SAN FRANCISCO HOMELESS ADVOCATES TEAM TO LAUNCH NEW ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR RESOURCE SHARING AND COLLABORATION

Online move designed to help foster closer working relationships, enable forum for policy discussion and timely distribution of information on policy issues

SAN FRANCISCO, January 30, 2007 — A group of local San Francisco homeless advocates have joined forces in a collaborative effort to launch a comprehensive homeless resource website, http://sfhomeless.net , which aims to help foster closer relationships between those working to fight homelessness by providing a forum for policy discussion and promises to speed the dissemination of important and timely information on related policy issues.

David Beall, Executive Director of San Francisco Revival Ministry, Julie Rosenthal of the Homeless Advocacy Project and Wolfram Alderson a member of the Policy and Legislation Committee of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board are teaming to use one of the internet's newest and most powerful online community aids, wiki software, to bring the fight against homelessness to the web. The group hopes the San Francisco wiki can serve as a template for other cities looking to share resources and help the homeless.

Beall left his job as a business analyst in San Francisco's financial district to work full-time for his non-profit, which focuses on getting services to the chronically homeless. Like most other homeless advocates in San Francisco, he relied upon the Bar Association of San Francisco Volunteer Legal Services Program's Homeless Advocacy Project (HAP) Resource Manual, which contains an exhaustive directory of homeless services cross-referenced with dozens of service types, including food distribution, shelters, medical clinics and much more.

The extensive hard copy manual, which was too heavy for Beall to carry around during outreach, inspired him to work with HAP to create an electronic version. After discussing the idea with several other advocates, it became clear the opportunity existed to create a new type of advocate community based on HAP's Manual. The group envisioned a website that would grow into a central point of collaboration and a channel to disseminate all types of information and tools to use in helping homeless persons.

 "The Homeless Advocacy Project has published the Resource Manual for over 15 years, as a public service to the community," said Teresa Friend, Managing Attorney for the Homeless Advocacy Project. "HAP staff is pleased that the Manual will now be online, but also intends to continue to produce a printed version of the Manual, knowing that advocates don't always have immediate and easy access to the internet during times of crisis."

The site, currently in the early stages of development, already has more than 700 separate articles on topics ranging from local drop-in centers, to available health and medical services, to upcoming community events and calendars. Anyone with an interest in learning more or contributing to the site is encouraged to visit: http://sfhomeless.net .

"At the moment the site lists about 700 homeless service agencies and roughly 45 categories of services," Beall explained. "It's great because anyone can click on 'Food' and see all the agencies that are providing some kind of food distribution. Or they can click on 'Glide Memorial' and see all the services they provide. The homeless can use this if they have access to the internet, but more likely it will be case managers and advocates and even curious members of the public who are doing research to help someone.

"Plus, the wiki is community edited, so that whenever there is a change in information or if something needs to be added, anyone in the community is able to make that change instantly. The fact that the site is based on wiki technology allows for the most updated information to be shared in near real-time, rather than relying on annual editions of the HAP manual, or e-mail notices, or word-of-mouth," Beall continued. "We are also planning on using the site to provide documents and other information that would be useful for the homeless and advocate community. The potential is limitless."

"Health care providers see homeless patients in a vulnerable state, and struggle to provide valid and relevant resources to meet their medical, social and daily needs," said Dr. Christine Ma, Assistant Clinical Professor in the UCSF Department of Pediatrics at San Francisco General Hospital and a member of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board. "This challenge exists for all service providers working with homeless clients. Keeping the information updated can be even more challenging. This website allows the resources to be right at the fingertips of all service providers with internet access and will be a useful forum for ongoing discussion on local policy issues impacting the homeless."

The SF Homeless.net site is being hosted by Wikia.com, the leading provider of community resources for building free content on every topic. To date, Wikia users have created and edited more than 400,000 articles on 2,000 topics, which have been translated in 45 languages.

"Building a community around homeless advocacy truly gets to the root of what online collaboration should be all about," said Jimmy Wales, co-founder and chairman of Wikia. "It never ceases to amaze me how people are willing to give themselves to a cause—and it's that passion that drives me to continue my push to free information and technology for the greater good. We fully support the homeless advocates on this project and look forward to helping develop something that can be duplicated by others around the world."

Anyone interested in learning more about ways to get involved can visit: http://sfhomeless.net for more information.