

## Point of View

### Ending Homelessness Profits Business

Joel John Roberts  
Special to the Mirror

National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week is November 16-22, when businesses everywhere should intensify the focus on the crisis of homelessness.

Commerce plays an important role in contributing to our quality of life, so this is an especially good time — in this recent era of Enron, WorldCom and even Martha Stewart — for community and business leaders to accelerate their participation in ending the cycle of homelessness.

We need corporate America's partnership, its ability to develop strategies, its creative thinking, entrepreneurial spirit, capacity to hire employees and its willingness to invest in the community. With the unrestrained support of business, we are infinitely more likely to permanently move people without homes off the streets and into stable and secure lives. The statistics prove it.

Homeless people sleeping on our streets and loitering at our shops and stores are bad for business, and just as bad for the desperate people forced into these humiliating circumstances.

So here are four ways business can marshal their efforts during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week:

**Give** - Increase your support for charity. In the past few years, corporate America has donated only .01 percent of its pre-tax profits to charity. If all of America's businesses increased their giving from .01 percent to .02 percent, a total of \$10 billion, we could end homelessness as we know it in our country. I challenge Big Business to become Bigger Givers in the world of philanthropy. The bottom line will benefit them short term and long.

**Volunteer** - Businesses should empower their employees to volunteer in the community and give them the time and encouragement to make it a reality. Secretary of State Colin Powell led the charge years ago in his effort to mobilize Americans to volunteer. It is now up to this generation of corporate America to pick up General Powell's baton and stay the course.

**Join A Non-Profit Board.** Boards are the backbone for non-profit agencies. We can't operate without them. Former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan made this a priority and started a leadership development program to encourage community membership on non-profit boards. The business community could actually become the foundation of a philanthropic imperative to end homelessness in this generation.

**Donate In-kind Services and Products.** Help an agency print a brochure, gather hygiene kits for people living on the streets, teach people a job skill, collect children's books for homeless kids — these are but a sample of the ways businesses can positively impact our community.

Just one week of mobilizing our efforts around these suggestions could make a profound difference. What if during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, our Southern California business community collectively gave \$1 million to homeless agencies, \$1 million of in-kind donations, deployed 1,000 new volunteers and recruited 100 new non-profit board members. Think of the impact. It's staggering.

When it comes to charity, Apple Computer must Think Different, Ford must act with No Boundaries, Nike must Just Do It, and corporate

America must truly make a difference. Because when homelessness ends, the community benefits and business profits.

Joel John Roberts is the Executive Director of PATH (People Assisting The Homeless), a regional homeless agency with locations throughout Los Angeles County. He is also the Chairman of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Advisory Board.

### **About P.A.T.H.**

Founded in 1984, P.A.T.H. is a non-profit community organization whose mission is to break the cycle of homelessness by empowering homeless people with the tools for self-sufficiency. The agency works towards this goal by providing services that assist homeless people find work, save money, secure housing and empower their lives. Initially a food pantry and 21-bed residence, P.A.T.H. has evolved into a multi-facility organization that provides a comprehensive range of coordinated services for 17,000 homeless individuals throughout Southern California annually.

Housing facilities are located in Los Angeles at the Regional Homeless Center in Hollywood and at the West Los Angeles office (2346 Cotner Avenue). P.A.T.H. also operates five job centers in South Central Los Angeles, West Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Monica and the Antelope Valley.

Among its services are Transitional and Affordable Housing, Outreach and Referrals, Employment Assistance Education and Job Training, Health Services Supportive Social Services.

Its programs include: PATHMall: A model collaboration of 19 community and government

social services organizations, all housed in one shopping mall-like setting that provide a comprehensive range of services and resources to the homeless population; PATHFinders Job Centers: Provides job readiness and job search assistance with access to job listings, career counseling, fax, telephone and computer equipment. Employment centers located in West Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Hollywood, Antelope Valley and South-Central Los Angeles; PATHAcademy Job Training Centers: Job skills training program that provides four eight-week classes in one of four career areas followed by a four-week internship for on-the-job experience; PATHWays Housing: Transitional housing and supportive services for a total of 130 men, women, families and homeless with special needs at facilities in Hollywood, West Los Angeles and the mid-city area. Includes the Rhonda Fleming Family Center, P.A.T.H. Women's Center and P.A.T.H. Cares Center; PATHVillas: Affordable housing to formerly homeless families in Los Angeles and Inglewood; PATHHealth Clinic: Addresses immediate needs, preventative care and health promotions for the homeless community; Street Outreach: Case managers travel in vans and on foot to encourage homeless people on the streets and in encampments to utilize available services and resources. Outreach services in Beverly Hills, Hawthorne, Hollywood, Inglewood, Los Angeles and West Hollywood; PATHAlumni Club: Open to all P.A.T.H. graduates, the club provides once homeless individuals access to supportive services such as workshops, employment resources and special quarterly events; PATHAccess Center: The Center provides initial intake and assessment of new and current clients. It also serves as the main hub for P.A.T.H. internal and external referrals to programs and agencies.

For more information visit [www.epath.org](http://www.epath.org)