

Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Autumn 2005

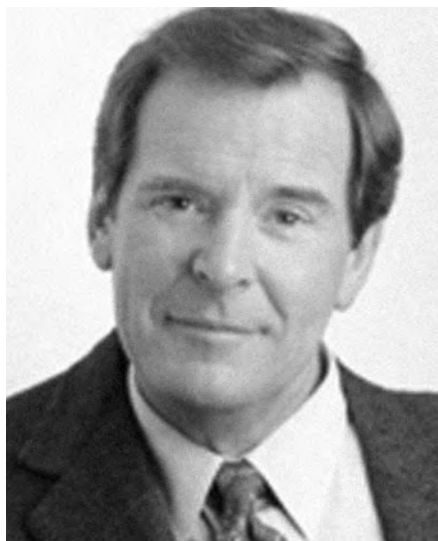
Giving
Thanks
&
Giving Back



Remembering our Friend Peter Jennings

On September 20, 2005, family, friends, and colleagues celebrated the life of Peter Jennings at Carnegie Hall. This very special event included these remarks from Mary Brosnahan Sullivan, who spoke about Peter's inspirational commitment to homeless people.

When Kayce Jennings called and asked me to speak at Peter's memorial, she told me about an encounter she had recently. She was sitting on a bench in Central Park and the man sitting near her leaned over to offer her condolences on Peter's death. She said "thank you" and the man responded by saying, "You don't recognize me, do you?" "No," she said. "I don't." He said, "It's me, Frank." And she said, "Oh." He said, "You still don't recognize me, do you?" "I'm really sorry, but no...I don't." He told her that he was homeless and she probably didn't recognize him, because he had cleaned himself up recently, gotten a shave. Then she knew instantly who he was – he lives on a bench over near their apartment. Frank went on to tell her how sad it was that Peter had died, because it meant so much to him and the other homeless people in the park that Peter would often stop and ask them how they



He would finish his broadcast and dash across town to jump in a van to deliver hot meals to people living on the streets. There is so much to be said about Peter's amazing style and ease and sly sense of humor. But, I guess the quality that will always stay with me is his sincerity.

were doing – and actually listen to what was happening in their lives.

Kayce has had a number of homeless people stop her since Peter died, telling her how sorry they are for her loss. Many of us had a wonderful friend in Peter Jennings. What most people don't realize is that Peter was a great friend to our homeless neighbors.

Peter had tremendous skills which brought him fame as a journalist – his writing, editing, reporting. But Peter was also committed to concrete action. Especially, when he saw an injustice. He knew that there are some things worth fighting for. And, even though his profession precluded him from perhaps engaging in a battle directly, he made sure those on the front lines had the resources they need. Peter poured tremendous time and passion

into ArtWalk, an annual Coalition event that Peter founded and chaired. Through ArtWalk he helped raise millions of dollars for meals, housing, job training for homeless men and women, and camps and after-school programs for homeless children.

But long before ArtWalk, I got to know Peter mostly from the dozens of times he came out to volunteer on our mobile feeding program. He would finish his broadcast and dash across town to jump in a van to deliver hot meals to people living on the streets. There is so much to be said about Peter's amazing style and ease and sly sense of humor. But, I guess the quality that will always stay with me is his sincerity. And I don't mean "sincere" in a sentimental or maudlin way, but a pure directness that was so refreshing and surprising to people meeting him for the first time.

You can only imagine the look of shock and then tremendous gratitude in people's faces as he handed them a container of hot stew or a carton of milk. They just simply could not believe that someone so important cared enough about them to come out on a bitterly cold night – or on a steamy summer evening to give them their dinner.

I also admired Peter, because he understood that homeless people are, first and foremost, people. And was always eager to hear their stories. I introduced him to Elizabeth, a small bird of a woman, originally from India and he asked her where she stayed right before she wound up on a cot in a church basement. She explained that her "friends" had allowed her to sleep on their kitchen table for \$300 a month. But her money ran out.

Or at the end of a long food run, we would bring dozens of meals to the men living in the last few flophouses on the Bowery. Our feeding program director remembers having to practically drag him away from the table, where the men had sat down to eat, after about 20 minutes, because he was engaged so

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Spotlight on the Board: Terry Andreas

By Michelle Gerber

Terry Andreas had always been concerned with social issues both at home and abroad. Through her work in environmental education, she has become intimately familiar with countries such as Kenya, Costa Rica and Mexico.

However, as Terry started thinking about the issues plaguing her own community, her desire to help took on a sense of urgency. Here in New York, where she and her husband raised four children, the plight of hungry and homeless men, women and families

Studies, an undergraduate program that brings students together with communities around the world to collaborate on solving environmental problems. As its name implies, the School for Field Studies uses experiential learning techniques – students are out in the field actually performing scientific environmental research. Terry likens this kind of education program to First Step, the Coalition’s job training program for homeless and low-income women. First Step brings real world experience to women who participate in the program through hands-on computer training, mock interviews and many other

practical lessons on the world of work.

Another important component of First Step – the internship – allows the women to enter the workplace with the full support of the program, as well as mentors and continued training. “Many schools in this country don’t teach the most basic financial skills,” Terry explains.

“Without adequate role

models, many people do not know the basics of how to balance a checkbook, let alone apply for a mortgage.” The First Step program helps to fill this gap by giving women the training and education they need to participate in the workforce and achieve stability and independence.

Terry’s reflections on the Coalition’s clientele convey her commitment to our mission. “The homeless are no different than you and I,” she says. “They look just like us. Many have simply hit a hard time that led them down this difficult road.” The Coalition is fortunate indeed to have compassionate people like Terry who volunteer to help homeless people and serve on its Board of Directors.



Here in New York, where she and her husband raised four children, the plight of hungry and homeless men, women and families inspired her to work with Coalition for the Homeless.

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She first became involved serving hot food to people on the streets, and eventually joined the Board in 1996.

Terry is passionate about education. She serves as a member of the Boston University Board of Trustees, and founder of the School for Field

completely and effortlessly with them.

He also noticed the kids. I remember once going out on the feeding program, in the middle of summer – it was nearly 8 o’clock, and still not yet dark and we pulled up to feed a crowd down by housing court, near Chinatown. It’s a particularly challenging site, because there’s an entrenched encampment of homeless men and then a whole group of Chinese grandmothers, who come out with their grandkids. There is such tension between the two groups, we have to keep two separate lines. Anyway, there was this adorable little boy wearing a Yankee’s cap, 2 sizes too big – couldn’t have been more than 6 or 7 years old. Peter leaned down and asked, “Are you a Yankee’s fan?” And the kid said, “Yeah.” Peter said, “My wife is at home right now, watching the METS.” The boy took his meal and said, without missing a beat, “You need to find a better woman.”

Peter laughed and replied, “There are none.”

You know a person is truly extraordinary because they can inspire us just by their presence. Maybe today, as we head to our offices, or later tonight as we make our way home, we can try to see the world a bit more like Peter did. There are literally thousands and thousands of homeless people living on our streets, just in New York City alone. We only have to slow down a bit to see them. And maybe then we can find our own unique way to acknowledge them and reach a hand to help.

Thank you Peter.

Mary Brosnahan Sullivan
Executive Director

Giving Thanks & Giving Back

By Joshua Klinski

Everyday the staff at Coalition for the Homeless hears amazing stories of tragedy, hardship, courage, and perseverance. Our waiting room is filled with working parents trying to house their families, mothers fleeing domestic violence, senior citizens unable to keep up with rising rents, people facing evictions, and indeed even children. One of our greatest joys comes from helping our clients fulfill their dreams of having a home of their own. Each year the Coalition secures housing for thousands of New Yorkers through one-on-one assistance, rent supplements, supportive housing, and our successful efforts to expand affordable housing programs. Often

pleased to share it with you.

James, a fifty seven year old man, immigrated to the United States from Japan in 1971. His position with a Japanese-based marketing firm brought him to New York City, and in 1980 he started his own business. By all accounts he considered himself physi-

lapsed in his Queens apartment. "At the last moment, before I went unconscious, I called the police," he remembers. "If I didn't call someone I would have died." James fell into a coma and was taken immediately to a hospital, where he woke up two weeks later, and spent a long seven weeks recuperating.

Coalition for the Homeless "helped James file an appeal of the Social Security de
Our clients need help navigating the challenges they encounter, and sometimes they're not even aware



our clients come back months later to tell us that their lives have continued to improve, that they only needed a safe, stable living situation to start getting back on track. One particularly thankful client, James, shared his extraordinary story with me recently, and I'm very

cally healthy, so he never felt a strong need to visit doctors for periodic check-ups. What he didn't know was that his kidneys were slowly breaking down.

By 1985, after months of what he now realizes were warning signs of impending kidney failure, James col-

His recovery, which included dialysis three times a week, was rocky at first, and costly since he had not paid his health insurance premiums for a few months. However, that same year James began working for another company, and things began to look up. In 1987 he moved into an apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and in 1991 he underwent a kidney transplant.

By the late 1990's James, an entrepreneur at heart, was once again working for himself, but his health was fragile. He didn't have health insurance, so all medical and prescription expenses were paid for out of his pocket – roughly \$2000 each month. "I got a second kidney and a second chance at life," he explains, "but no insurance to pay for it." These costs were hefty given his \$50,000 salary, and forced him to change his lifestyle. First he gave up his apartment and moved back to Queens into a more modest one. Soon after he began working out of his home.

Slowly his business began to fail, and by 2002 he was at the end of his rope. No longer able to afford his rent

due to his medical expenses, James fell into arrears and was evicted from his home. With one bag he left his apartment for good, giving up most of his clothing and all of his furniture. The one saving grace was Medicaid benefits, which allowed him to access his much needed medication.

blocks to get to the HRA office in Harlem to apply for food stamps,” he recalls. However, it was when his application for Social Security disability benefits was rejected that he came to Coalition for the Homeless looking for help.

James initially met with our Crisis Intervention staff, who referred him to

Our clients need help navigating the various bureaucracies they encounter, and sometimes they’re not even aware that they qualify for benefits that could help them get out of the shelter.”

Given James’ traumatic experiences over the years, Rich also encouraged him to seek counseling. “I could sense that he was depressed – who wouldn’t be if they became homeless – and felt he would greatly benefit from speaking with a counselor. I’m happy to report that he’s been meeting with a psychologist for over a year now and, as he would say, his ‘spirits have improved.’”

Earlier this year, the Coalition arranged for James to leave the shelter system and enter a supportive housing facility in Manhattan that has on-site social services. So thankful for the Coalition’s hard work and dedication, James decided to give back by volunteering at the office three times a week, helping Rich and other Coalition staff with filing and paperwork. “Like all of CAP’s clients, James wants to work and support himself,” says Rich, “but right now he can’t due to his disabilities.”

denial and began developing his medical evidence for his appeal hearing.
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that they qualify for benefits that could help them get out of the shelter.”

For the next year James lived in illegal boarding houses, being charged approximately \$100 a week for a bed. He moved from one to another, always looking for a cheaper deal given his quickly dwindling finances. In August 2003, the money ran out and James hit what most would consider rock bottom – he began sleeping in a public park in Queens.

“One day a nice police officer came up to me,” he recounts. “I was sitting on a bench reading Harvard Business Review. He understood that I was living in the park, and he gave me four dollars out of his own pocket and told me how to get to the Bellevue men’s shelter.” That day James traveled to Bellevue, the shelter intake facility for homeless adult single men in New York City.

Getting acclimated to the shelter system was difficult, and over time James developed more illnesses, including a tumor and gout. He also had his fair share of difficulty gaining access to quality healthcare, food stamps, and public assistance. “One day I walked over 100

Rich Lombino, the Director of the Client Advocacy Program (CAP). Created in 2000, CAP assists homeless, disabled single adults who have been residing in New York City’s municipal shelter system for approximately one year or more. CAP’s main goals are to help clients secure Social Security disability benefits

“I want to make it big,”
James says, “so someday I can write a big check
to the Coalition for all they’ve done for me.”

to which they are entitled, and to transition them out of the homeless shelter and into supportive housing.

“James had no support system, which is a main reason why many of our clients are in their current situations,” explains Rich. “We helped him file an appeal of the Social Security denial and began developing his medical evidence for his appeal hearing.

Even so, James is contributing in his own helpful way.

For the long term, James has hopes of returning full-time to the workforce. “I want to make it big,” he says, “so someday I can write a big check to the Coalition for all they’ve done for me.” We are just pleased that we could help James get back on his feet again, and grateful for his volunteer efforts.

The Coalition Says Thanks

As we approach the coldest winter months, our hearts are warmed by the generosity of government officials and elected representatives who have worked with the Coalition over the last year to help bring new and expanded services to homeless New Yorkers as well as men, women and children at risk of losing their homes. We don't always agree with elected officials on every policy decision, but we do find common ground where we can work together toward shared goals.

Coalition for the Homeless works each year with the NYC Council, the NYS Legislature, our Congressional representatives and government agencies at every level to secure funding to help pay for services like eviction prevention grants, emergency food, rental assistance, outreach and benefits counseling, etc. In addition, we often advocate for

in rent-regulated types of housing, thereby helping them to retain their housing in the face of rising rents. Landlords receive tax abatements in the amount of the foregone rent.

Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy with the Coalition said people with disabilities are already signing up for the program. "We are thrilled that after more than two decades of advocacy, we succeeded in winning this important benefit, and we greatly appreciate the efforts of everyone in the Bloomberg Administration, the State Legislature, and the City Council who helped make this happen. Everyone had to compromise – Assemblymembers Stringer and Grannis, Senators Golden and Padavan, the advocates, and Mayor Bloomberg – and now we have a law that will help countless vulnerable tenants living with disabilities."

Coalition also anticipates the announcement of a third New York/New York agreement between New York City and State to provide 9,000 units of supportive housing, most for homeless mentally ill New Yorkers. After years of advocating for such an agreement, we will be very thankful to see one take effect.

Among those we wish to thank (we haven't space to mention everyone, including the hard working "staff" behind the scenes), are Speaker Sheldon Silver, Speaker Gifford Miller; Assemblymembers Deborah Glick, Pete Grannis, Vito Lopez, Peter Rivera, and Scott Stringer; Senators Thomas Duane, Martin Golden, Liz Krueger, Frank Padavan, David Paterson, and Eric Schneiderman; Councilmembers Maria Baez, Lew Fidler, Alan Gerson, Melinda Katz, Margarita Lopez, Annabel Palma, Christine Quinn, and Joel Rivera; and

"Coalition for the Homeless is enormously grateful to the New York City Council and the New York State Assembly for, once again, showing leadership by protecting vital programs that help homeless and at-risk New Yorkers," said Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst.

larger programs to help address homelessness, whether through supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illnesses, or protecting more people from losing their apartments due to rising rents, or increasing the city's efforts to build affordable housing.

This has been an especially fruitful year. In partnership with government officials and in alliance with our colleague organizations such as Tenants & Neighbors, Center for the Independence of the Disabled – New York, The Legal Aid Society, and many more, we succeeded in expanding a very important housing preservation program – the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program – to include people with disabilities (DRIE). The program freezes rents above one-third of income for low-income disabled tenants living

In addition to winning DRIE, the Coalition has seen some important gains in the areas of homelessness legislation (NYC homeless death reporting requirement) as well as city and state funding for affordable and supportive housing (Battery Park City fund – special thanks to William C. Thompson); continuation and expansion of our own mobile feeding, client advocacy, crisis intervention, and after-school programs; funding for our new headquarters; and important new resources for sheltering LGBT youth. We also led the fight with lawmakers in Albany to prevent the wholesale block granting of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families allocation to local counties, thereby preserving important programs and benefits for low-income families. As this newsletter goes to print, the

Executive Director, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities Matthew Sapolin, Commissioner of Finance Martha Stark, and HPD Commissioner Shaun Donovan; and NYC Comptroller William C. Thompson.

The Coalition is very happy to have won financial support from the City Council to help expand its mobile feeding program to several new locations in the Bronx, update our vans, expand our after-school programming, and help complete the work on our new headquarters. "Speaker Miller's leadership and commitment in preserving and expanding desperately needed services for New York's homeless is unmatched. On behalf of all the families and individuals we serve, we extend our heartfelt thanks," said Dan Tietz, Deputy Executive Director for Operations at the Coalition.

11th Annual ARTWALK NY

By Shannon Hedrick

Artists and art lovers filled the renowned Sotheby's auction house on Monday, October 17, 2005 for the annual ARTWALK NY, benefiting Coalition for the Homeless. The event was a huge success, and raised over \$600,000, all of which will support the Coalition's network of direct service programs over the coming year. While this year's ceremony honored contemporary artist Brice Marden, a very special tribute was also paid to Peter Jennings, who founded ARTWALK NY eleven years ago, hosted the event each year, and showed tremendous dedication to helping homeless New Yorkers through hands on action. Coalition supporters Candice Bergen and Donald B. Marron graciously stepped in and co-chaired the event this year. Both gave very touching remarks about how much we all will miss Peter.

The evening kicked off with a cocktail reception and silent auction featuring works by Yoko Ono, Louise Bourgeois, Jeff Koons, and Cindy Sherman, and was fol-

lowed by an enthralling live auction, with Sotheby's own Jamie Niven at the podium. Audience members quickly outbid one another over works by Brice Marden, Ed Ruscha, Jenny Holzer, and Richard Avedon, as well as luxury experiences including a trip to South Africa for two and pampering stays at W Hotels. The live auction culminated with bids to send homeless children to summer camp, sponsor homeless women to receive job training, and monthly support of our mobile feeding program.

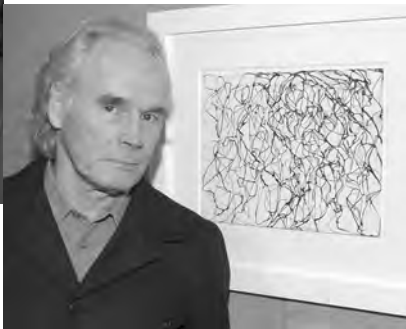
Our deepest gratitude to all of ARTWALK NY's sponsors, patrons, supporters, committee members, co-chairs, volunteers, and participating artists for demonstrating their concern and compassion for homeless New Yorkers.



Kayce Freed Jennings
and Candice Bergen



Donald B. Marron, Beth Rudin
DeWoody, and Marshall Rose



Brice Marden

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ARTWALK NY

A Coalition Client says Thank You

*To the entire Coalition for the
Homeless family,*

*I've been meaning to send you
all a card for quite some time.
Although I thanked you in person
for your efforts to find me a home,
I wanted to find a card to
remind you all of not just my
appreciation for what you did for
me, but for every person who walks
through your doors. I'm sure
they would express the same senti-
ment that I'm writing to you now.*

*Take care of yourselves and
continue to fight for what you
believe to be just.*

Peace and Blessings,

Sylvia



The holidays are here!

Nearly 13,000 children are spending this holiday season in homeless shelters throughout New York City

But you can support the Coalition's efforts to help homeless children and families enjoy the holidays by donating toys and other gifts.

For more information, please contact Joshua Klinski at 212.776.2002 or jklinski@cftthomeless.org.