

Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

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The Older Americans Act: Meeting the Needs of US Seniors

by Grayson Wolf

The Older Americans Act (OAA) has provided holistic care for senior citizens in the United States since 1965, but it is threatened financially, and not for the first time. Without a legislative push in the coming months to reauthorize the act, this federal program that has proved invaluable to countless Americans will become sorely underfunded, particularly as the older population grows.

The OAA as it stands is proof of America's care and reverence for its elderly population, which is loosely defined as those aged 60 and above.

Despite the current lack of funding for the OAA, these longstanding ideals are still widely espoused. Each decade since the 1960s, the White House has conducted a Conference on Aging aimed at improving the life of elderly citizens. The Obama administration plans to continue this tradition with another Conference on Aging this summer.

Furthermore, President Obama issued a Presidential Proclamation declaring May 2015 to be Older Americans Month. It said, "During Older Americans Month, we lift up all those whose life's work has made ours a little easier, and we recommit to showing them the fullest care, support and respect of a grateful Nation."

The OAA is instrumental in upholding these stated ideals. Some overarching points found in Title 1 of the OAA, which lists the act's objectives, include the expectation of respectable living conditions, the necessary means to personal health, and care for the elderly reciprocal to their contributions to society. In short, the OAA promotes

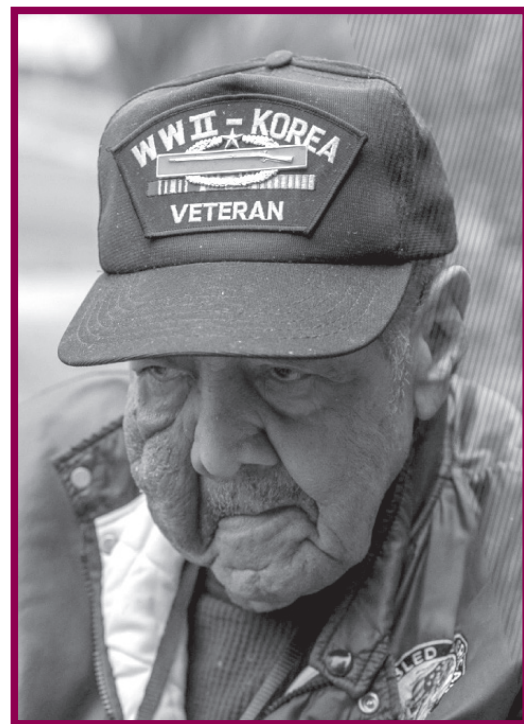


Photo courtesy of Meals on Wheels

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the independence of the elderly and, in doing so, affirms the place of senior citizens in the modern world.

The act also established an Administration on Aging, which is now called the Administration for Community Living (ACL), to execute the aforementioned purposes. The ACL as a federal entity is remarkable for its local emphasis.

Not only does it offer services and programs promoting elderly independence, but it also provides funding to similarly minded organizations. Thus, local bodies that have a more complete understanding of their communities' needs are empowered to more fully help the beneficiaries of the OAA.

However, the OAA no longer has the funding, both present and future, to continue its aid programs to the fullest extent. National inflation rates and the growing number of seniors have far outpaced the OAA's funding. If that weren't enough, recent budget cuts for Non-Defense Discretionary programs have hamstrung both the OAA and its dependent organizations.

According to Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the lack of funding for the OAA means "It will not meet the needs of the current

population of older adults and certainly won't meet the needs of the generation of older adults to come." Even though the need is growing to fund care programs for senior citizens, the fundraising well is drying up rapidly.

A Center for Effective Government study shows that every dollar spent on an OAA-funded program such as Meals on Wheels results in as much as \$50 saved for Medicaid.

Meals on Wheels is one organization that proves the effectiveness of the OAA, thereby highlighting the need for continual funding. There are more than 5,000 Meals on Wheels programs across the nation. Through Title III of the OAA, these Meals on Wheels programs are granted funds that enable them to address a variety of older-American needs, ranging from nutritional aid to home-care assistance.

The most publicized of Meals on Wheels' initiatives is its goal of providing needy seniors with three nutritious meals a week. In a 2013 study cited by the AARP and the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), 9 percent of seniors, living alone or in a household, are food insecure, and that number is growing.

Meals on Wheels and similar OAA-funded organizations are often the most effective ways to combat these pressing concerns. According to Meals on Wheels data, Meals on Wheels has been very successful in addressing such needs:

- 2,477,736 seniors are being served by Meals on Wheels programs.
- 223,633,085 meals are served annually by Meals on Wheels.
- 92 percent of seniors aided by Meals on Wheels say it enables them to remain living at home.
- 84 percent say it helps them eat healthier.
- 83 percent say it improves their health.

OAA-funded programs like Meals on Wheels have done a commendable job in providing for older Americans, but their good goes beyond sentimentality

The White House Conference on Aging

The White House plans to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Older Americans Act, Medicare and Medicaid by hosting a Conference on Aging this summer. Since the first White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA) in 1961, there has been a WHCOA each decade.

The WHCOA convenes in order to promote the welfare of senior citizens and ascertain how to best meet the needs of older Americans. In doing so, the White House hopes to bring to light the important issues of elderly care, as well as to educate and prepare the general populace for future concerns we must face as the number of senior citizens grows.

In addition to holding a national conference, the WHCOA features five regional forums that afford a greater voice to individuals who work in the field or benefit from social work. These voices will allow the WHCOA to focus on,

among other things, topics such as retirement security, healthy aging, elder justice and long-term services and supports.

Normally, the WHCOA is funded by the Older Americans Act. Since Congress has yet to reauthorize the act, the Obama Administration petitioned the legislature for \$3 million during the Fiscal Year 2015. Although the WHCOA is seemingly smaller than in previous years, the budget allowance, along with private donations, will permit it to take place.

To keep up with WHCOA news, visit whitehouseconferenceonaging.gov.

—Sources: Forbes, White House Conference on Aging

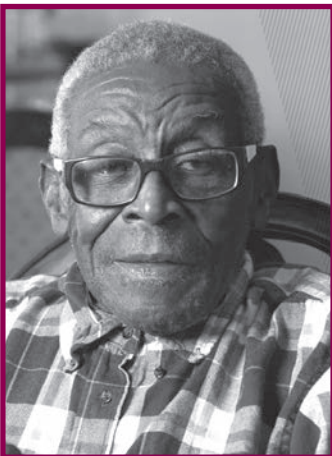


Photo courtesy of Meals on Wheels

or ideas about justice. Funding the OAA makes savvy financial sense.

Senator Bernie Sanders, chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging, noted that providing assistance to senior citizens mitigates healthcare costs in the long haul, claiming, "If you're malnourished, you're going to get sick more often. You may end up in the emergency room at great expense to Medicaid.... We can feed a senior for an entire year for the cost of one day in a hospital."

Ellie Hollander, president and CEO of the Meals on Wheels Association of America, echoes this statement by asserting that small expenditures for OAA programs result in enormous savings for Medicare and Medicaid.

This claim is corroborated by a Center for Effective Government study that shows every dollar spent on an OAA-funded program such as Meals on Wheels results in as much as \$50 saved for Medicaid.

If the Older Americans Act is so cost effective, why hasn't it been reauthorized and fully funded? Partisan politics don't appear to be a significant factor. The OAA has been reauthorized multiple times, most recently under a Republican-led Senate in 2006. Current supporters are found across the political spectrum.

Since the OAA is relatively bipartisan, some are quick to blame the Obama administration for the lack of funding. However, Obama's FY2016 proposals to increase funding for nutrition programs and the White House's ongoing Conference on Aging procedures would seem to refute these accusations.

Ignorance of the OAA due to generational gaps may be one culprit. Meals on Wheels and similar organizations often rely on elderly volunteers. Accordingly, the groups that both aid and are aided by the OAA are those who are least able to affect legislation.

Whatever may be the holdup in providing funding, it is clear that ignorance of the issue only exacerbates the situation. If the Older Americans Act is to remain useful, it must be reauthorized and refunded in accordance with the elderly population's growing needs.

—Grayson Wolf is a religion and English major at Baylor University and a Seeds editorial intern. He grew up in Waco, TX. Sources: AARP, Forbes, Food Research

and Action Center, Meals on Wheels Association of America, The Nation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, United States Administration on Aging, US President Barack Obama: Presidential Proclamation, The White House Conference on Aging.

What You Can Do...

To help secure a respectable future for senior citizens:

1. Contact your US Senators and Representatives about reauthorizing the OAA.
2. Advocate a balanced fiscal plan that protects the OAA and other Non-Defense Discretionary programs.
3. Educate your communities about the OAA, care for the elderly and local opportunities to volunteer.

The Goals of the Older Americans Act

1. An adequate income in retirement in accordance with the American standard of living.
2. The best possible physical and mental health which science can make available and without regard to economic status.
3. Obtaining and maintaining suitable housing, independently selected, designed and located with reference to special needs and available at costs which older citizens can afford.
4. Full restorative services for those who require institutional care, and a comprehensive array of community-based, long-term care services adequate to appropriately sustain older people in their communities and in their homes, including support to family members and other persons providing voluntary care to older individuals needing long-term care services.
5. Opportunity for employment with no discriminatory personnel practices because of age.
6. Retirement in health, honor, dignity—after years of contribution to the economy.
7. Participating in and contributing to meaningful activity within the widest range of civic, cultural, educational, and training and recreational opportunities.
- viii. Efficient community services, including access to low-cost transportation, which provide a choice in supported living arrangements and social assistance in a coordinated manner and which are readily available when needed, with emphasis on maintaining a continuum of care for vulnerable older individuals.
8. Immediate benefit from proven research knowledge which can sustain and improve health and happiness.
9. Freedom, independence, and the free exercise of individual initiative in planning and managing their own lives, full participation in the planning and operation of community-based services and programs provided for their benefit, and protection against abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

—from the text of the original Older Americans Act



Photo courtesy of Meals on Wheels

A Homelessness Glossary

compiled by Chelle Samaniego

In 2005, the United Nations Census estimated that of the 6 billion people on our planet, 100 million lived without a home. Special consideration was taken not to document those living in abandoned buildings or shelters or those who bounce around from house to house. Another report showed that if we did add the “hidden homeless,” the number would double to 200 million.

A lot of things have changed since then. And the face of homelessness has changed throughout the world. It is no longer the face of a man on the street; the faces now are those of women and children.

Below is a special glossary we have put together to help us better understand homelessness in our world. The statistics and demographics of homelessness vary throughout the world, since different countries define it in different ways. The following information is based on the United States, unless otherwise indicated.

Homeless *adjective home-less: Having no home or permanent place of residence. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)*

Shelter *noun shel-ter: A place that provides food and protection for people or animals that need assistance. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)*

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): This Federal agency, with a cabinet post, was created in 1965 to address America’s housing needs. HUD provides funds to state and local governments and to nonprofit organizations to assist homeless individuals and families. The funds are used to help people move from the streets to temporary shelter, to supportive housing (with services, if necessary) and ultimately back to the mainstream of American life. (www.hud.gov)

Homeless People (HUD Definitions)

1. People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing or exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days. People will also be considered homeless if they were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution.
2. People who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a “doubled-up” situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.
3. Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. (This new category applies to families with children or unaccompanied youth who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment.)

4. People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. (National Alliance to End Homelessness --NAIH)

Hidden homeless: Families and individuals who do not have a place of their own but are not counted in homelessness censuses. Living with family members or friends, moving from place to place, they do not seek services at homeless shelters, so their exact numbers cannot be counted. It is estimated that there are 100 million “hidden homeless” in our world.

Chronically homeless: An individual or family with a disabling condition who have been continuously homeless for a year or more or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. HUD’s Consolidated Plan Interim Rule defines a chronically homeless household as a disabled individual or family, where the head of household is disabled, who is literally homeless and has been such for at least one year or on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years, where each occasion lasted for at least 15 days.

Disabling conditions include:

- A diagnosable substance-abuse disorder
- A serious mental illness
- A developmental disability
- A chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions. (HUD)

Continuum of Care (CoC) Program: A program designed to promote community-wide commitment to ending homelessness. CoCs provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, as well as state and local governments, to quickly rehouse individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness. Area homeless coalitions are formed to operate effectively under the Continuum of Care program. (HUD)

Point-in-Time Count: The Point-in-Time (PIT) is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. HUD requires that Continuums of Care (see above) conduct an annual count of persons who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Continuums of Care also must conduct a count of unsheltered homeless persons during odd-numbered years, to be planned, coordinated and carried out locally.

The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is a PIT inventory of provider programs within a Continuum of Care that provide beds and units to serve homeless persons, categorized by five program types: Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-housing, Safe Haven, and Permanent Supportive Housing. The January 2014 PIT count showed that 578,424 total persons were in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs or living unsheltered on US streets. (HUD)

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness. Each CoC selects an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management and reporting standards. (HUD)

Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR): This is a HUD report that provides nationwide estimates of homelessness, including information about the demographic characteristics of homeless persons, service-use patterns and the capacity to house homeless persons. The report is based primarily on HMIS data (see above) about persons who experience homelessness during a 12-month period. (HUD. To view the most recent AHAR, visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/manage-a-program/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports>.)

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH): The mission of this council is to coordinate the Federal response to homelessness and to create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness in the nation, while maximizing the effectiveness of the Federal Government in contributing to the end of homelessness. (USICH)

Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act: This law, known as the HEARTH Act, enacted by Congress in May 2009, mandated that the USICH produce a "national strategic plan" to end homelessness and report to Congress and the President.

"Opening Doors": This was the first comprehensive US strategy to prevent and end homelessness. The plan was presented to the Office of the President and Congress on June 22, 2010. It set the country on a course to end veteran and chronic homelessness in America by 2015, and to end homelessness among children, families and youth by 2020. (USICH; the entire plan can be viewed at http://usich.gov/opening_doors.)

National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH): A nonprofit, non-partisan organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the US. (NAEH: www.endhomelessness.org)

"Housing First" Model: An approach to end homelessness by providing housing as quickly as possible as a first step, then providing support services as needed. (NAEH)

This drawing by Jesse Manning is inspired by a sculpture called "Whatever You Do" by Timothy Schmalz, outside of St. Stephen-in-the-Fields in Toronto, ON, and outside of St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York City. A drawing by Jesse of another Timothy Schmalz sculpture called "Homeless Jesus" was featured in the Fall 2014 HNH issue.

National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH): This group works to "prevent and end homelessness while ensuring the immediate needs of those experiencing homelessness are met and their civil rights protected." NCH provides educational resources and speakers for events, and were co-creators of **National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week**, which occurs the week before Thanksgiving throughout the US. (NCH: www.nationalhomeless.org)

Transitional Housing: Supportive housing that generally lasts for a limited time ranging from as short as two weeks to as long as 24 months that provides help for people after a crisis or domestic violence. (Transitional Housing, a directory of transitional housing programs: www.transitionalhousing.org)

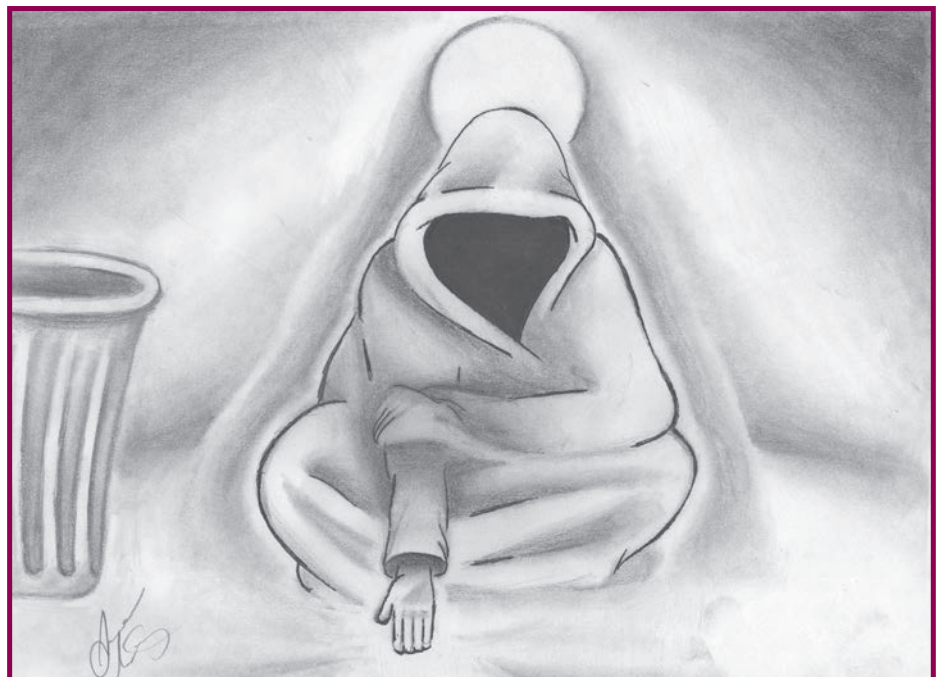
Permanent Supportive Housing: This program is designed to assist homeless persons in transitioning from homelessness, by providing housing and supportive services as needed to enable homeless persons to live as independently as possible. (HUD)

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act: This law is the first and only major US Federal legislative response to child homelessness. Specific areas pertain to and protect children in the US public school system. (NCH)

Unaccompanied Youth: An individual under the age of 24 who lacks parental, foster or institutional care. It is estimated that 500,000 unaccompanied youth experience homelessness in America each year. (NCH)

—Chelle Samianego is a community organizer who specializes in issues of hunger and homelessness. She has worked with the Waco (TX) Homeless Coalition, the McLennan County Hunger Coalition, Caritas of Waco, the Heart of Texas CROP Hunger Walk and the Waco Committee for National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. She also volunteers as the Seeds Social Media Editor.

Author's note: You can find a convenient source for statistics about homelessness around the world at www.homelessworldcup.org/content/homelessness-statistics.



Survey Finds One in Six Households with Food Hardship

While the US Congress threatens funding cuts for the country's safety net programs that keep or lift people out of poverty, new data released in April by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) show that millions of Americans still struggle to afford enough food for their households.

How Hungry Is America? is FRAC's latest look at food hardship. The report finds that one in six Americans (17.2 percent) said in 2014 that there had been times over the past 12 months that they didn't have enough money to buy food that they or their families needed.

The report finds that hunger exists in every state in the country. While Mississippi may have the worst rate among states, with one in four households reporting food hardship, still the "best" state, North Dakota, has one in eleven households struggling with food hardship. Ninety-eight of the largest 100 surveyed Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) have at least one in eight (12.5 percent or more) households reporting food hardship.

Nationally, the food hardship rate reflects the economy's weakness for many Americans. The food hardship number skyrocketed in late 2008 and early 2009 as the recession deepened, and remained relatively high as the nation slowly recovered. Only in this past year have the numbers almost returned to early 2008 levels. Still, that means that nearly

one in six households are reporting food hardship, a fact that FRAC officials say is unacceptable.

"There was too much hunger before the recession, and that is not a level to which the nation should aspire," said Jim Weill, FRAC president. "These survey findings represent an economic and political failure that is leaving tens of millions of Americans struggling to afford food. Doubling down on this harm would be a national nightmare. Congress and the President must reject cuts to nutrition programs and other programs that benefit low-income people, and build a stronger safety net."

How Hungry Is America? contains data throughout 2014 for every state and (for 2013 and 2014 combined) 100 of the country's largest MSAs.

The data were gathered as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project, which has been interviewing hundreds of households daily since January 2008. FRAC analyzed responses to the question: "Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?" A "yes" answer to this question is considered a signal that the household experienced food hardship.

—From the Food Research and Action Center. The full report is available at www.frac.org.

You're Never Too Young to Fight Hunger

Ten-year-old Miriam Hinojosa (pictured right) overheard her dad talking about the challenges of poverty and hunger among children in the US, and decided to do something about it.

Victor Hinojosa is a professor at Baylor University and has worked to end hunger in a number of ways, including serving on the board of directors at World Hunger Relief, Inc (WHRI). Miriam heard him talking with Jeremy Everett, the director of the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI), based at Baylor's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. Among many other things, THI organizes summer feeding programs for children in communities across Texas.

Miriam likes making bracelets, so she decided to start a fundraising project for THI. Using a Rainbow Loom, she began making dozens of bracelets, key chains, hair clips, pen toppers and more. "Miriam spends hours upon hours creating her products to sell to benefit THI," Victor Hinojosa said.

"I've been really impressed, and we're so proud of her heart to do this," he said. Miriam's mom, Lynne, is also a Baylor professor.

Miriam sells her pieces for \$2.50 each. She set up a booth at WHRI's Spring Farm Day in April. By that time, she had raised more than \$200. She recently presented her first check to THI.

—From Baylor Proud, the Baylor University news blog, personal interview with Miriam Hinojosa. Photo courtesy of Texas Hunger Initiative.



Resources & Opportunities

A Story of Homeless Teens

The *Homestretch*, a documentary from filmmakers Anne de Mare and Kirsten Kelly, aired last year and again this spring on the PBS program *Independent Lens*. The film follows three homeless teens in Chicago as they fight to stay in school, graduate and create a new life.

Now a discussion guide is available, free of charge, at www.homestretchdoc.com. The film raises questions about much more than the issue of unaccompanied youth and will produce an abundance of fodder for discussion. Robert Lloyd of the Los Angeles Times wrote that *The Homestretch* does not try to be “any kind of definitive statement on teenage homelessness or even teenage homelessness in Chicago.” It is, instead, he writes, “a portrait of a situation.”

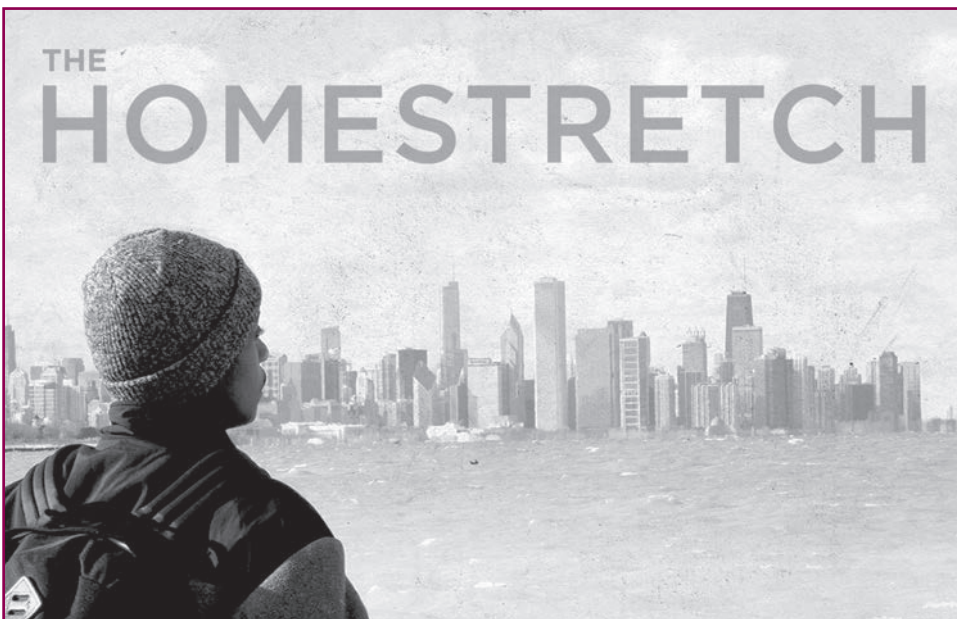
The youths whose stories are followed—Roque, Kasey and Anthony—challenge audiences to rethink stereotypes of homelessness as they work to complete their educations and transition into life after high school.

With unprecedented access into Chicago public schools, The Night Ministry “Crib” emergency youth shelter, and Teen Living Programs’ Belfort House, *The Homestretch* follows these kids as they move through the milestones of high school while navigating a landscape of couch hopping, emergency shelters, transitional homes, street families and a school system on the front lines of the homelessness crisis.

The Homestretch examines the struggles these young people face in obtaining a high-school level education. It then follows them beyond graduation to focus on the crucial transition when the structure of school vanishes, and homeless youth often struggle to find the support and community they need to survive and be independent. The film brings a powerful, original perspective on what it means to be young and homeless in the US today.

The Homestretch is part of *American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen*, a public media initiative supported by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Independent Television Service to help local communities across America address the dropout crisis.

—From *Public Broadcasting Service, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Independent Television Service (ITVS)*, Los Angeles Times.



Raise Hunger Awareness through Worship.



Art by Sally Lynn Askins

Ask for a free promotional copy of a Lent, Advent or Hunger Emphasis worship packet from Seeds of Hope.

Sacred Seasons is a series of creative worship tools to help raise awareness of hunger and justice issues. A year’s subscription of US\$100 includes Advent/Christmastide, Lent/Eastertide and a fall Hunger Emphasis resource. To order, call 254/755-7745

or e-mail seedseditor1@gmail.com. Single packets are US\$40.

(Non-US subscriptions are US\$115; individual packets are US\$50.) For more information, go to www.seedspublishers.org.



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Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and hungry people; and to affirm, enable

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

We can see Spirit made visible when people are kind to one another, especially when it's a really busy person, like you, taking care of a needy, annoying, neurotic person, like you. In fact, that's often when we see Spirit most brightly.

—Anne Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*

God is a compassionate God... who has chosen to be God-with-us.... Here we see what compassion means. It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.

—Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, Henri J.M. Nouwen,
Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life

Peace will come when what we want for our neighbors is more than what we demand for ourselves.

—Erin Conaway, from a Sunday morning benediction at Seventh & James Baptist Church.



art by Helen Siegl

and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

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Seeds of Hope also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for the liturgical year—with an attitude “toward justice, peace and food security for all of God’s children.” These include litanies, sermons, children’s and youth activities, bulletin art and drama.

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