

Tackling Homelessness

JACK GARRETT
HOMELESS COALITION OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

The mission of the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County (HCHC) in Tampa, FL is “to bring together various entities, agencies, service organizations, and individuals to establish and maintain a concentrated effort to break the cycle of homelessness in Hillsborough County.” To accomplish this we work with homeless service providers, the homeless population and funding sources to establish permanent, affordable housing and expand temporary housing options. As part of my responsibilities at HCHC, I head the biennial “point in time enumeration” of the homeless population and survey projects county-wide. We utilize both qualitative and quantitative data to gain insight into where homeless people in our county experience gaps in services. I also work directly with service providers, monitoring the development and construction of new projects and the implementation of the county-wide Homeless Management Information System.

Men, women and children from diverse cultural backgrounds and family types are finding themselves in emergency shelters and on the streets in increasing numbers. Over the last 20 years, the homeless have become a symbol of poverty in the US due to increased public exposure in the media. However, in spite of this increased exposure, certain segments of the homeless population are less visible and resources to assist them remain limited. In the state of Florida there are more than 59,000 homeless people, but according to the Florida Department of Children

and Families, there are only 32,000 emergency and transitional housing beds to aid this growing population.

There are many barriers preventing homeless people from achieving self sufficiency, including loss of employment, medical bills, substance

abuse, mental illness, prior evictions, underemployment and a lack of truly affordable housing. In a 2007 survey of the homeless population in Tampa, we found that more than 50% of the survey respondents had an income source, but most of those who were employed held minimum wage or day labor jobs. The National Low Income Housing Association estimates that in Hillsborough County a person must earn \$16.98 per hour in order to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment and other costs of living, more than a minimum wage job provides.

Applied anthropologists are taught to use our theories, methods and ethnographic findings to solve human problems by advocating for fair and just public policies based on solid research. This viewpoint is valuable when working to change the dire circumstances facing homeless men, women and families, and we can play an important role in providing sound information to help shape the development of policies affecting those who struggle daily to succeed. How did I get here? As I finished my anthropology master’s thesis on homeless custodial fathers at Cal State Long Beach, my wife was offered a position in Florida. My previous

experience working with the homeless population with the Institute for Urban Research and Development in California, coupled with my education in anthropology, helped secure a desirable position working with an organization where I felt I could make a difference.

I am fortunate to regularly meet other anthropologists who are pursuing this same kind of work, such as Glenn Brown (Children’s Board),



ANTHROPOLOGY WORKS

Paige Beverly Walkup (United Housing, Inc) and Valerie Bouriche (Metropolitan Birmingham Services for the Homeless). Nationally there are a number of anthropologists writing about homeless issues. Kim Hopper, Irene Glasser, Philippe Bourgois, Anna Dehavenon and Joanne Passaro are just a few who have published notable works over the last few years, with Kim Hopper also advising the US Census Bureau in developing better strategies for enumerating homeless populations. As my experience shows, there are many anthropologists working to tackle homelessness in grassroots and local-level positions around the nation. Although it is rare to find the job title “anthropologist” on our business cards, we are secure in the knowledge that our anthropological training has prepared us to make a difference in the lives of others.

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What if everything you owned had to fit in a single bag? The Brown Bag Project is part of the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County’s public awareness campaign “Unexpected Faces, Unexpected Places,” which aims to dispel myths, misperceptions and stereotypes about our homeless neighbors. Learn more about this effort at www.unexpectedfaces.org. Photo courtesy Brian Adams PhotoGraphics, Inc

The WHY Prize

The SEVEN Fund announces The WHY Prize, a first of its kind challenge -- a \$50,000 prize for the best act of integration between a macroeconomist and an anthropologist in the field of Enterprise Solutions to Poverty. Submissions will be considered on an ongoing basis until a winner is selected.

The WHY prize will reward a team that has published during 2007, 2008, or 2009 with a view toward producing further work such as a book or additional articles in a peer reviewed format.

We seek submissions from teams of two or more individuals; the domains of anthropology and macroeconomics must be represented.

Full details of the award are available online at www.sevenfund.org.



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Questions may be directed to Elizabeth Hooper at ehooper@sevenfund.org.

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