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Michigan Recognizes 25th Annual Homeless Awareness Week

LANSING, Michigan (November 16, 2013) – Governor Snyder has designated November 16-24, 2013 as Homeless Awareness Week. This year’s theme “Bringing America Home” sends a strong call to action to all Michigan residents.

Homeless Awareness Week is a statewide initiative to educate the public about the many reasons people become homeless and the diligent work that service providers are doing to bring relief to those most in need. Too often, people who are homeless are stereotypically thought of as single panhandlers who refuse to work and are unworthy of assistance. The truth of the matter is that homelessness affects every community in Michigan – all age groups, all racial and ethnic groups, and families as well as individuals. The Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness, in association with local agencies statewide, is spearheading this awareness effort.

In 2012, there were over 93,000 homeless individuals across the state. The stereotypes ignore the real causes of homelessness, which are far more complex, and include: loss of employment, a lack of employment opportunities, a shortage of affordable housing, fleeing from domestic abuse, untreated mental illnesses, emergency medical crises, etc. Along with these

examples, a great many people are simply born into poverty. In fact, the average age of a homeless child is just seven years old.

Talking with those who experience homelessness firsthand, it is easy to see that every situation is unique and that there is no single reason that people become homeless. Robert Quick, a formerly homeless man who currently works to help others as a peer support specialist at the Northeast Guidance Center in Detroit, expressed this sentiment well. “Everyone has a story to tell, and everybody’s story is different. People become homeless for all kinds of reasons so you can’t say that it’s just one thing or another thing. They’re all just people so they’re all different.”

While the number of people becoming homeless has leveled off since last year, the number of people who have been successfully housed or have taken action to avoid becoming homeless has increased. More than 41,000 individuals found stable housing in 2012. This success is attributed to new, expanded and improved programming, as well as enhanced coordination at the local level.

According to Eric Hufnagel, Executive Director of the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness, “There's still a public misconception about who is homeless. In 2012, more than half of homeless individuals were women, 29% were under the age of 18, and overall 43% of the adults were homeless for the first time. When you look at who they really are, you can see that anyone can become homeless.”

A more realistic understanding of the causes of homelessness will continue to lead to more effective solutions to reduce and prevent homelessness in the future.

Michigan citizens from all walks of life are encouraged to help in any way they can by volunteering or making a donation to local programs working to help solve the problems facing individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

The Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness is dedicated to ending homelessness in the state of Michigan through community awareness, collaboration, capacity building, and advocacy. For more information please visit MCAH's website at www.mihomeless.org .

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