County, Washington State, NUH partner Chaplains on the Harbor is continuing to operate our projects of survival with poor and homeless people through this pandemic. Our most immediate and serious concerns are for:

1) The grave health risk faced by 43 people living in the City of Aberdeen's one sanctioned encampment. Currently, cold water from a single hose serves as the only potable water source for the entire camp. Additionally, all heat sources have been banned since the camp opened (despite below-freezing temperatures on and off for the past several months). Tents provided by the city are leaking and sitting on top of standing water. On top of these inhumane conditions, [visitations to the camp were just suspended](#)-- including from food outreach programs like ours.

2) The looming outbreak faced by our incarcerated community members in jails and prisons across Washington State. Cases of COVID-19 have already been confirmed in Monroe and Purdy prison. [This article](#) is written by an inmate currently incarcerated at Monroe.

3) The impact of this outbreak on a county where decent healthcare was already inaccessible to begin with.

We have shifted our operations to minimize risk as much as possible: moving our large feeding programs outdoors instead of indoors, implementing new health/hygiene requirements at our cold-weather shelter, and doubling down on our written and phone communication with our incarcerated community members as visitations are suspended. We are seeing the closure of emergency food and shelter programs across Grays Harbor County, and we know how hard this will be for our people.

However, as our government flounders to respond at the local, state, and federal levels we-- a team of formerly homeless leaders and their supporters-- are continuing to plan for the long-haul. Currently we are planning to expand food production at our Harbor Roots (our farm) for this coming season. in order to meet what we anticipate will be record levels of food insecurity. Our jail and prison newsletter, "The Holy Hustler", currently circulates in every prison in Washington State, featuring pieces published by incarcerated leaders—we hope to be able to get news on conditions inside and publicize them as necessary. We are coordinating with healthcare workers and church relief programs on best practices and installing things like portable hand washing stations in our programs. We are continuing to document human rights abuses, share our theology of Jesus, a homeless millennial with a criminal record, organize for the long term.



Chaplains by the Harbor; Aaron Scott in foreground

“Fight for a society that will meet our basic needs!”

A Vietnam vet confronts the coronavirus crisis...

by Bruce Parry
March 21, 2020

I'm a Vietnam Veteran. I was in the infantry in the Army in Vietnam from 1969 to 1971 and saw a lot of combat.



I suffer from serious Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and have worked for years to overcome the effects of that. I was homeless in 1993 due to the PTSD. I was already severely depressed, my third marriage broke up, I had a couple of bad experiences with the work I was doing, my mother got sick and died and I barely kept it together. Fortunately for me, a friend let me double up at his place for a number of months. The VA (Veterans Administration) then sent me to a PTSD program for three months and that pretty much saved my life. Today, I'm not homeless anymore. But I'm over 70 and at high risk from this coronavirus. My wife (not my fourth wife, my *only* wife) is also a veteran (she's a Marine – once a Marine, always a Marine), but she's younger than me and therefore lower risk. She went shopping today. I'm lucky. I have someone who loves and supports me and can go shopping. A lot of veterans, particularly homeless veterans don't have that. I'm active in the veteran's movement, as well as in the Homeless Union and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.

Homeless Vets Face Greater Danger

My experience with the troubles I've gone through isn't all that uncommon. Veterans – particularly homeless veterans – are more at danger from the coronavirus than the general population. That's because many veterans have health problems relating directly to their service like I do, especially if they were in combat or deployed overseas. PTSD – from combat, military sexual trauma (MST), or from just plain military service – Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Agent Orange, Gulf War Syndrome, exposure to depleted uranium and exposure to other chemicals and agents the military uses that have unknown effects, all reduce the immune resistance of exposed veterans. And many, if not most veterans, have been subject to these conditions.



The author, Capt. Parry,
in Vietnam, 1970

Those who were physically wounded in the war are even more at risk. Most of the time, physical wounds have profound effects on the rest of the body that reduce resistance to disease. Physical wounds also come with mental and emotional problems.

Many of the homeless are veterans. Many are – or should be – declared disabled vets by the VA. That homelessness even exists in 2020 is a disgrace; that there are homeless veterans, in my view, is one of the greatest disgraces of this country. (That's one reason “a national call for moral revival” resonates with me). And the homeless are especially vulnerable. Whether they are on the streets, in a shelter or doubled up in an apartment, homeless veterans are exposed to even more severe conditions and have less access to the health care they need. In a shelter, you have no idea what you're exposed to. And with the coronavirus, someone can have it for a couple of weeks before symptoms show up, so people don't even know they're being exposed. Women with kids, including women veterans, have particular problems in shelters. Our experience of homeless women veterans with children is that they need a home *now!* The VA is not set up to handle that. It's too bureaucratic. Homeless programs close at nights and on weekends, when many people need help immediately. Our local veteran's organizations – which, of course, as

non-profits, are poverty stricken themselves – have to find places for these veterans to stay. I'm not saying that the same problems don't face non-veterans (they do), but we deal mainly with the veteran population. (Cont.Next Page)

Vietnam Vets and the Coronavirus Crisis (Continued)

Many homeless people, particularly veterans, tend to be loners and don't have anyone to shop for them to get the stuff they need. Many homeless veterans (and veterans who aren't homeless, too) resist care from the VA. They have dealt with the military and hate it. They see the VA as an extension of the military, so they refuse to deal with it.

Limit our Exposure? Homeless vets can't do that...

I'm lucky. I can stay home and avoid exposure to the virus. I am getting all my meetings and friends and connections on Zoom on the computer. Homeless veterans – in fact, all those experiencing homelessness – can't. They don't have homes. Many have phones, but many don't and so don't have Internet connections. In a time when we are told to limit our exposure, homeless veterans have no ability to do that. They are at high risk.

If and when they do go to the VA hospital, they may find the hospital is not ready to deal with them. They are overwhelmed by the number of patients with the virus. Testing materials and beds are in short supply. At my VA, standard medical treatment has been cancelled. In fact, my scheduled surgery has been cancelled. They also cancelled several appointments I had scheduled in the next few weeks. The VA newsletter is telling veterans to call before going to the hospital in order to reduce exposure. It seems they don't even want you to come to the hospital!

Let's talk about age. World War II veterans are all over 90. Korean War veterans are all over 80. Vietnam veterans are almost all over 70. (I spent just about the whole year of 1970 in Vietnam 50 years ago this year). The bulk of veterans are all in the highest risk category as I am. Our health problems now are even more acute as we have aged. And they have encouraged us to stay away from VA hospitals.

After I got out of the Army, I was trained as an economist. I taught economics. I'm retired now, but I continue to write and teach for the movement. It doesn't take an economic expert to see the economic consequences of this pandemic are already extremely severe and are going to get worse. Huge numbers of businesses are shutting down, throwing people out of work. Theaters, restaurants and airlines were the beginning. Now businesses in every line that is not considered "essential" are keeping their workers home for safety and to avoid liability. They're not firing people they say, they're putting them on "furlough," mostly without pay. Wow, that's a very subtle difference! It's clear that we're going into a recession that may become a depression. The result will be massive unemployment and a huge increase in homelessness.

The Catch-22: Where is the Backup?

And in this crisis, where is the backup? It turns out that the VA has four missions. Three are veteran's health care, veterans benefits and running national cemeteries. The fourth mission, though, is to support the federal government in times of natural disasters and pandemics. *The VA is the backup system that is supposed to be mobilized in times of crisis for public health.* But the VA is being privatized. The VA budget and resources are continually being challenged. The VA has been encouraging veterans to get their health care in the private sector. That's the Catch-22. *The backup system has been sending more and more veterans into the system they're supposed to be backing up.* What do you think the consequences are going to be?

Veterans served. They were promised what every person in this country ought to have: free, quality health care as a human right. Veterans no longer have it. And it's clear the rest of the population doesn't have it either. Our economic system is unplanned and driven by profits, not by the needs of the population. In this time of crisis, the system is exposed for what it is. It is a system that cannot and will not meet the needs of the veterans or of the general population. The poorest and the most needy are the most vulnerable. My experience has led me to fight for a society and an economy that can and will meet *our* basic needs. **Please join me.**



Maybe it's time...



To start marching, again!!

Editor's Note: The following letter was sent within minutes after the City of Santa Cruz began forcing the homeless into an illegal "triage" center. Union officers Alicia Kuhl and Keith McHenry documented this outrage and within 24 hours the camp was closed.

California Homeless Union

Statewide Organizing Council



Chico/Paradise * El Centro/Imperial County * Inland Empire * Marysville/Yuba City * Redding * Sacramento
Salinas/Monterey County * Santa Cruz * San Jose/Santa Clara County * Ventura County

Office of the General Counsel

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March 20, 2020

To: Justin Cummings, Mayor, City of Santa Cruz

It has been brought to my attention that Santa Cruz police officers are forcibly removing and threatening to arrest homeless persons camped by the post office. Persons are being ordered to go to what is being called a "triage" center although no physicians or medical professionals, let alone anyone who is properly suited or trained to make determinations of anyone's medical status, are present. There is no evidence that this "triage" center is in the least set up or equipped to receive those being forced into it. To the extent that non-medical personnel are performing medical screenings, or what purport to be medical screenings, they, and the City of Santa Cruz are engaging in the unauthorized practice of medicine and will be reported to the proper authorities at once.

By conducting sweeps, the City of Santa Cruz and the SCPD are increasing the risk of spreading the coronavirus. The City is violating Governor Newsome's Executive Order of sheltering in place. In Sacramento, the Homeless Union, in collaboration with private parties and the Mayor's office, has established washing stations, porta potties and other hygiene facilities where the encampments exist. If the City of Santa Cruz is not going to immediately provide actual housing to those being swept or ordered to "triage," then under *Martin v. Boise*, these persons must be offered accessible **indoor** shelter, not available at the so-called "triage" center.

Finally, to the extent that police are harassing and interfering with the work of Santa Cruz Homeless Union and Food Not Bombs officers and members, this is to advise you that as persons who are providing food, hygiene articles, blankets, soap and water to the homeless, they are providing an essential function. We are in the process of documenting the above-described violations of law and disregard of coronavirus pandemic risk protocols and will hold the City fully accountable for all harms, present and future which may arise therefrom.

Very truly yours,

Anthony D. Prince

General Counsel,

California Homeless Union/Statewide Organizing Council

Cc:

Members of Santa Cruz City Council

Anthony Condotti, Office of the City Attorney

Andrew Mills, Chief of Police

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty

Northern California ACLU

Santa Cruz Update:

While the City of Santa Cruz drags its feet “in negotiations” with other hotel operators, the Santa Cruz Homeless Union and Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs has secured 48 motel rooms for our most at-risk homeless community members.

Union leaders **Alicia Kuhl** and **Keith McHenry** have assigned officers to each of three motels to insure against any harassment or by police or city officials and the safe delivery of food, health care items and interactions with qualified medical professionals.



We want to thank the management of **The Islander**, the **Budget Inn Motel** and the **Ocean Gate Inn** for cooperating with the Union and supporting those in need.

The Union is demanding that local government promptly reimburse the Homeless Union, Food Not Bombs and others who made it possible for our at-risk homeless residents to be safe.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF THE HOMELESS

The heart and soul of the National Union of the Homeless is to commit our lives to ending homelessness and poverty and to work tirelessly for the human right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, for social and economic justice for all. We dedicate ourselves to raising the awareness of our sisters and brothers, to planning a sustained struggle and to building an organization that can obtain freedom through revolutionary perseverance. We pledge to deepen our personal commitment to end all forms of exploitation, racism, sexism, and abuse. True solidarity demands that we create not only the new society, but also the new human being.

The National Union of the Homeless

Chico/Paradise, CA * Imperial County/El Centro, CA * Sacramento, CA * Santa Clara County/San Jose, CA
Monterey County/Salinas, CA * Marysville/Yuba County, CA * Ventura County, CA * Santa Cruz, CA * Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs
Washington, D.C. * New York City * Buffalo, N.Y. * Pomona, CA * Claremont, CA * Rochester, NY * Massachusetts/Boston
Harrisonburg, VA * Lancaster, PA * Greensboro, NC * Syracuse, NY

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For more information about the National Union of the Homeless, please contact Anthony Prince, Lead Organizer and General Counsel: princelawoffices@yahoo.com

