

Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Summer 2005



Smiling the Summer Away at
Camp Homeward Bound



A Letter from Mary

New Yorkers of every stripe are struggling under the overwhelming heat we've had this summer. Whether walking down the street, or waiting on a subway platform, the 90 degree-plus temperatures are beyond oppressive. In overwhelming heat, life in a shelter can be especially tough on kids, and with school no longer in session, homeless boys and girls lose that one source of stability that they can count on during the year, leaving them feeling more isolated and lonely.

At the Coalition, we are always so happy that we can give homeless kids a respite from the sweltering city in the summer at Camp Homeward Bound, and we couldn't do it without generous supporters like you. I'm delighted to share these wonderful photos and stories about our campers – the faces of these boys and girls send a million heartfelt "Thank you's" to you all for making their summer so special.

Mary Brosnahan Sullivan
Executive Director

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is published by

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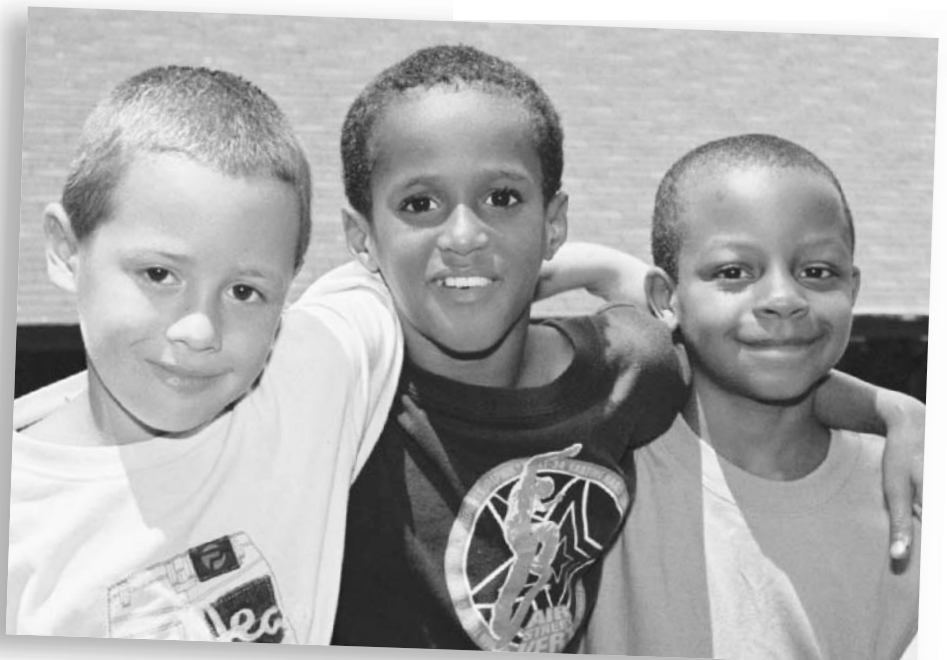
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Just a few of the many smiles being had at Camp Homeward Bound this summer, thanks to you!

Spotlight on the Board: Chris Pendry

By Joshua Klinski

Shortly after Chris Pendry and her husband were married, in their early 20s, the two took on the responsibility of raising his three younger siblings. “I could not have done it without lots of support from others,” she says. “So I know firsthand how valuable strategic help in crisis situations can be.” As a teenager Chris was encouraged to help others by her mother, volunteering at a nursing home and at a Long Island summer camp for inner city girls from Harlem and Brownsville, where she first heard about being homeless from one of the campers.

Chris graduated from Harvard University and Boston College School of Law, clerked for a federal judge, and began her career at Manhattan law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell. “Davis Polk was committed to taking on meaningful pro bono cases. A good friend and magnificent lawyer there, Bob Buschman, won the case that established the right to vote for the homeless. I found that case very inspiring.” Later, Chris joined The Atlantic Philanthropies as Vice President and General Counsel, helping to distribute \$400 million a year, and most recently joined the NYC Center for Charter School Excellence. “Through The Atlantic Philanthropies grantmaking program, I got to know the work of nonprofit organizations all over the world in the fields of disadvantaged children and families, human rights and reconciliation, education, and economic development,” she recounts. “The challenges of managing a nonprofit well are much greater than most in the for-profit world understand.”

In 2002 Chris joined the Coalition’s Board. “I thought it was a well-run organization, and was honored to be a part of it.” Specifically, she was impressed by the Coalition’s work with families and children in difficult situa-

tions, as well as its advocacy work. “With over 13,000 children living in the New York City shelter system,” she explains, “there is a great need for programs that break the cycle of poverty and provide them with tools to overcome the odds they face. Children in the shelters often suffer from inadequate education and from emotional and behavior problems resulting from the instability of their worlds.”

Today Chris includes the Coalition’s Eviction Prevention Program in her list of services she feels are extremely valuable. “It is an enormously important homelessness prevention strategy that literally keeps so many vulnerable families in their apartments and out of the shelter system,” she states. “It prevents trauma.”

“It also just makes sense from an economic standpoint,” she continues. “A one-time eviction prevention grant of

“I am excited to see that the Coalition's youth service programs are continuing to expand, with after school activities in the shelters during the school year, and now a pilot summer day camp here in the city.”

\$800 helps a family get through a crisis, and that’s a smart investment when you know that the cost of the government sheltering that family would be roughly \$36,000 per year.” One little-known fact about the Coalition is that it works in partnership with foundations, other charities, and New York City and State to prevent 700 evictions each year, avoiding millions of dollars in taxpayer costs for emergency shelter. Every dollar the Coalition provides to maintain a family in their own home leverages up to five dollars for a total of over \$2.1 million in matching contributions from public and private sources.

When informed that this profile would be included in a children-focused



Board Member Chris Pendry

issue, Chris reflected upon the great work the Coalition has undertaken with young people. “I am excited to see that the Coalition’s youth service programs are continuing to expand, with after school activities in the shelters during the school year, and now a pilot summer day camp here in the city. And it’s wonderful that Camp Homeward Bound is in session for its 21st summer in upstate New York. Kids need a break from homelessness, and an opportunity to just be kids. I think that’s the beauty of Camp Homeward Bound.”

Coalition for the Homeless is most fortunate to have Chris and a fine cadre of other community leaders serving on its Board of Directors.

The Children of Camp Homeward Bound

By Pam Grove

Summer in NYC can be tough: Sidewalks bloat, tar roofs melt and the air is a cling-wrap of moist soot. Some of us can make an easy getaway. But others need help to find respite and recreation. That is why Coalition for the Homeless opened Camp Homeward Bound, a sleep-away summer camp for three hundred homeless children. During three nineteen-day sessions, these youngsters, who normally live in family shelters, have a unique opportunity to play, learn and meet new people in a very special place.

Pick-Up Day

As Associate Director of Programs, I help supervise the Camp's operation. Today, the children are boarding the buses that will bring them to the camp-site, about fifty miles upstate. I had the pleasure of speaking with many of them as they waited to begin their long anticipated vacation. Here are some of the conversations we had!

Justin

Justin, 8 years old, is sitting on top of his duffle bag while his Mom registers him for camp. I think I recognize him; he tells me, "Yeah, I been at Camp last year." He reminds me who he is and tells me "I'm ready for action. I'm thinking about the water there. I hope there's a rope over the lake that I can hang onto and swing way out like Tarzan and make a BIG splash." I say, "Sorry, I'm pretty sure no rope, but you can splash plenty." His face falls then lifts as he brags that he was promoted to third grade. I reply, "Oh, that's great, so your grades must have been really good." He grins and says, "Well, not all, but enough."

John and Ramy

John and Ramy, 8 and 10 years old, are cousins who live in the Bronx. With them is a crying baby. John explains, "My little brother is screaming 'cause he's too little to go to camp." I say, "Well, at least you two guys are old enough. Happy school is over?" John says, "YES! But I gotta do second grade again 'cause I started late and couldn't pass." I tell him that there are tons of books and computers at camp, so he can practice school

stuff while there. He says, "OK, but I gotta pick books that are not too hard for me." Ramy inquires, "Are the buses air-conditioned or have TV?" John answers for me, "Naw, I bet it's the old yellow ones. What about the pool there?" I explain the swimming water is a lake and Ramy wonders, "What happens to the fish when we go in the water?" I tell him that the fish swim out deeper and only come closer to shore at night, to go to sleep. Ramy nods his head, "Oh, OK, I'll be in bed somewhere else by then."

Yilka, Janna and Siara

I ask, "Are you sisters? Your hair is all braided up so pretty and with the same kind of barrettes." "No," they say in unison, "but we are friends from the same shelter." They think camp is going to be "way fun" and they need "some of that" after school. Yilka, 10, and Janna, 8, are proud they passed their "City-wides" (exams), so they are promoted. Siara, 7, pipes in, "I didn't have that test yet, but I'm smart." She asks me, "Do you know websites?" I say, "A few, which do you like?" "Nickelodeon," she yells and then jumps up and down when I tell her there are computers at camp. The older girls

want to hike in the mountains - provided there are "no scary animals." As for swimming in the lake, "Are there crocodiles?" "Not the last time I looked," I offered. Janna demands, "Did you look good?"



Every summer Camp Homeward Bound
of the city and into the water

Steven

Going to Camp for the first time, Steven, 13, has two concerns. "Do you think I'm too old to learn to swim?" I tell him, "Actually it's never too late, it's even brave to learn things later on. Like me, I'm old and I just learned computer moves you've known for years." He rolls his eyes and smiles.



Secondly, "Are the counselors around all the time?" I reply, "Yup. Why you asking?" He says, "It's nerve-wracking to have to deal with them all day and then at night too." I concede that "sometimes the world is nerve-wracking, but I'm sure you'll like your counselor." He counters, "And if I don't?" I tell him we'll go to Plan B (if needed) on Friday when I come to visit. "S'all right" he agrees.

Three Days Later

I'm making my way through the last leg of the drive to camp - like loosely curled ribbon candy, it rises and falls. I slow down to avoid a turtle that sits on double-yellow traffic lines, pondering. I turn into Camp Homeward Bound, looking for my younger friends from the other day, and find a few of them.



Justin

Justin is at the Learning Center, and is involved with folding a paper, like origami, with math problems so it ends up box-like on his fingertips. He notices me. "Answer one of these multiplying things," he asks. I respond, "Twelve" and he manipulates his fingers twelve times so the paper stops at another problem. From nowhere, he tells me he likes sleeping in the tent.

John and Ramy

They are with the Nature counselor gathering rocks. I ask them, "What are you going to do with the rocks?" "Paint them or something," says Ramy, yawning. He wanders desultorily, until, "Yo, snap, look a snake hole" he yells to the other boys. John runs over, warning, "Maybe a rattlesnake, careful!" Next to the hole is a teeming ant hill and the campers kneel to get a closer look. The rocks are forgotten, but Nature is not.

Steven

He's on a bench outside the Health Center waiting for his introductory visit with the Nurse. "Hey," I say; "Hey back," he grins. "So did you get in the water?" I ask. "I told you I'd flunk the test, but it's OK, I got a good swimming vest to start." "And the counselor thing?" I check. "Shhh...don't snitch me out," he says as he nods his head to an older male, "He's good, I like him."

I just can't help but smile when I hear first-hand how the children are enjoying themselves at camp. For the first time in a long time, many of them can forget their worries and act like kids. As I look around at all the youngsters swimming, playing ball, making arts and crafts, or just sitting in circles talking and laughing, I am confident that this will be another wonderfully successful summer at Camp Homeward Bound.

Bound gives homeless kids a chance to get out
(and grass, and sand and sun!)

Homeless Youth Organize Second Annual Summit

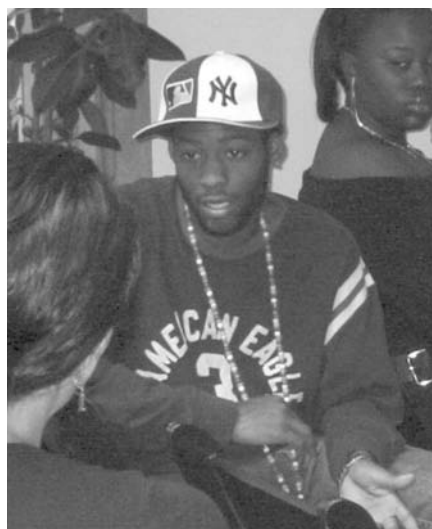
By Lindsey Davis

On June 18th homeless youth gathered to share plans and ideas to raise awareness and propose solutions to the many issues they face. For the second year in a row, *Youth Against Homelessness*, the youth advocacy project of Coalition for the Homeless, hosted the *Homeless Youth Summit*. The event took place at the Top of the Times Hotel and addressed the growing social problem of homelessness. A primary focus was on the needs and experiences of homeless youth throughout New York City.

Homelessness has reached record levels in recent years in New York, and with over 13,000 young people sleeping in City shelters every night, homeless children and youth are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. At the Summit, young people from throughout New York City came together to share information and resources, and to discover ways to get involved in grassroots organizing around the issues of homelessness and housing for young people.

Youth Against Homelessness is a group of homeless and formerly homeless young people who have joined forces to find ways to advocate for solutions to this growing problem. The group was formed by four youths with diverse experiences of homelessness, but a shared desire to find ways to effect change and empower other youth. The project's main focus is to empower young people to become advocates by identifying the issues, stigmas, and stereotypes that directly affect homeless youth, and to offer solutions through public education, community organizing, and political action.

"I think it's really important for homeless kids to know that they're not



alone, and that there are a bunch of us going through tough situations," says Shawn Shearman, a 14 year old member of *Youth Against Homelessness*. "Hopefully events like this will make them feel like there's a real community here to support them."

Like the year prior, the 2005 sum-

mit brought together homeless youth from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, as well as homeless youth service providers and advocates. Over the course of the day, various educational workshops took place. Among the specific issues discussed were the educational rights of homeless youth, housing and health options, issues affecting LGBT and street-involved

The group was formed by four youths with diverse experiences of homelessness, but a shared desire to find ways to effect change and empower other youth.

youth, and grassroots organizing. Summit participants also had the opportunity to hear from keynote speaker New York City Councilmember Alan Gerson, member of the youth services committee. Councilmember Gerson discussed efforts underway in the City Council to address homelessness and its effects on youth, and answered questions about strategies for youth-led advocacy efforts.

The summit culminated in a discussion of youth-focused campaigns currently being organized in New York City and current needs experienced by homeless youth that could become the basis for future action. The Coalition hopes this year's summit will serve as a catalyst for collaboration among groups and the beginnings of a stronger youth advocacy and organizing movement in New York City. *Youth Against Homelessness* will be working in the coming months to create campaigns and public education initiatives that will structure their work for the coming year. Their platform will undoubtedly include plans for a third *Homeless Youth Summit*, building on this year's successes.

Carnival Night Raises Over \$150,000 for Kids

By Jill Madeo

Children, parents, and performers flooded Central Park's Victorian Gardens on June 1st for Coalition for the Homeless' ninth annual Carnival Night for Kids benefit. The event raised over \$150,000 for Camp Homeward Bound and the Continuum of Care for Children. Victorian Gardens, the amusement park located inside Wollman Rink in the middle of Central Park, was once again an enchanted setting for an evening of summer fun and entertainment for families.

Over four hundred children and their parents enjoyed a festive evening under the stars. With so many rides to choose from, and their favorite carnival foods being served, kids' smiling faces filled the night with joy. Stiltwalkers, Elmo, Spiderman, and Vinnie Voltage added to the fun – engaging the guests and performing for their amusement.

Always the high-point of the evening, the balloon-pop raffle attracted lively crowds. The donated prizes included tickets to see the Yankees and Mets, and gift certificates to Café des Artistes, Bouley, SQC, and Lupa. In addition, for those looking to get away, prizes also included a Loews Miami Beach Hotel gift certificate for 3 days and nights, and a weekend stay

at the W Hotel in New York City.

The evening would not have been possible without our fabulous Co-Chairs, Andy and Julie Kramer and Mara and Baron Silverstein. With Anne and Bill Detwiler, Alison and Barry Berke, Hee-Jung Moon, Penny Bradley, Caroline LoFaro, Nicole Cee, Michelle and Alan Rosenbaum and Marcia Sells and Kenneth Kruta rounding out the benefit committee, the night was an unqualified success. Also, special thanks go to all the volunteers and Coalition staff who made the evening memorable.



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A Homeless Boy Says Thank You

Thank you Coalition!

It's great here at Camp Homeward Bound. My name is Danny and I'm 15 years old. I've been here for two years and this is my second year here and I'm having a blast at the greatest camp ever. Camp Homeward Bound is a great experience for kids. They have all types of activities like basketball, swimming and kickball.

Next year is my last year and I'm a little upset but it will work out 'cause the year after that I will be a junior counselor and I can't wait until then. My favorite counselors and I will be working together.

Thanks for a great summer.

Sincerely,
Danny

11TH ANNUAL

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SAVE THE DATE!

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17TH, 2005, 6:30 P.M. AT SOTHEBY'S



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