



SOLIDARITY

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Housing As HIV Prevention

— *Suzy Subways*

As many as 60% of all HIV positive people have experienced homelessness or unstable housing (such as staying on a friend's couch, where a person could be kicked out at any time) in their lifetimes, according to research by Angela Aidala, Ph.D. of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. But often, even when organizations or governments provide housing as a part of HIV services, the issue is talked about in a way that blames individuals for "risky behavior" and assumes that if someone is dealing with both housing problems and HIV, these two challenges are a result of being a "risky person."

For 20 years, AIDS housing activists have known that housing challenges are often beyond the control of an individual because lack of stable, adequate housing affects whole communities and is rooted in racism and poverty. The research of Mindy Fullilove, also at Mailman, has shown that destruction of urban neighborhoods uproots whole communities of people and makes them vulnerable to homelessness, drug use, and HIV.

Rodrick Wallace, an epidemiologist at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, also points to the forced displacement of Black neighborhoods, whether through urban renewal programs, redlining (when banks refuse to lend money to African Americans to buy homes), eminent domain (a legal process by which houses are taken for city or commercial use of the land), gentrification (when residents are priced out of their neighborhoods by an influx of wealthier residents), or disasters like Hurricane Katrina (due to neglect of infrastructure), and the Bronx fires in the 1970s (due to the closing of firehouses). "Health disparities in the Black community can be traced to a 70-year course of serial forced displacement," Wallace says, and he offers a dire warning for New York City. "Gentrification is driving African Americans from Harlem, the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant [Brooklyn], which will

create a ring of refugee camps around an alabaster white city. Multi-drug resistant HIV will be allowed to grow in these communities over time before spreading to the rest of the world."

Poor communities are experiencing forced displacement in cities around the world, with even worse implications in places like South Africa, where the HIV rate is already extremely high. But people living in shacks around the cities of South Africa are resisting forced evictions, and people living with HIV in New York City are demanding housing – not just for their own survival, but also as a prevention tool. Activists at [Housing Works](#), [Gay Men's Health Crisis \(GMHC\)](#), and the [New York City AIDS Housing Network \(NYCAHN\)](#) are leading a campaign to force New York

City to provide housing to *all* people living with HIV by expanding the city's unique policy that guarantees housing only to people living with an AIDS diagnosis.

“One of the single biggest ways to prevent HIV by reducing risk behavior is to provide stability in housing,” says Charles King, president and CEO of Housing Works. “As long as you have chronic homelessness, people will be involved in drug activity that’s related to their homelessness and sex trade that’s related to their homelessness. Whether you’re HIV positive or negative, homelessness increases the risk of HIV transmission. The more people are forced to engage in survival activities, the greater the risk.”

Alan Perez, coordinator of the Legislative Action Group at GMHC, agrees and emphasizes how unstable housing puts people at risk. “We have clients who have to sell their bodies just to stay where they’re at,” he says.

With organizing help from Housing Works and the **National AIDS Housing Coalition (NAHC)**, researchers have come together with new data showing that housing is integral to HIV treatment, care and prevention. And activists are using the research as tools in their advocacy. This collaboration between activists and researchers is further strengthened by collaboration between AIDS housing activists and housing justice activists, people who fight to end homelessness and gentrification in cities around the world. This issue of *Solidarity Project* explores some of this inspiring work.



This mural, “House Every One,” is a collaboration between Groundswell Community Mural Project and NYCAHN (© Groundswell Community Mural Project; Lead artist: Belle Benfield; Assistant artist: Claude Cantave, with youth from TEMA (Teen Empowerment Mural Apprenticeship Program); 14 x 28 feet on canvas, Park Slope, Brooklyn, 2004).

New York City's HASA For ALL Campaign: Advocating for Homeless People With and At Risk for HIV

A Model Campaign for Activists Around the Country

Twenty years ago, when 30,000 people with AIDS were at risk of dying homeless on the streets of New York City, AIDS housing activism was born. "In 1988, activists took over the Human Resources Administration Commissioner's office [in New York City] to demand they honor an injunction to take a plaintiff living with AIDS out of a shelter and put them into single-room occupancy housing," Charles King, cofounder and CEO of **Housing Works**, explains. In 1990, Housing Works grew out of **ACT UP/New York** to provide housing, job training and other services while organizing homeless people with AIDS to fight for their rights and survival.

The Campaign

Now, a coalition of activist groups led by the **New York City AIDS Housing Network (NYCAHN)**, **Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)**, and Housing Works – the **HASA For ALL** campaign – is fighting to expand the city's unique guarantee of rental assistance, a nutritional allowance, and transportation for people living with AIDS to all low-income New Yorkers living with HIV.

The HASA For ALL battle began in 2006, when activists successfully pressured the city's health department to release data on the health of homeless adults. AIDS was the primary cause of death for women in the shelters and the second leading cause of death for men, accounting for 11 percent of all shelter deaths. But people with AIDS weren't supposed to be in the shelters. A 1998 lawsuit brought by activists guaranteed medically appropriate, same-day emergency housing assistance to homeless people with an AIDS diagnosis through the city's HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA).

According to Sean Barry, co-director of NYCAHN, the problem is that "people who didn't have an AIDS diagnosis and didn't qualify for HASA because of that are dying because the bad conditions in the shelters worsen their health so quickly – before they can go through the bureaucratic process to get HASA benefits once they *do* get sick." Housing Works estimates that 7,000 low-income people living with HIV would benefit from HASA For ALL, including an estimated 800 individuals in the shelter system.

"It took me two years to get on HASA," Alan Perez, coordinator of the Legislative Action Group at GMHC, says. "I had to stop taking my meds just to get on it. A lot of people are doing something to get sick, especially people who are in the shelter system. They should be in permanent housing."



About 700 AIDS activists demonstrate in support of HASA For ALL at New York's City Hall, September 25, 2007 (photo courtesy of Housing Works).

The irony that people with HIV who are doing relatively well are making themselves sick just to get needed help is not lost on activists. They developed a cost-benefit analysis revealing that, despite an estimated \$68 million per year price tag, HASA For ALL would save the city money in shelter and hospital costs, keeping people with HIV healthy – and preventing as many as 66 new infections each month.

Assisting People With and Without HIV

The idea is a sort of “prevention for positives” approach, but activists appreciate that HIV negative community members need permanent housing as well to protect themselves from HIV and the many other hazards of being homeless. Young trans and gender non-conforming people, as well as men who have sex with men (MSMs), are especially vulnerable, explains Johnny Guaylupo, intake outreach coordinator at Housing Works.

“Many trans people don’t get services – they’re rejected because the services aren’t trans-friendly.” Guaylupo says. “There’s only one shelter for LGBT people [in New York City], with 17 beds.” He explains that trans people and MSMs rely on their social networks for support. “One friend may be eligible for HASA and get an apartment. Other friends stay there, and they have to provide some contribution. Some end up going to sex work. Often there are drugs involved – cocaine, crack, crystal. And they earn more money if they have unprotected sex.”



NYCAHN's Shirlene Cooper and Charles King of Housing Works speak on the steps of City Hall as HASA For ALL legislation is introduced inside, January 30, 2008 (photo courtesy of Housing Works).

Trans and gender non-conforming people are even more vulnerable while transitioning from living as one gender to another, a period during which they particularly need quality healthcare. “Friends call me and say, ‘I hear that Housing Works has a transitional housing program,’ but I have to tell them it’s only for people with HIV. If they had stable housing, they could take care of their transition and focus on their healthcare. Illegal hormones are not safe, and [without healthcare] trans people are not getting tested for HIV on a regular basis.”

As a teenager, Guaylupo needed HASA himself. “My grandma raised me,” he says. “I had gone through a transitional moment as a teen by saying ‘I’m gay.’ My grandma couldn’t handle it. I went to my aunt’s, my mom’s. I tested positive for HIV at 17 and tried to commit suicide. I was working at McDonald’s as a manager, and sometimes I was up until 4 am there. When I was 19, I was given an AIDS diagnosis. I got housing assistance to pay for rent so I could [quit my job and] go to school. I did two years of college. Some people may need it just for a little while, to get back to the life they had before.”

New Yorkers with stories like Guaylupo’s are organizing all over the city to demand HASA For ALL. Guaylupo works with members of a day treatment program in East New York, Brooklyn, training them in community organizing skills, leading discussions about HASA For ALL, and taking the group to demonstrations. Perez talks to clients who were turned down for HASA because their CD4 cell counts were too high and brings them to City Hall to advocate.



Shirlene Cooper, co-director of NYCAHN, says, “All of our members know how to speak to the media and elected officials. It’s best to have the person who’s directly affected tell their representatives what they need.” A formerly homeless woman living with AIDS, Cooper was trained years ago in NYCAHN’s POWER Academy (People Living with HIV/AIDS Organizing for Welfare Equal Rights). “I was able to be the spokesperson, and I was able to pass that on. All of our members can do that extremely well, after going through POWER Academy. They can organize better than me.”

Disappointing Opposition from a Presumed Ally

But Mayor Bloomberg and the health department oppose HASA For ALL, saying there isn’t enough money. Even Christine Quinn – the speaker of New York’s City Council, whose support activists had every reason to expect based on her longtime support of AIDS housing activism – opposes the HASA For ALL legislation. Last September, Quinn released a statement that said, “I am concerned this bill could set a wide-ranging precedent that would require additional costly benefits, diverting limited resources to an unnecessary mandate instead of allowing us to target funds where they are most needed.”

“We met with Speaker Quinn three times,” Cooper says. “She said it cost too much, so we showed her the cost analysis. She said she didn’t know if housing was a prevention tool, so we asked Angela Aidala, associate research scientist at Columbia University, to do a presentation for her – and we even got David Holtgrave, a former senior CDC official, to meet with her.”

With sponsorship by City Council member Annabel Palma, the bill is now being introduced. Cooper believes that it can pass even without Quinn’s support. “If we get at least 35 of the 51 council members to support it, there’s nothing she can do. I spoke with my councilmember and told him that my community in Brooklyn has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS among African American women in the country, and I’m one of those statistics. I said, ‘This is your borough; you need to come out and support this.’”

New Alliances

New York City may be the major U.S. battleground where housing as a vital part of HIV prevention and treatment is being fought for – backed up by substantial, convincing research. One thing is for sure – activists around the country and the world are paying close attention, knowing that the New Yorkers’ experiences with this fight will provide many useful lessons for their work.

Not to Be Missed at the Global AIDS Conference This Summer

The First-Ever Poverty, Homelessness, and HIV Satellite Meeting

As part of the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City in August, the National AIDS Housing Coalition and Housing Works have convened an international committee to plan an International Summit on Poverty, Homeless Persons and HIV. The summit’s main objective is to create a declaration demanding that adequate housing be incorporated in the implementation and development of HIV/AIDS public policy at a global level.

The committee’s concept paper reads: “*Through an intense campaign and consultation via the Internet, our plan within the next six months is to reach HIV positive activists, leaders, investigators, key actors and decision makers in the HIV/AIDS global community so as to open the dialogue to discuss common themes in relation to poverty, the lack of access to housing and HIV/AIDS around the world.*”

For more information, call Housing Works’ national office in Washington at (202) 408-0305.



“Go to the NYCAHN website or contact me,” Cooper suggests to organizers who want to learn from the campaign’s efforts. “We’re willing to give any support we can. We’ve had a lot of groups come here, sit in on our trainings, and visit welfare centers with us. New York is the only state with HASA, so we show visitors what the single-room occupancy housing is like.”

In addition to HASA For ALL, NYCAHN is working with the new Anti-Gentrification Network in New York City, along with **FIERCE**, the transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirit, queer, and questioning youth of color activist group, **FUREE** (Families United for Racial and Economic Equality) and **Organizing Asian Communities**. **The Anti-Gentrification Network** is affiliated with the **Right to the City Alliance**, which formed nationally at the U.S. Social Forum last year “to build a united response to gentrification and the drastic changes imposed on our cities.” Led by local groups, the Alliance, in turn, is connected with international struggles for human rights and democracy, and against displacement.

Like HIV, homelessness is stigmatized as if it’s an individual failure. Right-wing talk of “personal responsibility” has obscured the connections between lack of housing, free-market policies and social neglect. But activists are pushing for big changes to prevent both homelessness and HIV. “New York is becoming way too expensive for low- and moderate-income residents,” King says. “This is happening all over the city, not just in Manhattan. People get forced out of housing that becomes more expensive. This is not going to be addressed purely through the market – government and civil society need to step in and create places for people to live.”

Getting Involved

The HASA For ALL campaign meets on the last Monday of every month. Organizations, low-income HIV positive New Yorkers, and their allies can join the campaign. For more information or to get involved in the effort, call Shirlene Cooper at (718) 802-9540 x.18 or e-mail cooper@nycahn.org.

A Lone Activist Survives an Urban Shelter System

— As told to Suzy Subways

An HIV positive homeless activist talks about life inside city shelters, being kicked out of one for his activism, and delavina HIV treatment because he’s homeless.

The shelters are like warehouses for men. Guys who go to work have to fill out a “late return.” And you can fill out the paperwork, but if the person on duty doesn’t put it in the proper place, you lose your bed. While I was living in another shelter, I finished an HIV treatment education class at a local AIDS service organization and completed a building maintenance class, but it was very hard for me – that and keeping my doctor’s appointments, because I’m HIV positive.

The people who work at the shelters put everybody in a classification that comes from Narcotics Anonymous – that you can’t manage your life so somebody has to do it for you. “You’re here, so you must have a problem. We’re gonna strip you down and build you back up, and we’re gonna make you the man that you couldn’t be.” They treat you like you’re on drugs, even if the problem is just that you’re having trouble with your wife, and you have a home,



if you could just patch things up. People might have mental health problems, you might have HIV, or have had a disaster, like a fire. But I'm 45 years old – you can't strip me.

I think people who work in this capacity need to listen. I would let people express themselves, and I think I would get a better response. Rather than "Shut up, let me tell you what I want you to do." They provoke people. A guy could come there and be at his exceeding limit, and they're not trained to notice anything like that. Something could trigger him, and he goes into a rage. I've seen suicides in the shelters.

Getting Kicked Out for Activism

They want to manage your money. You use the shelter's address, and you can get your welfare benefits. You pay shelter fees, and then you put most of the rest of the money into a savings plan. A few months ago, I needed carfare to go be with my wife, but they said I had to pay those shelter fees or they were going to kick me out. My wife has cancer. I felt that saving money would mean nothing if my wife was to pass away.

I had to involve some higher-ups, so I talked to a gentleman at my city councilperson's office. After that, it seemed like I was on a blacklist. Two people the next day were badgering me. They come around in the mornings and say, "get out of bed." I was getting dressed, and the one woman said, "I better not say nothing to him, because he's going to tell the politicians on me." I didn't say anything back.

The day I had a colonoscopy, I went back to the shelter and they had cut my locks, packed up everything and had it in a big tub, and said, "You're out of here." A person comes into the shelter with all they own, their worldly possessions. And I said, "Look, I've got this note from my doctor, I need to rest," but they kicked me out. I had to lift my belongings. They said, "We feel that you'd be better suited somewhere else." The present place I'm at, it's cold as ice. It's a gymnasium. This is just for the winter initiative – it's going to dissolve at the end of the month.

Living with HIV in the Shelters

I'm putting off going on HIV medication because I'm in a shelter. At this point, my CD4 count is getting pretty low. Every month, my doctor says, "You're going to have to go on it either way, but I think we could hold off." The problem is, if I started a regimen and wasn't consistent with taking it, I'd have to start on something else. I was reprimanded for keeping my depression medication in my locker. They hold your medication. One time, I said, "Miss, I really need my medication." She got on the phone, and it seemed like a personal phone call. Then she says, "Okay, okay, in a minute. I forgot about you, wait 'til I come back." So I went out the door, because I had to make an appointment. Had I been on HIV meds, I probably would have blown my regimen. See, that would aid in you forgetting to take your medicine at all.

Sometimes my medication has been stolen, and we would suspect by the staff, because they had access to it. Most of the staff are ex-addicts. They forget where they come from and return back to where they were, in their state of mind. I was told that certain meds go for \$5 per pill. One time, at another shelter, I came down with scarlet fever and went to the hospital. When I got back, I never got my medication back. It was like the second or third time, and the Medicaid HMO wouldn't replace it. Had I been on HIV meds, that would have messed me up. It's not made for a person who has to adhere to taking their meds on the regular.



There's so much unprofessionalism, it's a shame. I'm trying to protect my anonymity, because nothing's confidential in the shelter. People sometimes are caring, but you've got some people that are just plain old mean. If their way to hurt somebody is to let their business out, then they'll do that. That could crush somebody. These people that work there, they gossip. And you could be sitting right there and overhear what they say about people. When you take your meds, the way it's supposed to be is that only one person is allowed in the room, so nobody knows what you're taking, but it's not like that. People are standing right there. I don't even think they go by HIPAA [patient confidentiality] laws.

They didn't try to gear me to any programs for people living with HIV. As a matter of fact, I took one of the HIV resource books to my case manager, but I just got the feeling that she took it and put it under somewhere. After that, I felt like the other case managers knew my status.

There was a guy – I haven't seen him – I think he passed, just maybe a few weeks ago. His name was Jerome, and I think the guys looked out for him pretty good. That really hit me close to the heart, because I'm HIV positive, and I would guess that he was at a really bad stage of AIDS. A shelter like that is no place for a person like that. He was so frail you had to help him get dressed. I dream about the magnitude of this thing, and it gets me really choked up that people have to suffer like that.

Solidarity and Organizing Among Homeless People

People get homeless, and at that time, the barriers drop and we come together and help each other. It's amazing. You really need a belt, and a guy takes the belt off his waist if you've got an interview or something. It's not the shelter giving you clothes – it's other guys giving you clothes. It feels good when guys in the shelter say, "How's your wife doing? Is she getting around alright?" These are guys that, if you looked at them, you'd never think they had it in them like that – big, tough guys. You're all depressed, but you're sitting in there, and you find something to laugh about. I guess that's what lets you know you're still alive.

Most of the shelters, they're going to be making them leave soon, because they're in a family section and nobody wants to see homeless people. This is the next thing that's coming up. They're refurbishing an old hotel to make condominiums around the corner from one of them, so that shelter's not going to be there in a couple of years.

During the mayoral election, I went out with a local advocacy group and got people to vote. We had a homeless rally at City Hall, got the candidates to come out, and shot some questions at them. The only idea they had was transitional housing. If it's privately run, that's like a slumlord. You're going from living with a bunch of men to living with fewer men. If you had your own little room, in a sense you'd have your self again. In order for people to take care of themselves mentally and physically, be nourished, take their medicine, you name it, every person should have a home. That's just one of your rights.

I've got to be with my wife. I want to have my granddaughters over and play with them on the floor. Without all that, I'm like this fourth class citizen. I have no sense of belonging, in a place that gets paid for me to sign my name, but I can't stand in front of the building. They say, "Go walk down the street." Well, all of us stay here. But it's like I'm some kind of protester when I open my mouth. Because I knew enough to go and see somebody, they were like, "Oh, we don't want him, because if what he's got is catching, we'll be in real trouble." But that's what they need. You can't be a lone activist and have some punch.

Abahlali baseMjondolo – The South African Shack Dwellers Movement

South Africans living in the *imijondolo* – shack dwellers – have by far the highest HIV prevalence in the country. Sometimes called shantytowns or informal settlements, these communities of people, living in shacks made of materials like tin and paper, usually have no water, electricity, sanitation, healthcare or garbage removal. According to the [2005 South African National Household Survey on HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication](#), commissioned by the Nelson Mandela Foundation, HIV prevalence among 15- to 49-year-old shack dwellers is 25.8%. Nationwide, women ages 15 to 24 are up to four times more likely to be HIV positive than their male counterparts.

“Our women and children are vulnerable to HIV because they become homeless through eviction by the government from the shacks,” explains Zandile Nsibande, an AIDS activist and member of [Abahlali baseMjondolo](#), the shack dwellers’ movement. “Others are unemployed and find it hard to rent an accommodation. They involve themselves in conditional love, because they need a place to sleep with their children, and they are voiceless when it comes to condom use,” she says. “That is how our women become vulnerable to rape and HIV infection.” Also, without access to toilets in the *imijondolo*, women are raped in the bushes.

Abahlali baseMjondolo began in the large port city of Durban in early 2005, with a road blockade organized by people living in the Kennedy Road settlement to protest the sale to a local industrialist of nearby land that had long been promised by a local government representative to the shack dwellers for housing. The movement grew quickly, and now



Abahlali organizers and sisters Nellie and Nosipho Mtshali amid the wreckage of a shack demolished by the city of Durban, South Africa, in the Arnett Drive settlement on January 17, 2008 (photo courtesy of Abahlali baseMjondolo).



Abahlali marches on Mayor Obed Mlaba, September 28, 2007, demanding an immediate moratorium on forced evictions, as well as land for more housing and basic city services (photo by Mnikelo and Richard, courtesy of Abahlali baseMjondolo).

includes tens of thousands of people from more than 30 settlements, according to a [history of Abahlali](#) written by the Abahlali baseMjondolo Book Collective in October 2006. The document reports, “Amongst other victories, the Abahlali have democratised the governance of many settlements, stopped evictions in a number of settlements, won access to schools, stopped the industrial development of the land promised to Kennedy Road, forced numerous government officials, offices and projects to ‘come down to the people,’ and mounted vigorous challenges to the uncritical assumption of a right to lead the local struggles of the poor in the name of a privileged access to the ‘global,’ i.e., Northern donors, academics and non-government organizations (NGOs), that remains typical of most of the NGO-based left.” The group’s peaceful demonstrations have frequently met with [police beatings, rubber bullets \(and sometimes live ammunition\), and arrests](#).

In a 2006 report published by the Centre for Civil Society, “[Informal Settlements as Spaces of Health Inequality: The Changing Economic and Spatial Roots of the AIDS Pandemic, from Apartheid to Neoliberalism](#),” Mark Hunter relates the HIV rate in the shacks to the unemployment crisis. Unemployment has worsened dramatically since the mid-1990s, as policies favorable to capitalist globalization have replaced early efforts to redistribute wealth and undo the socially crippling effects of apartheid. As more women leave their rural homes looking for work, there are fewer jobs for them, and women’s wages have plummeted. Now, many very poor women must rely on men, sometimes several of them, who provide financial support, food, or clothes in exchange for a sexual or romantic relationship. Women who live in the *imijondolo* often send money home to relatives in the countryside, frequently to support children they had to leave behind.

Nsibandé hopes that Abahlali’s new income generation program, in which mutual financial support allows women to invest in making or growing products to sell, will help women in the shacks protect themselves from HIV. “Our income generation program can help our women to live financially independently without any sexual relationships,” she says.



The Abahlali T-shirts read, “2010: Free from Eviction, Free from Shackfire, Housing 4 All.” 2010 refers to the year many demolitions are expected in anticipation of the World Cup being held in Durban. Fires are a primary concern for the shack dwellers, without electricity, stoves, or running water in their homes (photo by Mnikelo and Richard, courtesy of Abahlali baseMjondolo).

South Africa is unique, in that its post-apartheid constitution guarantees the right to adequate housing. But in an October 30, 2007 [interview with Worldpress.org](#), Miloon Kothari, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Housing, said about South Africa, “Legislators in South Africa have lost their way since 2000-2001... The promises of the early years are now in reversal... All the progressive judgments have not been implemented, nor has the constitutional regulation and the right to housing in policy been put into practice.”

But it’s not just South Africa. Kothari discusses forced evictions in a global context. “Today, more people are being displaced from large development projects because of the market, than in places of conflicts. There are shocking statistics; millions of people around the world are being displaced... What is a gross violation of human rights is that there is no compensation or consultation, so you see this legacy of greater homelessness, which is often permanent. There has been, of course, data generated on

evictions that shows that it is disproportionately represented by minorities, aboriginal people and women... This reliance on market solutions to meet housing demands is increasingly not treating housing issues as a human right. This is not a commodity that you buy and sell.”

Sbusiso Zikode, president of Abahlali baseMjondolo, agrees that the increasing dominance of free-market global capitalism, also called neoliberalism, is behind the forced evictions of shack dwellers around the world. “In the major cities of the world, in countries where the cities are progressing, poor people are being evicted from the shantytowns,” he says. “It’s about the neoliberal policies at very high levels, and it is about the growth of the gap between the haves and the do-not-haves. It is a strategy to make sure there is no space for poor people who can’t make profits.”

Abahlali is currently resisting a government bill that would include a five-year prison sentence for trying to stop an eviction. “Poor people are at the brink of catastrophe and declared as being criminal,” Zikode says. “The poor people of the world must defend very strongly against evictions and against this idea that we have no right to the city.”

For more photos, reporting and videos, visit <http://abahlali.org/node/239> or watch *Dear Mandela*, a six-minute film about Abahlali baseMjondolo by Sleeping Giant Films from February 2008, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZWIZX_8ub8.

Donate to Abahlali baseMjondolo’s women’s support group

The women of Abahlali have started an income generation program for the survival and independence of women shack dwellers. The group hopes to purchase a sewing machine and other supplies. Visit [Supporting Abahlali baseMjondolo](#) to donate – specify that the money is for the women’s support group.

TAKE ACTION – What You Can Do

- 1) **Advocate for Policy Changes:** This Tool Kit from the National AIDS Housing Coalition can arm you to advocate for housing on both local and national levels, using research findings to demonstrate the link between housing and health for people at risk for or living with HIV.
English: <http://www.nationalaidshousing.org/policytoolkit.htm>
Español: <http://www.nationalaidshousing.org/ToolkitSpanish-Policytoolkit.htm>
- 2) **Donate to Abahlali baseMjondolo’s women’s support group:** Women of Abahlali have just started an income generation program for the survival and independence of women shack dwellers who are at risk of HIV because of their economic dependence on men. The group hopes to purchase a sewing machine and other supplies. Visit [Supporting Abahlali baseMjondolo](#) to donate – specify that the money is for the women’s support group.
- 3) **Stay informed and active:** Subscribe to the [Housing Works AIDS Issues Update](#) to read action alerts in your e-mail in-box and support AIDS housing rights.
- 4) **Help build the movement against gentrification and the destruction of neighborhoods:**
 - Visit the [Right to the City Alliance](#) and click on “Alliance Members” to find a group fighting gentrification near you.
 - [Defend New Orleans Public Housing](#) supports the Coalition to Stop the Demolition in its resistance to displacement of communities in New Orleans, which is increasing HIV risk.
 - Sign on to the [International Declaration in Defense of El Barrio](#) [English and Español] and support Harlem’s Movement for Justice in El Barrio by hosting a fundraiser, launching a support committee, attending a protest, or just expressing your organization’s support.
 - Two more New York City groups to watch: [Develop Don’t Destroy Brooklyn](#), an activist group that uses lawsuits and organizing strategies to defend communities from displacement; and the [New York Is Our Home! Affordable Rent Campaign](#), which fights for affordable housing.

RESOURCES

English Links:

New research from National Housing and HIV/AIDS Research Summit (Press release, March 2008)

Information about two major, long-awaited studies showing that housing for homeless people living with HIV/AIDS not only improves health outcomes but also saves millions in medical costs. Another study found that homeless youth are four to five times more likely to engage in high-risk drug use and more than twice as likely to engage in high-risk sex than youth in housing with some adult supervision.

AIDS and Behavior housing issue (Journal, November 2007)

Special issue of *AIDS and Behavior* with new research on HIV/AIDS and housing. The National AIDS Housing Coalition is offering free copies for a modest shipping charge.

CHAMP Community Forum, "Housing as HIV Prevention" (Summary, November 2007)

Notes and PowerPoint slides from presentations by speakers from Housing Here & Now!, Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, and the New York City AIDS Housing Network.

Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) (Website)

An international human rights organization fighting forced evictions.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness (Report, January 2007)

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force/National Coalition for the Homeless comprehensive report showing that 40% of homeless youth identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

AIDS Housing Alliance/San Francisco (Website)

An advocacy group founded and run by disabled people with HIV/AIDS.

Movement for Justice in El Barrio (MJB) (Article, March 2008)

In *Left Turn* magazine, R J Maccani writes about Movement for Justice in El Barrio, an East Harlem-based organization of immigrants and low-income people of color fighting gentrification in Manhattan's "last frontier."

INDIA: Black Flags in Dharavi (Video, 2007)

15,000 shack dwellers in Mumbai, India, protest the displacement of Dharavi, popularly known as Asia's largest slum, by real estate developers.

Homeless Forums (Website)

A global English-language forum for people who are homeless to share their stories and offer helpful information.

BBC: Tent Cities Spring Up in LA (Video, 2008)

News report on a shantytown in Southern California as people have lost their homes during the mortgage crisis.

Links en Español:

VIH/SIDA y la Vivienda: Una Buena Inversión de Recursos Públicos (Factsheet, 2007)

How housing reduces HIV infection rates and saves money.

VIH/SIDA y la Vivienda: Previendo la Transmisión de VIH (Factsheet, 2007)

How stable housing prevents HIV transmission.

Los de Abajo (Article, March 2008)

This article by Gloria Muñoz Ramírez in the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* discusses the work of Movement for Justice in El Barrio to resist gentrification in New York City.

Bilingual Link:

Forced Evictions in Guatemala (Video, January 2007)

This video by **Rights Action** shows Guatemalan police and army forcibly evicting indigenous families for a mining company.

Solidarity Workshop: How to Do Activist Teach-Ins at a Homeless Shelter

By Jose de Marco, *ACT UP Philadelphia* and *Proyecto SOL* (Latino AIDS Leadership Organization)

ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, has been fighting for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and for human rights-based HIV prevention in Philadelphia for 20 years. Longtime member Jose de Marco says, "People at our meetings – community members living with HIV and our allies – decide what political issues to work on. Sometimes, our campaigns choose us – they come to us and bang on the door." One action de Marco is most proud of? Interrupting John Kerry during a campaign speech in 2004, which helped inspire Kerry to double Bush's global AIDS funding promise from \$15 billion to \$30 billion.

Once ACT UP lays out its basic plans for a campaign, it may plan a demonstration or other type of action. This is where teach-ins come in. ACT UP goes to drug recovery houses, classes for people living with HIV at a local AIDS service organization, and other groups to invite people from the larger community to participate.

Here are de Marco's seven basic steps for a successful teach-in at a homeless shelter:

- 1) **Empathize with shelter residents.** You have to put yourself in other people's shoes. One time when I went to the shelter to do a teach-in, I had on old jeans with holes in them and a dirty T-shirt, and the staff asked me in a really mean way, "Where are you going?" I didn't like the way they talked to me, so I ignored them. It was horrible – almost a confrontation. It really gave me insight into how people are treated there. I was just a person that they thought was homeless. Folks in the shelters aren't treated with respect. They're treated like animals. I could imagine having to kiss feet just to stay there.
- 2) **Be out and proud.** AIDS is a stigmatizing subject in a shelter. A lot of people still think you can get it by taking a shower behind someone. I always tell them that I'm HIV positive right off the bat. They usually respect you



because you did that, and HIV positive people in the room will feel more comfortable. Even if they don't come out, they're thinking, "Here's someone from an AIDS group, and he's being really open about it."

- 3) **Meet people where they're at.** You need to have a great deal of respect for the people there and what they're dealing with. There's a lot going on in their lives. Probably in the back of everyone's mind, they're thinking, "I don't want to be in this shelter anymore." So it can be hard to engage people in conversation. Maybe the last thing they're thinking about is going to an action. But they're probably already angry with the system. You need to find some way to talk about the issue that hits home. If you're not talking about homeless issues, try to relate the issue you're focusing on to something that's happened in their lives. For example, if your demonstration is against higher co-pays for medicines, even if you're homeless, you still have to pay them – and it'll be even harder for you than for people with more resources.
- 4) **Start a real conversation.** Depending on the time constraints, I attempt a popular education approach. I usually have everyone in the room talk a little bit. Sometimes people go off on tangents about unrelated stuff. I try to keep the discussion to the topic at hand. We go around the room and get everyone's opinion on the issue. "Why do you think this is happening? What do you think should be done about it?" You don't want anyone to feel excluded. You need to build a feeling of inclusiveness. Let the group know that you want to hear what everyone has to say. And it's really true, you do. You can always learn something that can make your campaigns stronger. People often come out with some real wisdom.
- 5) **Take people's concerns seriously.** They may think they don't have a right to go to a demonstration. A lot of folks don't have identification, or they may have bench warrants, and they're afraid to come to a demonstration. Tell them that they have every right to complain and every right to be a part of the discourse on the issues. Sometimes you get a full bus. One time we only got about four people to come out. After organizing with ACT UP for more than 11 years, I've learned that if people are getting their checks that day, they don't have time for a demonstration. Make sure the demo isn't set for a day when people need to deal with financial obligations.
- 6) **Consider working on an activist campaign around shelter issues.** As AIDS activists, we need to be part of movements against poverty and homelessness. One issue to organize around would be nutritious food. If the people who ran the shelters realized that the people forced to live there are human beings as well, they'd make sure that the conditions are sanitary, the food isn't rotten, and the facilities are clean. A guard was selling crack at one of the shelters here in Philly. Often in the shelters, there's no Spanish translation, which makes many people feel even more isolated. The people who run the shelters need to talk to people who live there – a community advisory board or oversight committee is needed. And stop treating people like animals. I call it the bootstrap mentality; I've seen it a lot with people in recovery. The people who work at shelters need training. It must be overwhelming if you don't have appropriate training. And the shelters need more money. HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS) funding just isn't there anymore.
- 7) **Keep giving yourself a reality check.** I could end up in a shelter one day. You could. People in shelters probably thought it could never happen to them. I try to remember this when I'm doing a teach-in at a shelter.

Solidarity Project

CHAMP is committed to a solidarity approach in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The purpose of *Solidarity Project* is to provide information on key HIV/AIDS issues that affect people in the United States and around the world. We also provide conversation starters and training exercises in each issue to help spur discussion of hard topics on these issues in our own communities. *Solidarity Project (Proyecto Solidaridad)* is also available in Spanish.

We Want To Hear From You!

We appreciate hearing from you about specific articles and issues of *Solidarity Project*. Your input helps *Solidarity Project* be relevant to our readership while remaining true to CHAMP's mission. To contribute a letter, please email champ@champnetwork.org or write to one of the addresses below. If you'd rather not include your name with your letter, we will respect your confidentiality. But please provide contact information in case we need to get in touch with you for clarification or verification.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Lead Writer: Suzy Subways

Suzy Subways has been writing for HIV/AIDS community publications since 2000. Previously an editor at POZ magazine, she has also written for AIDS Treatment News and A&U, mostly covering the work of AIDS activist movements. She works with the Independent Media Center and writes for the New York City Independent and other Left media outlets. Her social justice activism began in the early 1990s, organizing against the first Gulf War and with the successful ACT UP Philadelphia-led movement for condoms in her high school. She was a founding member of the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM) at the City University of New York (CUNY) from 1996 to 2001. SLAM was a women of color-led radical activist group that fought tuition hikes and the elimination of open admissions at CUNY, and organized youth in New York City to resist police brutality and the prison industrial complex.

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