

# **The Texas Homeless Network (THN) "Helps Those Who Help the Homeless"**

**By Annie Kovski**

There are many approaches one might take in helping address homelessness. You can donate money to support the cause, start a program to help homeless individuals, or you can do what the Texas Homeless Network (THN) does: help the organizations that assist with the homeless. Because there are many speed bumps and road detours in attaining the resources and assistance needed, THN (a statewide non-profit membership organization) provides "information services to direct service providers and individual members all across the state of Texas." These services include providing an abundant amount of information through various means, training programs, and an annual conference all to help direct members through these winding roads.

To better understand this organization, a little history is in order. In 1989, the now named Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (TICH) was created by the 71<sup>st</sup> Texas State legislature. TICH was to provide a framework for the state to address the issue of homelessness. The TICH, since its creation, has been a family member of many departments but now resides within the Texas Department of Housing. Because TICH was primarily a framework, it needed assistance in carrying out its activities, and THN was the key to doing that. THN actually existed before the creation of TICH, but only after it became an incorporated group in 1989 did it join forces with TICH.

The THN staff (see photo) is at work in full force to tackle this issue. They sponsor a website providing current information, newsletters, and even a resource library that are all easily available to interested organizations. THN consists of over 1500 people all across the state of Texas who provides valuable data regarding the homeless. The newsletter, maintained by the editor and Programs Manager of THN, Wanda Robins, features available grants, spotlights on other homeless organizations, and upcoming events on a state and national level, among other things. The library is primarily for the service providers (i.e. local coalitions, planning bodies, non-profit organizations, and more), and the topics range from mental health, housing, and grant resources to a range of relevant statewide data. In addition, there is even a compilation of grants that other organizations have previously been awarded which helps in paving the way for others to apply for the same grants. THN hopes to develop and acquire many more resource than they are currently able to provide, and it is still expanding.



Training and workshops are also a major activity that THN provides. In particular, they offer Regional Training, Community On-Site Technical Assistance, and Agency On-Site Technical Assistance programs. These customized training programs are highly beneficial for the organizations in regards to planning, developing or strengthening their framework, and in seeking and attaining resources. The training assists in helping them get funding from programs like the government provided Continuum of Care program, a "community based, long-range plan," which is specifically designed for homeless assisting communities.

Ken Martin, Executive Director of THN, spent ten years working with Child Protection Services and over eight years working with other homeless services and housing. This includes years of firsthand knowledge on the Continuum of Care application process. Applying to receive funding from this program and others like it is exhausting not to mention competitive in its nature; thus, THN places major emphasis in assisting communities and organizations to apply and ultimately receive funding. There is a fair amount of available funding out there for these organizations; it is sometimes just a matter of attaining it, as noted by THN staff.

THN is at work "behind the scenes" on an individual basis, but also on the center stage. You might have seen them hosting the one and only Texas Statewide Annual Conference that took place in Corpus Christi this past October. The Conference is a 4-day event that features guest speakers, workshops on a variety of topics, exhibits, and other entertainment like silent auctions. The conference is a great opportunity for networking and gaining more insight on homeless issues. Each conference is held in a different city every year to accommodate all members statewide, and this was their 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference is planned for Austin.

THN has also put a great deal of work into coalition building in the past two years to double the amount of homeless coalitions statewide to 24. They have also created and been working on the THN VISTA project, which aids in placing Americorps volunteers in the coalitions to be the connection at a state level and local level for THN. However, THN has lately been consumed and involved in working with the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

This organization and the delightful staff that keeps it thriving are dedicated to "strengthening communities and partnerships to prevent and eliminate homelessness". For more information, visit them online at <http://www.thn.org/>.