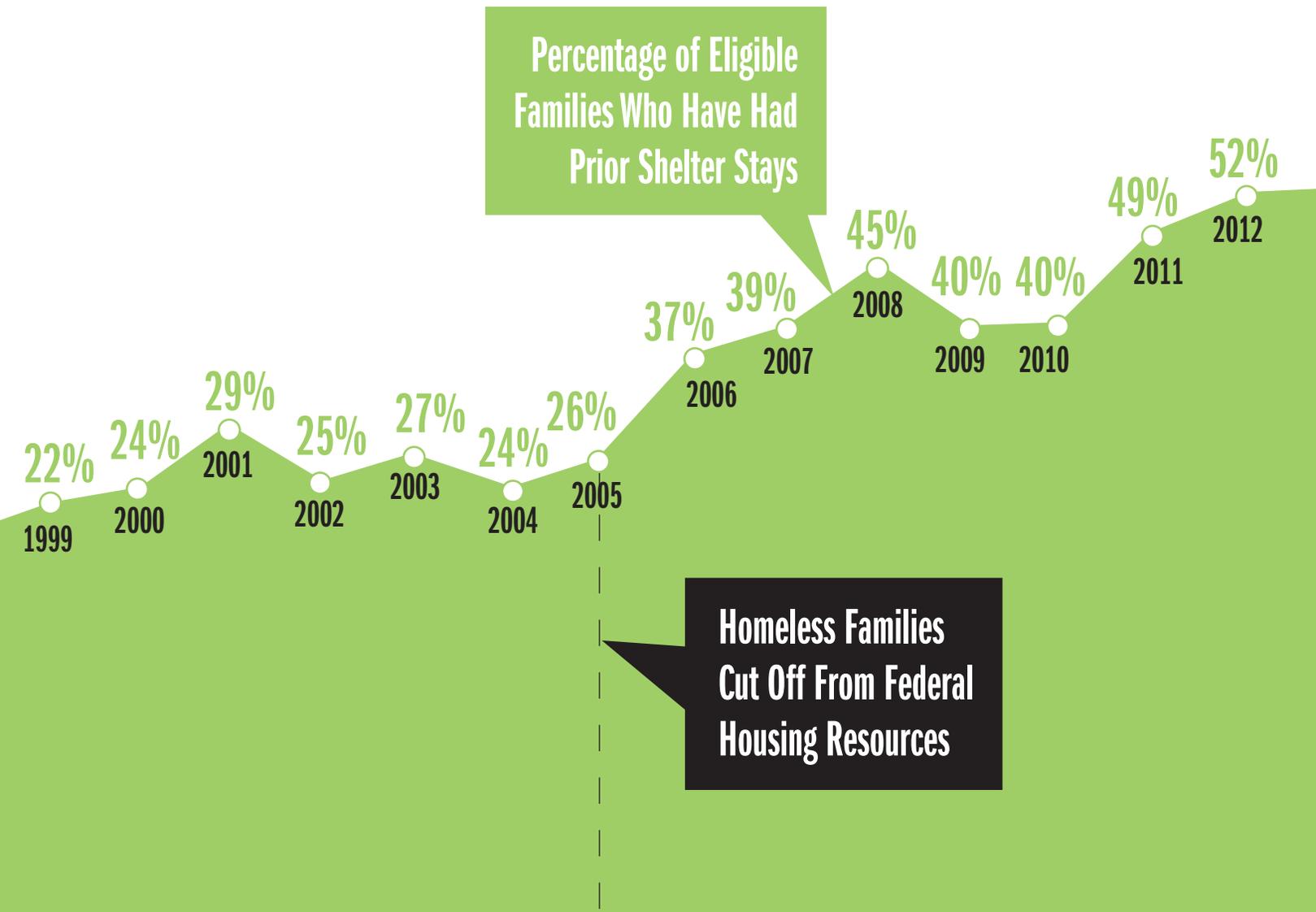


Safety Net

The newsletter of the Coalition for the Homeless

Spring 2012

The Revolving Door Into Shelter



Remembering Larry

By Tim Campbell,
Director of Programs

Larry had been coming to the Coalition for over ten years before he passed away in December. A short, stocky man, built a bit like a fire hydrant with the voice of a bullhorn, he was a colorful character to say the least.

Over the last decade we helped Larry get the disability benefits he needed and deserved. We helped get him into the shelter he had the right to – only to lose the shelter. We helped him get into housing – only to lose the housing. In fact, we did all these things many times. See, in addition to severe mental health and medical issues, Larry had an unrelenting addiction to alcohol, and needless to say, things could get messy with Larry.

This was a man who spent years and years off and on the streets, who had been kicked out of countless drop-in centers, and someone who, undoubtedly, was in incredible emotional pain.

One of the most vivid memories I have of Larry was one of the most heartbreaking images I've ever witnessed. It's the vision of this hard man, broken down after years of homelessness, coming into our office to tell us a story of having passed out one night on the subway, only to wake up to find a group of kids had set him on fire. Despite the incredibly inhumane cruelty of being set on

instead of a shelter bed, or a back alley, or a seat on the train. But the fact is there are far too many people and far too many places that gave up on Larry a long time ago.

But that never happened at the Coalition. It means everything to me that I work in a place that never gave up on Larry. And for that I thank our Grand Central Food Program for continuing to feed him while he lived on the

I'm writing about Larry today because, aside from missing him and believing that he should be remembered, we also believe that he deserved better than the life he got. Above all else, he deserved a home...

fire in his sleep simply because he was homeless, Larry sadly blamed himself for being in that position. He didn't seem to share our disgust that someone could disconnect so entirely from the fact that he was a human being.

But he wasn't *just* a human being. Larry was a good and decent man who could be insightful, honest, gentle and kind. Make no mistake, when Larry was sober he was one of the most pleasant people you'd want to talk to, and like so many of our street homeless clients, he was a survivor in every sense of the word. There were often times that he fought valiantly for his independence and his sobriety only to ultimately lose the struggle of maintaining them.

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streets; our security, front desk and maintenance staff for being patient and kind to him on his not so good days; our Crisis staff for being there for him whenever he asked them to be; and especially our CAP staff who served him so faithfully, and were still at it, working on housing for him right up to the end of his life.

In spite of an intensely committed and capable staff, the reality is that we do not always get the results that we hope for, or more importantly, the results that the people we serve would hope for themselves. However, as Larry could attest to, we will not stop caring; we will not stop serving; and we will not give up. It happens in big and small ways every day in each and every one of our programs. It is what the Coalition is all about and we keep going because, as we all know, there are far too many people like Larry still out there who deserve better.

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Page 7:

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New Yorkers Open Their Hearts This Holiday Season

By Marisa Butler

This past December, thousands of New Yorkers came together to make the holiday season a little brighter for homeless children across the city. Deliveries of hundreds of action figures, dolls, stuffed animals, games and more came in each day provided by drives from over 35 businesses and community organizations. In total, we collected over 1,500 toys.

A most inspired gift came from an eight year old girl named Francesca. After saving her own money and getting her friends and family to do the same, she was able to purchase an entire truck-full of toys – over \$800 worth!

The drive culminated in an exciting holiday carnival held at the UFT headquarters. Nearly 200 children enjoyed games, food, dancing to tunes played by a DJ, face painting, gift bags, toys and a special visit from Santa's favorite helper, Mr. G from Pix 11! Then after the party, our vans distributed the remaining toys to family shelters throughout the boroughs.

We'd like to extend a special thanks to companies and groups that hosted drives, special events, wrapped gifts or volunteered at our carnival, including the UFT, AIG, Macy's, New York Life, Lightyear Capital, X-mental, Rainbow Media Holding, Forbes, The New York Economic Development Corporation and Golden Strings of Fate.

We'd also like to thank all of those who hosted fundraisers on behalf of the Coalition, especially IR Magazine and Treasure&Bond.



Dear Santa,

Thank you for gifts, prizes, food and face painting you guys have given me. Thank you for making my holidays super and extra special for me and my family.

Elio



Eight-year-old Francesca delivering her toys.

Mayor Bloomberg's Revolving Door of Homelessness

By Giselle Routhier

Last night, more than 43,000 homeless men, women and children went to sleep in New York City municipal shelters, including an all-time record 17,000 children. For many of them, it wasn't their first trip through the shelter system. Almost four years out of the 2008 economic collapse, there are still lingering economic factors contributing to record homelessness, like the worsening housing affordability crunch. But the precipitous rise in New York City homelessness began even before the economic crisis and continues to rise more severely now due to the disastrous policy decisions made by the Bloomberg administration.

Up until 2005 and under Mayors Koch, Dinkins and Giuliani, the City's main resource for combating homelessness was to prioritize homeless individuals and families for federal housing programs, such as public housing and Section 8 rental vouchers. For decades, these resources had been a proven, effective way to move families out of shelter and keep them stably housed. The federal housing programs were also cheaper for New York taxpayers, who pay most of the bill for the \$36,000 annual cost to shelter a homeless family.

However, in 2005, Mayor Bloomberg broke from this longstanding and successful policy and cut off homeless families from receiving these valuable resources. Instead, homeless households were given City-funded short-term rental subsidies, the latest of which was called "Advantage." These time-limited subsidies have proven wasteful and ineffective, with more than one of every three formerly-homeless families returning to seek shelter after their subsidies ended.

In continuing along the trajectory of bad to worse, the Bloomberg administration decided to terminate the Advantage program in March 2011, and refused to replace it with the successful federal programs. Now, for the first time since modern homelessness began, there is no housing assistance in place to help homeless families move from shelter to permanent housing. And compounding the problem, the City also tried to cut off Advantage subsidies for thousands of families who had already left shelter for

case, but in the meantime, 8,000 formerly-homeless families are now at risk of flooding the already bursting shelter system.

Advantage Recidivism

Although the Advantage program has ended, its failures continue to cause immeasurable harm to children and families, and to feed record homelessness. New data have cast a light onto the increasing problem of Advantage families returning to shelter. Four years after the start of the Advantage program,

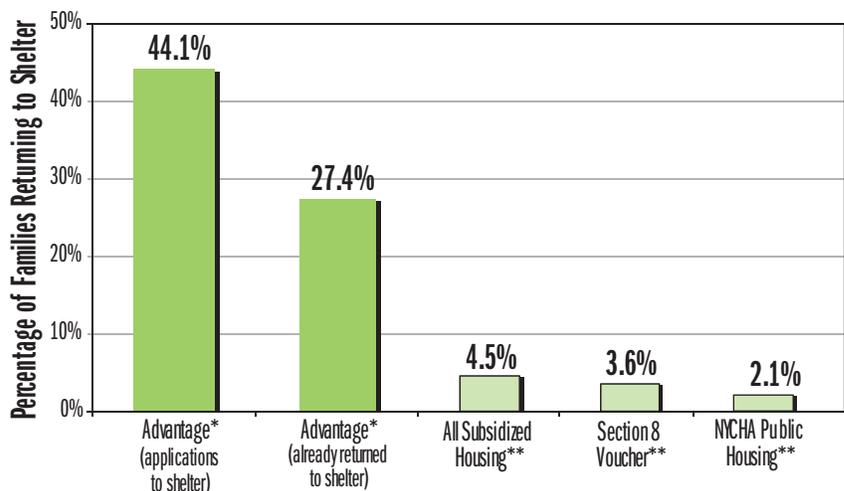
...the precipitous rise in New York City homelessness began even before the economic crisis and continues to rise more severely now due to the disastrous policy decisions made by the Bloomberg administration.

apartments. Fortunately, due to a legal challenge by the Legal Aid Society, the City was required to continue making rental payments for existing Advantage tenants until February 2012, when a protective court order was lifted. The plaintiffs are currently appealing the

more than 3,100 Advantage families have returned to shelter at a cost of at least \$106 million to taxpayers. These 3,100 families make up over 27 percent of all families no longer receiving Advantage rental assistance.

In comparison to the shelter

Rate of Return to Shelter for Time-Limited and Non-Limited Housing Subsidies



*Advantage data refers to share of all Advantage families without rental assistance as of 11/1/2011

**Refers to families who exited shelter from 1994 to 2001

Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, and Vera Institute, "Understanding Family Homelessness" (2005)

return rates associated with permanent housing resources, these numbers are astronomical. A 2005 study of homeless families in New York found that only 3.6 percent of families who received a Section 8 voucher returned to shelter and only 2.1 percent of families who moved into public housing returned. All in all, the Advantage shelter return rate is more than six times that of long-term subsidized housing.

The reason behind this is simple math. According to City data, the average rent for an Advantage

apartment was \$1,065. Working families that received Advantage made an average of \$9.50 an hour and worked 32 hours per week. This comes to roughly \$1,200 a month in income—nowhere near enough to cover the full rent after the subsidy ended.

The sharp rise in Advantage families returning to shelters has been a major contributing factor to current record homelessness.

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Furthermore, a significant portion of Advantage households receive disability benefits as their only source of income. Often, this amounts to little more than \$700 a month. While these households were originally scheduled to transition to Section 8 rental vouchers

after one or two years, the City only kept that promise for a small portion of those disabled tenants. Of the 8,000 remaining Advantage tenants today, roughly 20 percent are on fixed incomes.

Recidivism Contributing to Record Homelessness

The sharp rise in Advantage families returning to shelters has been a major contributing factor to current record homelessness. Before homeless households were cut off from federal housing assistance in 2005,

around 25 percent of all families entering shelter had experienced homelessness at least once before. As of late 2011, the rate had more than doubled to 52 percent. **In other words, today more than half of all families entering shelter have been homeless before!**

The consequences of this are apparent in the marked increase in the family shelter population since 2005, even during years when the economy was growing and unemployment was low. The number of families entering shelter reached new record levels almost every year

since then. Had the shelter return rate remained constant at 25 percent, family shelter entrants would have increased only in 2009 and 2010, consistent with the prevailing economic climate.

Moreover, the 2005 shift to providing homeless families with short-term rental subsidies has cost New York taxpayers hundreds of millions in avoidable shelter costs. If from 2005 to 2012 the shelter return rate had remained at 25 percent of all families entering the shelter system, the City would have saved \$448 million dollars over the course of six years, or an average of \$74.7 million each year. And most important of all, thousands of children and families would have been spared the hardships of homelessness.

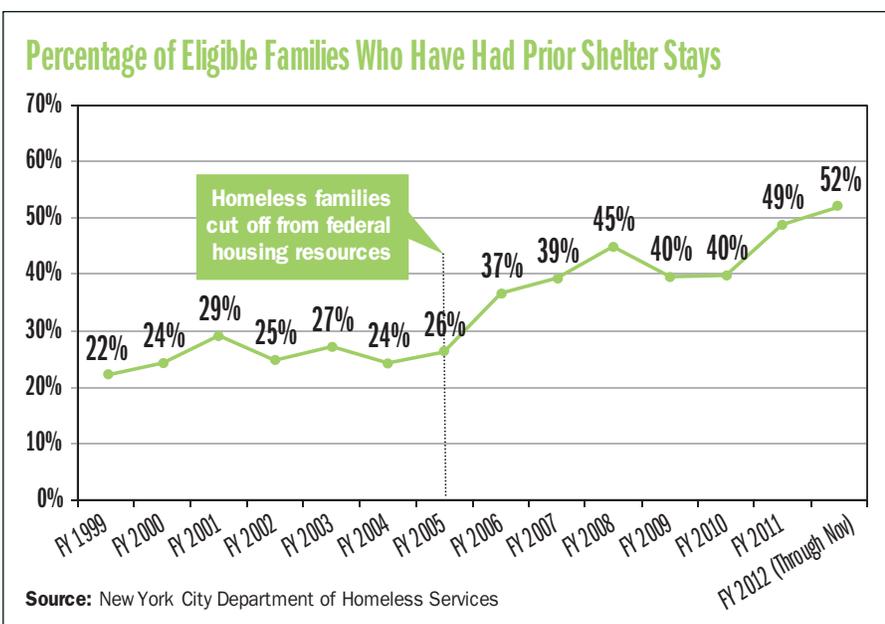
Moving Forward

The sad result, if the Bloomberg administration doesn't change course immediately, will be ever more homeless families languishing in shelters for longer periods of time with no way out. Even more tragically, thousands of families will continue to experience multiple episodes of homelessness, with thousands of children bearing the worst consequences of this instability.

The City can and should begin to address this crisis by 1) immediately targeting one in three federal housing resources to homeless families; and 2) creating a new and improved local rental assistance program modeled on the proven Section 8 voucher program.

The effects of Mayor Bloomberg's post-2005 homeless policy decisions have been catastrophic. The number of families experiencing multiple episodes of homelessness has skyrocketed and has been a main factor fueling record homelessness. This has resulted in millions of wasted taxpayer dollars and immeasurable suffering for tens of thousands of children.

Read our full Briefing Paper at www.coalitionforthehomeless.org



Shelter Residents Take Charge Through the Coalition's Client Advocacy Group

By Sarah Murphy

Every other Tuesday roughly 30 men and women from New York's single adult shelters gather at the Coalition to participate in our Client Advocacy Group (CAG). Formed nearly two decades ago to help organize community boards of people living in homeless shelters, CAG has grown into a multi-faceted program based on advocacy, education, empowerment and socialization.

Each CAG meeting is facilitated by our Shelter Specialist and former CAG member, David Obele. He leads the group in a discussion about topics relevant to the members' needs, such as DHS policies and procedures, voting rights, and more personal concerns, like ways to cope with the embarrassment and guilt that often come with being homeless. Having known what it is like to live in a shelter himself, David is able to get members to open up and focus on how they can make their lives better.

The group also goes over issues that have arisen in the shelters. David calls CAG his "eyes and ears." As the designated shelter monitor, the Coalition is responsible for making sure 68 shelters are up to code, and as David put it, "We can't be everywhere at one time, so we depend on

CAG not only to tell us how things are going, but to go back to the shelters and help us negotiate with shelter staff and get things fixed."

We hear a host of concerns. Some of the members have been wrongly threatened with eviction from the shelter. Others tell us that they have been placed in a shelter inappropriately, or forced to enter a drug treatment program when they are in fact sober. Still more come with complaints about shelter cleanliness, extreme

settled, they spend the remainder of the meeting eating dinner and socializing. "We want to let our CAG members know that they aren't alone," David acknowledges. "There is so much isolation in being homeless. This time allows people to realize they aren't the only ones who have had hardships. That there are others like me."

Outside of the meetings, CAG plays a central role in the Coalition's advocacy efforts. In addition to heading shelter community

Formed nearly two decades ago to help organize community boards of people living in homeless shelters, CAG has grown into a multi-faceted program based on advocacy, education, empowerment and socialization.



temperatures, crime and poor staff treatment. David coaches them on ways to deal with these problems, but more importantly, the roundtable style of the session gives other CAG members the chance to share how they have dealt with similar situations in their shelters, helping to give each member a valuable sense of purpose.

After the business has been

board meetings and informing other residents about their rights, they join the Coalition at press conferences, rallies and marches – even going up to Albany in the middle of the winter to challenge government cuts. Through all of this, friendships are made, and many of our members – for the first time, in a long time – realize that they matter. They can make a difference.

ARTWALK NY Raises Over \$880,000

By Maria Fregoso

In November, nearly 900 New Yorkers gathered at Skylight Soho for the Coalition's 17th annual ARTWALK NY. Co-chaired by Alec Baldwin, Richard Gere and Carey Lowell, with honorary chair, Coco Rocha, the live and silent art auction was our most successful ever, raising over \$880,000.

Jenny Holzer, Leonard Rosenfeld, Wade Guyton and Invader, while the silent auction featured works by over 100 artists, including Roxy Paine, Mary Heilmann, Kenny Scharf, Hernan Bas, Olaf Breuning and Yoko Ono.

The evening was topped off by DJ Donna D'Cruz and DJ ADD; restaurant tasting stations from Macao, Michael's and Edi & the

We are truly grateful to the many artists, committee members, and sponsors that helped make the 17th annual ARTWALK NY possible.



Mary Brosnahan, Alec Baldwin, Coco Rocha, Carey Lowell, and Richard Gere in front of Shepard Fairey's *The Future is Unwritten*

The event featured Shepard Fairey, who introduced the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's inaugural "Artist as Activist" print project to commemorate Rauschenberg's dedication to important social issues and the mission of the Coalition for the Homeless. As part of this special project, Fairey created an original print, *The Future is Unwritten*, which was sold on artnet to benefit the Coalition.

Live auction bidders vied to win works by Andy Warhol, Kim McCarty, Ed Ruscha, Thomas Hirschhorn, Shepard Fairey,

Wolf; and complimentary beverages by Star Vodka, Beck's, Sud de France and the Odeon.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of this year's ARTWALK patrons, almost one million dollars will go towards ensuring that the Coalition can continue offering a safety net to more than 3,500 homeless men, women and children every day.

We are truly grateful to the many artists, committee members, and sponsors that helped make the 17th annual ARTWALK NY possible.

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