



She ensures the homeless are remembered

Bonnie Briggs, Local Hero

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Who: Bonnie Briggs, 54.

What: The Homeless Memorial, a plaque and a website with the names of the more than 500 street people who have died in this city since 1985. A service is held at the memorial every month.

When: Briggs is a social activist who became involved with housing matters in 1987. She started working on The Homeless Memorial in 1996.

Where: Toronto's mean streets. The plaque is at The Church of the Holy Trinity, 10 Trinity Square, by the Eaton Centre.

Why: Because she knows what it's like. Briggs and her husband, Kerre, were homeless for about two years, starting in 1987. The homeless are part of the family of human beings and deserve to be remembered when they die, she says, explaining the thinking behind the memorial.

How: After Briggs and her husband got off the streets, she studied community work at George Brown College and developed her idea for the memorial, which she originally hoped it would be at City Hall. These days, she maintains The Homeless Memorial website, writes poetry about social issues, is active with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and is on the steering board of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, which advocates for the homeless.

Quote: "People have it backwards about the homeless. They think because you're a drunk or on drugs you're on the street. But it's the street that drives you to it. You drink or do drugs to forget the pain of being there."

Success so far: The plaque remembering the homeless who died and the monthly service, attended by anywhere from 20 to 50 people. And the many ways Briggs has contributed to a growing awareness of the homeless.

Learn more: The Homeless Memorial website is geocities.com/hommem. Briggs' home page is geocities.com/ronniebca. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee site is tdrc.net. Briggs and her husband are the subject of a chapter in the book *Dying for a Home* by street nurse and activist Cathy Crowe.