

Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Spring/Summer 2011

Record Homelessness

Mayor's Response? **No Plan**



A Letter From Mary

Since mass homelessness emerged 30 years ago, every New York City mayor has had some plan to house homeless families – until now.

Mayor Bloomberg announced his new budget for Fiscal Year 2012, and it contains ZERO funding to move homeless families out of shelters. His decision to defund all housing options comes just as homelessness in NYC has reached yet another all-time record. In FY 2010, 113,553 DIFFERENT people went through the municipal shelter system. That includes 42,888 children.

It also includes a record 28,977 families – 10 percent more than the previous year and 81 percent more than when Bloomberg took office.

That's right – there has been an 81 percent increase in family homelessness since Michael Bloomberg became mayor.

The details on this were widely reported in local and national media and you can read a terrific analysis of both the numbers, how New York got to such crisis levels and what the mayor and City Council need to do to reverse course here in this issue of *Safety Net*. It was our Senior Policy Analyst, Patrick Markee's "State of the Homeless" report that pulled all this data together and effectively brought it to the attention of

New Yorkers at large.

As we go to press, Mayor Bloomberg personally accompanied a cadre of press through the rebuilt intake center for homeless families in the Bronx. It's beautiful, to be sure. But over 66 percent of families applying for

our website, coalitionforthehomeless.org. Bone up on these awful facts and arm yourself with knowing the simple, common sense solutions. Increasing your advocacy acumen and sharing this message with others is a terrific way to help build the momentum we need to change



On May 12, the Coalition for the Homeless joined over 20,000 New Yorkers for a march on Wall Street to demand everyone pay their fair share to support housing, education, and health care.

emergency shelter are currently being turned away – and that proportion is way up. Forty-four percent of families ultimately found eligible have been made to re-apply for shelter two or more times – another number that's way up.

Rather than alleviating the crisis by providing time-tested, housing-based solutions, the mayor has ratcheted up shelter denials – hoping a closed-door at the front-end of the shelter system will solve the problem.

The Coalition's waiting room is packed every morning with these families with vulnerable children. Mothers and fathers are forced to miss days at work and the children miss out on school and often become sick from being bussed to far flung, one-night shelter placements as the eligibility process goes on for weeks.

There are so many ways to help out our homeless neighbors, and this month, if you have just a few moments, I ask that you please look at our main story or visit

Since mass homelessness emerged 30 years ago, every New York City mayor has had some plan to house homeless families – until now.

how the Bloomberg administration deals with homeless families.

Your support of us makes it possible to give these families a place to turn when they've given up all hope. Help us raise awareness in the coming weeks, so we can provide safe, decent housing to those most in need.

Thanks again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Mary E. Brosnahan".

Mary E. Brosnahan
Executive Director

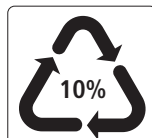
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Featured Book: The Girl's Guide to Homelessness

By Sarah Murphy

Brianna Karp became homeless in 2009 after losing her job to the recession and later being kicked out of her childhood home. At a friend's suggestion, she began a blog, "The Girl's Guide to Homelessness," which has since been turned into a book. Over the past two years, she has been chronicling her life as a young homeless woman, sharing her extraordinary resourcefulness. While now she technically has a roof over her head, her time continues to be filled with uncertainties and hardships. She uses whatever means she has at her disposal to make it more bearable.

I recently spoke with Brianna about her life, being homeless, and the book. Her past has been nothing but difficult. She had a strict religious upbringing, as well as suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. She began working at the age of 10 and was largely the primary earner in her family from then on. She credits the work ethic she developed over time, "as well as sheer stubbornness," for her ability to move beyond the many barriers she has encountered – and continues to encounter – in her life.

When she first learned she would be homeless, she felt frightened and isolated. It didn't make sense to her. "Growing up, I learned all of these stereotypes about homeless people, and that wasn't me." As it slowly sunk in, she collected herself, began looking at her resources, and developed a plan. She had a computer on which she could continue to look for jobs, a phone to field interviews, and a trailer that would provide her with basic shelter (though finding water and electricity would pose another challenge).

Brianna read that she could keep the trailer parked at a Walmart, and so began her life as a homeless girl. She discovered through her journey that she was not alone. "I was surprised at the all the different types of people I



Author Brianna Karp

became friends with: elderly couples, a former doctor, a teacher, gay teenagers. Some had mental problems or were into drugs. But most were like me.

book. At first she was resistant. Up until the *Elle* media blitz, she was anonymous. She wasn't ready to expose the issues with her family, but she came to peace with this and realized that her book may be able to help someone in her situation, someone also feeling alone. As she said, "If this can be something people can connect to, then it will be a success."

Brianna is now on the road, doing speaking engagements, promoting the book, and talking once again to the press, but her struggle is not over. She has a job and has moved into a converted shed, which she considers a "step up from the trailer."

However, she explained that for all intents and purposes, she lives in a camp. "At any time, we may have to

She discovered through her journey that she was not alone. "I was surprised at all the different types of people I became friends with: elderly couples, a former doctor, a teacher, gay teenagers. Some had mental problems or were into drugs. But most were like me. They couldn't get a decent paying job."

They couldn't get a decent paying job." They all supported each other. She also found comfort and information in the vast online resources and forums for homeless people.

Her blog began to pick up followers, and later a piece she wrote was accepted in *Elle Magazine*. *Elle* gave her an internship, which came with a lot of press, and immediately, she was thrust into the spotlight. She said it was "surreal" and spoke about being "overwhelmed and in shock throughout the whole process." She was on the *Today Show* and being flown around the country, but when the media dried up, "I was still homeless."

Brianna never stopped writing and started to get calls asking her to write a

pick up all of our things and vacate the premises, but then after some time passes, we all move back." Further, because she works in Orange County California where there is a dearth of affordable housing, she has to drive 80 minutes per day to get back and forth from her job. But through all of this, her attitude continues to be inspiring. "I don't expect anything to come for free. I know that I need to work hard." So that is just what she does.

Brianna continues to document the two lives she is leading: One as a published author, and the other as a girl still trying to get ahead.

Learn more about Brianna and *The Girl's Guide to Homelessness* at <http://girlsguidetohomelessness.com/>.

State of the Homeless in New York City

In April, Coalition for the Homeless released its annual “State of the Homeless” report, documenting all-time record homelessness in New York City. The report also analyzed new evidence that the Bloomberg administration’s failed homeless policies – particularly the use of flawed time-limited rent subsidies – have contributed to record homelessness. Finally, the report outlined a “One in Three” plan to reduce record homelessness by using one of every three available public housing units and Federal housing vouchers to help homeless New Yorkers move from costly shelters to affordable, stable homes – a return to a successful approach used by previous mayors but abandoned by Mayor Bloomberg.

More New Yorkers Experience Homelessness Than Ever Before

In the midst of high unemployment, the steady loss of affordable housing and years of failed policies under the Bloomberg administration, an all-time high number of New Yorkers turned to homeless shelters last year, and the New York City homeless shelter population is now larger than at any time since the City began keeping records.

- A record 113,553 homeless people – including 42,888 children – slept in municipal shelters in FY 2010, an 8 percent increase from the previous year and a 37 percent increase from FY 2002 when Mayor Bloomberg took office.
- This includes a record 28,977 families, a 10 percent increase from the previous year and a remarkable 81 percent more than when Mayor Bloomberg took office.
- And by the end of February of this year, the nightly census of homeless adults and children in the municipal shelter system – 39,542 people – reached the highest point ever recorded.

Mayor Bloomberg’s Failed Experiment with Time-Limited Subsidy Programs

In the midst of this historic homelessness crisis, the Bloomberg administration’s only response has been to defend its failed policies. Unlike previous New York City mayors from Ed Koch through Rudy Giuliani, Mayor Bloomberg ended the use of proven and cost-effective Federal housing programs to move homeless families from shelters to stable homes. Instead, for more than six years the Bloomberg administration has replaced proven Federal pro-

grams with a series of untested, time-limited subsidies like the recently-terminated Advantage program.

have forced thousands of formerly-homeless children and families back into the shelter system and homelessness, at tremendous expense to taxpayers.

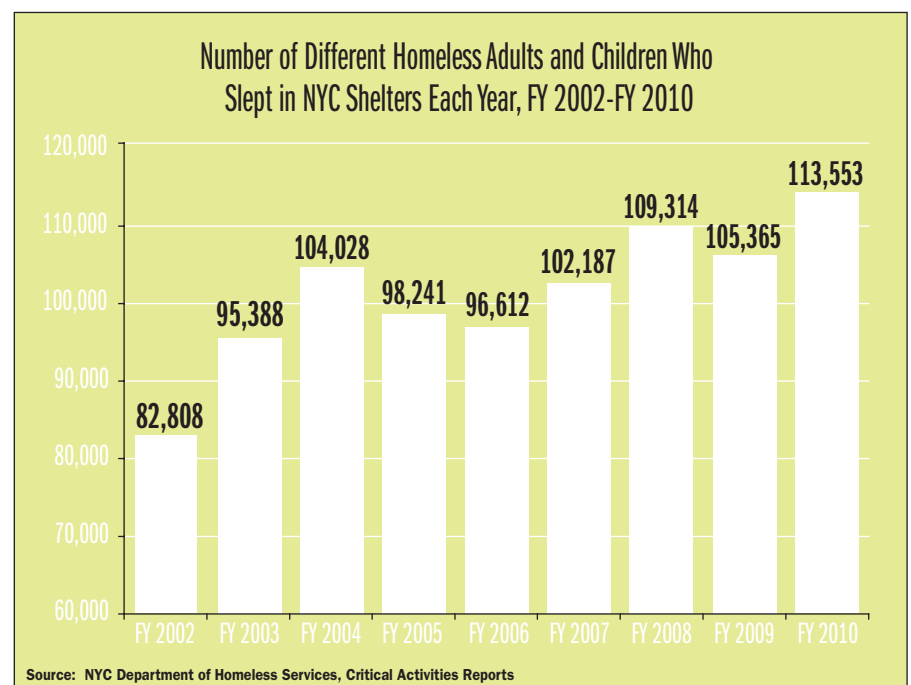
- Since the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless families from Federal housing programs and replaced them with time-limited subsidies like the Advantage program, **more than twice as many formerly-homeless families entered the shelter system each year.**
- In the seven years before Mayor

The smart, cost-effective, and proven way to help homeless children and families move from costly shelters to long-term, stable homes is by maximizing the use of Federal housing programs.

grams with a series of untested, time-limited subsidies like the recently-terminated Advantage program.

The Administration’s own data show that these flawed time-limited subsidies

Bloomberg’s misguided policy change, an average of 2,003 formerly-homeless “repeat families” entered the shelter system each year, but **in the five years after the**



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change, an average of 5,020 “repeat families” entered the shelter system each year, a remarkable 151 percent increase. And in FY 2010, a record 6,294 “repeat families” entered the shelter system.

- Before the Mayor’s short-term subsidies were implemented, only one in four families (25 percent) entering the shelter system was formerly-homeless, while **now nearly half (47 percent) of all families entering the shelter system was previously homeless.**
- The record number of so-called “repeat families” entering municipal shelters has already **cost taxpayers an estimated \$370 million in shelter costs alone.**

The “One in Three” Plan: How to Move Forward and Address the Crisis

With New York City confronting the worst homelessness crisis since the Great Depression, the time to reverse the failed policies of recent years is long overdue. The Bloomberg adminis-

tration’s recent decision to terminate the flawed Advantage program offers an opportunity at last to abandon the failed experiment with restrictive subsidies that have forced thousands of formerly-homeless children and families back into homelessness. Thousands more remain at risk of the same fate.

Mayor Bloomberg should draw from the lessons of previous mayors who, at various times, had to confront rising homelessness. Indeed, Mayors Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani may have little in common, but they did agree on one thing: The smart, cost-effective, and proven way to help homeless children and families move from costly shelters to long-term, stable homes is by maximizing the use of Federal housing programs.

Coalition for the Homeless calls on Mayor Bloomberg and other City and State officials to build on the success of the past and enact the following policies:

1. Immediately begin to use “one in three” available public housing apartments and Federal housing vouchers to help homeless families and individ-

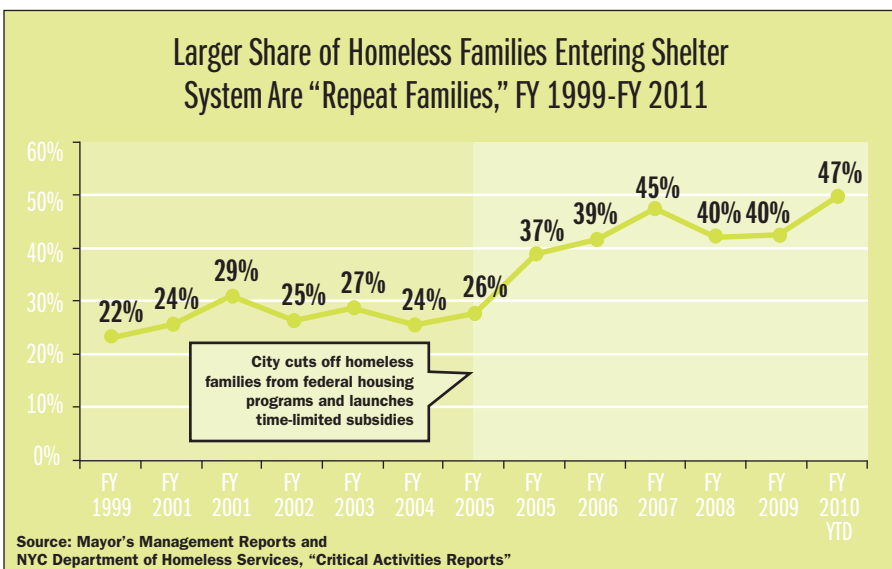
uals move from shelters to permanent housing.

- This can be swiftly accomplished by using the existing priority system for both the public housing and voucher waiting lists and make households referred by the NYC Department of Homeless Services the highest priority applicants.
- In addition, the New York City Housing Authority should act to restore the separate “emergency priority” for all homeless households that was reduced in 2005.
- The New York City Council should require the Bloomberg administration to enact the “One in Three” policy as part of the final FY 2012 City budget agreement.

2. In coming years, the City should set aside at least one in ten City-assisted apartments created or preserved by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development for homeless families and individuals.

- This policy would build on the success of Mayor Koch’s ten-year “Housing New York” program which allocated 15,000 affordable apartments – 10 percent of all housing units created or preserved under the program – for homeless New Yorkers.
- Currently Mayor Bloomberg’s “New Housing Marketplace” plan allocates only around four percent of all City-assisted apartments to homeless people, even at a time of much worse homelessness.

You can find the complete “State of the Homeless 2011” report at the Coalition’s website, www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.



No End in Sight

By Giselle Routhier

While Tammy's children enrolled in the Coalition's Bound for Success after-school program, we learned that this was her family's second time through the shelter system.

Tammy first became homeless in early 2008, after leaving an apartment where she and her children were exposed to lead paint and a host of

lies, her Section 8 voucher never came through, and after her subsidy ended in September 2010, she received an eviction notice. She was forced to re-enter the shelter later that year.

Because one of her daughters was born with Down Syndrome, a hole in her heart, and breathing problems, attending to the 24-hour care her daughter required, Tammy left her job. She and her children remain in a lower

that one in three of Advantage families end up homeless once more. In March, the City put these families at an even greater risk when, in response to a State budget cut, it abruptly announced that it would cease rental assistance payments for all 15,000 families – giving them just a two-week notice!

With the help of the Coalition, the Legal Aid Society immediately filed a lawsuit on behalf of current tenants



Tammy, with three of her children

other dangerous conditions, including rats and bad plumbing. She was placed in a shelter in Brooklyn and remained there for six months with her four children.

In September 2008, she was enrolled in the Children's Advantage program, with a promise that the subsidy would transition her family to a Section 8 (Federal housing) voucher within one or two years. The apartment where she was placed was virtually untenable. At times, her family lacked heat and hot water, but they endured. Unfortunately, like many other fami-

Manhattan shelter today, wondering how they will get out and hoping that if assistance comes, it will be permanent.

In the meantime, 15,000 formerly homeless families are still receiving Advantage, with Department of Homeless Services' statistics showing

who were guaranteed at least a year of rental assistance under Advantage. A judge ordered that April and May rent be paid while the arguments were heard and a decision was made. As we go to press, it is unclear if June rent will be paid.

15,000 formerly homeless families are still receiving Advantage, with Department of Homeless Services' statistics showing that one in three of Advantage families end up homeless once more.

Women Mean Business Luncheon Raises \$175,000 for First Step

By Maria Fregoso

More than 350 guests joined us at the 17th Annual Women Mean Business Luncheon at The Pierre Hotel on April 12, 2011. The luncheon was emceed by comedian and former social worker, Christine O'Leary, whose poignant and heartwarming anecdotes were the perfect compliment to this year's program. Draftfcb CEO and Coalition board member, Laurence Boschetto, inspired the audience with his keynote remarks on the importance of the Coalition's work and community involvement in these times of massive budget cuts. During his speech, he personally pledged \$100,000 in memory of John Sullivan and encouraged all of the attendees to "add a zero" to their donations that afternoon.

Latoya Sykes, First Step class 99, was featured in a brief video that told her courageous story of overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles with the help of First Step. First Step's comprehensive structure, which includes both job training and social services for students and graduates, helped Latoya secure a job with Black Veterans for Social Justice, where she has become an invaluable part of their team, in addition to finding permanent housing for herself and her daughter.

This year's graduate speaker, Adriana Rivera (from First Step class 46) truly inspired the audience as she outlined the ways in which First Step helped her feel empowered and motivated again after becoming a displaced worker on 9/11. She underscored the importance of mentor and peer support, but she also urged us to look within ourselves in the face of adversity because as she explained, "We are all superwomen!"

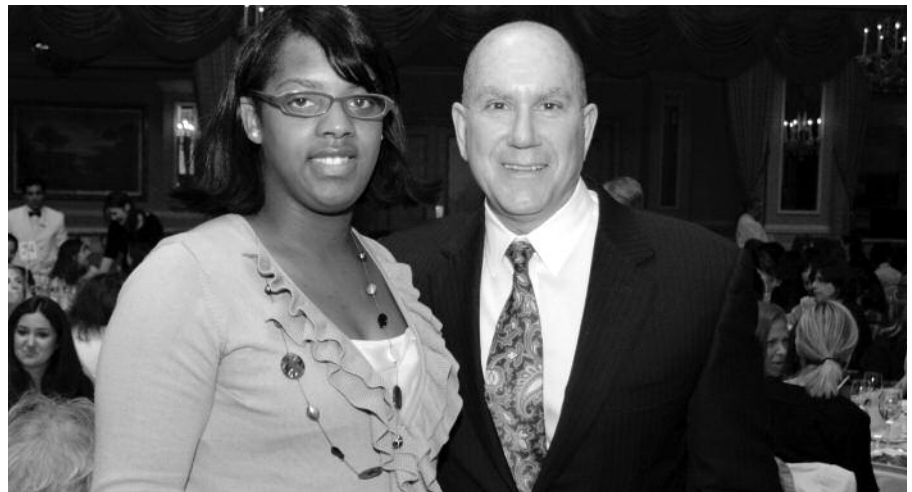
This year, the Coalition was proud to honor Bumble and bumble with our Corporate Partnership Award and Neuman's catering with our Volunteer Service Award. First Step graduate Maureen Butler, who went on to work at Bumble and bumble had the opportunity to share her experiences and to present

Peter Lichtenthal, President of Bumble and bumble, with their award. The Volunteer Service Award was presented by another First Step graduate and current member of the Neuman's team, Roxanne Lowe. As an aspiring baker and caterer she explained, it was "a dream come true" to have the chance to work at Neuman's and to be able to present Paul Neuman with this award.

Our sincerest thanks goes to all the First Step graduates who attended that afternoon as well as our supporters who make all we do possible. The event was a tremendous success, raising over \$175,000 which will go towards ensuring the continued success of the First Step Job Training Program and the hundreds of homeless and low-income women it serves each year.



The event's hostess, comedian Christine O'Leary



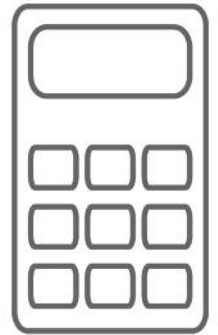
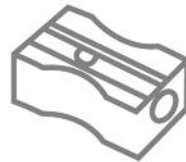
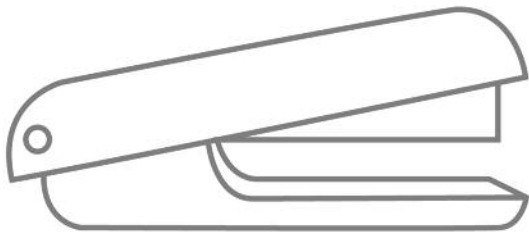
First Step graduate, Latoya Sykes, and Coalition for the Homeless board member, Laurence Boschetto



Bumble and bumble employee and First Step graduate Maureen Butler, presenting the Corporate Partnership Award to Bumble and bumble President, Peter Lichtenthal

PROJECT:

BACK TO SCHOOL



**AUGUST 22-
SEPTEMBER 16**

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