

# Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Autumn 2008

*INSIDE:  
Mary Brosnahan on how  
the Financial Crisis affects the Coalition*

## Historic Settlement in Family Litigation



Homeless Families Win Right to Shelter

# A Letter From Mary

We are all staggered, emotionally and financially, by record increases in unemployment, soaring fuel and food prices, and our entire economic system teetering on the brink of failure. But for those literally struggling to survive from today until tomorrow, government cutbacks to emergency meals and housing programs make this bleak backdrop all the more dangerous. Tonight, over 34,000 men, women and children – near record numbers – will sleep in our emergency shelters. Thousands more will seek comfort on park benches and in subway cars.



The fallout from the economic crisis is dramatic here in our offices.

Our Crisis Intervention office opens at 9 a.m. each morning. We used to see folks lining up for services at around 8:15. Now, the line starts forming at 7 a.m.

Our Eviction Prevention program gives one-time grants to families on the brink of eviction. In order to qualify,

applicants must have a sure way to pay their rent going forward, after any arrears are cleared away. In recent days, we had to temporarily shut down intake for this invaluable program, because our cash flow could not support the overwhelming demand of working families looking for help.

Rising gas and food prices have hobbled our mobile feeding program. Although we continue to feed an average of 1,000 people each night on the streets, we often run out of food before the end of our 31 stops. In fact, we've eliminated three stops on our Bronx run to make sure that the men, women and children waiting at other stops both in the Bronx and Manhattan receive a hot dinner.

We are doing all we can, despite severe cutbacks from both the State and City governments. So far this year, we've weathered the loss of over \$100,000 in government funding, and both the mayor and governor are

planning further reductions.

This stark economic downturn makes the recent victory in settling the decades-old litigation surrounding homeless families all the more important. Steve Banks and the Legal Aid Society have been the counsel for the Coalition for years, and he managed to win an enforceable right to shelter for homeless families, effectively ending the case he brought over 25 years ago on behalf of homeless parents with vulnerable children. You can read more about this victory and what it means in practical terms in this issue of *Safety Net*.

Given the grave financial condition of New York City, Steve's victory could not come at a more important juncture. The original litigation brought in the early 1980's by Bob Hayes, a founder of the Coalition, argued that the New York State Constitution supports a right to shelter for all who have no home. The particular clause in our constitution cited was adopted following the Great Depression – while lawmakers were fully cognizant of the toll mass homelessness can take for both the indigent and for society as a whole.

Your support is what allows us to help over 3,500 people every day. On their behalf, many thanks for ALL you do!

Sincerely,

Mary Brosnahan  
Executive Director

## Safety Net

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# PROJECT: BACK TO SCHOOL

By Sarah Murphy

In September, the Coalition for the Homeless teamed up with CW11, Capital One, Global Design Concepts Inc., and Manhattan Mini Storage for PROJECT: BACK TO SCHOOL, an initiative to help New York City's homeless kids get the school supplies they need to succeed. During the campaign, generous New Yorkers donated brand new backpacks and lunch boxes, along with other school essentials, to help make the beginning of the school year a little easier for these children and their families.

Throughout the drive, our partners went above and beyond. CW11 and weatherman Mr. G promoted the campaign through public service announcements and on-air mentions. Capital One hosted collection boxes in 16 locations throughout Manhattan and the Bronx. On top of this, Capital One employees raised more than \$5,000 to help purchase extra supplies to make sure every child received a complete backpack of essential school materials. Manhattan Mini Storage provided the collection boxes and transported donations to the Coalition, and Global Design Concepts gave over 1,000 backpacks to the cause.

Kids who do have homes also stepped up to help their homeless counterparts. Students from Ethical Culture Fieldston School, Riverdale Country School, and Rodeph Sholom School brought the initiative in house, asking students and parents to pick up extra items while doing their last minute back to school shopping.



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Photos courtesy of Rodeph Sholom School

Students from Rodeph Sholom School were happy to get involved!

PROJECT: BACK TO SCHOOL concluded with a celebration for more than 30 children from the Coalition's Bound for Success After School Program. Mr. G joined in the festivities and helped distribute the backpacks. Our kids enjoyed snacks and music, as well as the chance to be on TV! The party was later featured on the CW11 News at 10.

We thank all of our donors, big and small, for making a profound difference by helping get our most vulnerable students off on the right foot this school year! With your help, more than 1,500 backpacks, stuffed full of essential supplies, were donated to homeless children in New York City shelters.



Mr. G and Capital One visited the Coalition's Bound for Success After School Program to distribute backpacks and supplies.

## Special Thanks to:

- ANSAC
- Ethical Culture Fieldston School
- FAB/Starpoint
- Victor Ozeri
- The Lowenstein Family
- Riverdale Country School
- Rodeph Sholom School

PROJECT: BACK TO SCHOOL was made possible through the amazing partnership of:



# Homeless Families Win Right to Shelter — What it Means and What's Next

By Patrick Markee and  
Mary Brosnahan

Homeless families won a legally enforceable right to shelter this past week. It was a huge victory — 25 years in the making. The settlement of the McCain litigation, originally brought against the Koch Administration, came on the brink of a trial at which homeless mothers were poised to testify in open court about their recent treatment while attempting to get into emergency shelter. In short, they and their children were relegated to sleep on the streets, in subway stations, parks, laundromats and all-night fast food restaurants. Coming on the heels of a damning Independent Budget Report last month, the last thing City officials wanted was graphic sworn testimony of the toll Mayor Bloomberg's homeless policy had taken on mothers with vulnerable children.

The other looming backdrop is near record family homelessness in New York City. How did we get into this mess and how do we work our way back out of it?

Four years ago, Michael Bloomberg committed to reduce New York City homelessness by two-thirds over five years. His ambitious goals were praised by a wide array of advocates, service providers, and community groups. But many remained concerned that the mayor did not commit sufficient housing resources and had failed to craft the right policies needed to achieve the goal.

In recent years, those fears were sadly realized as the Bloomberg Administration stumbled through a series of flawed approaches to homelessness — from the administration's decision to cut off homeless New Yorkers from federal housing assistance, beginning in the autumn of 2004; to the dis-



astrous “Housing Stability Plus” program, which was finally abandoned by the city in early 2007; to the deeply flawed “Work Advantage” program which replaced Housing Stability Plus; to the city's ongoing and accelerated use of illegal boarding houses to shelter homeless adults living with mental illness and other disabilities.

Substantial changes in the City's approach to housing homeless families are needed in order for New York to see real reductions in the numbers of families residing in shelters each night.

Most troubling, New York City's homeless population has risen dramatically in recent years. Every night since Mayor Bloomberg took office, more than 30,000 homeless New Yorkers have resided in shelters, a higher number than at any point in the 1980s or 1990s. In June, more than 8,600 homeless families with more than 14,000

were codified in September's historic legal settlement. But intake — the front end of the shelter system — is only half of the equation. Substantial changes in the City's approach to housing homeless families are needed in order for New York to see real reductions in the numbers of families residing in shelters each night.

The New York Independent Budget Office's recent report documented the clear failures of the Mayor's plan. In short, four years after Bloomberg announced his plan, New York City's homeless population is dramatically larger than the targets in the plan. In fact, more New Yorkers are homeless than when Mayor Bloomberg took office.

children bedded down each night in municipal shelters, only slightly fewer than when the Mayor unveiled his plan four years ago.

All in all, the current decade has proven to be the worst for New York City homelessness since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

An enforceable right to shelter for homeless families along with specific enhancements in intake procedures by the Department of Homeless Services,

*This article was featured in the September 22 issue of the Gotham Gazette.*

# Proven Solutions to Reduce Family Homelessness

The Independent Budget Office's findings and rising family homelessness should serve as a call to arms. They should spur Bloomberg Administration officials to abandon their failed homeless housing policy and to embrace proven, cost-effective solutions to radically reduce homelessness in New York City.

Perhaps most important, the mayor and administration officials remain mired in the mistaken, false notion that family homelessness is a behavioral problem, not what it primarily is — a housing affordability problem. Thus, addressing the problem must involve proven, housing-based solutions.

Following is a summary of immediate steps the City can take to change course and genuinely reduce family homelessness:

### 1. Target Federal Housing Aid to the Homeless:

In late 2004, the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless New Yorkers from longstanding priority for federal housing programs, including Section 8 vouchers and public housing. In January 2007, Mayor Bloomberg announced that the city would give out 22,000 new Section 8 vouchers –



none to the homeless.

Reversing the city's misguided policy will move thousands of homeless families to permanent housing – and will save city taxpayer dollars spent on emergency shelter.

### 2. Repair the Flaws in Rental Assistance Programs for the Homeless:

Over the past four years, the City has created two flawed rental assistance programs for homeless New Yorkers. The "Work Advantage" program has unrealistic, one-size-fits-all time limits that cut off rental assistance to struggling families after two years – regardless of a family's circumstances. In contrast, acclaimed studies by the Vera Institute, the National Alliance to End Homelessness and

academic researchers have found that long-term, flexible housing assistance – like the federal Section 8 voucher program – helps move families from shelter to their own homes and helps them stay there.

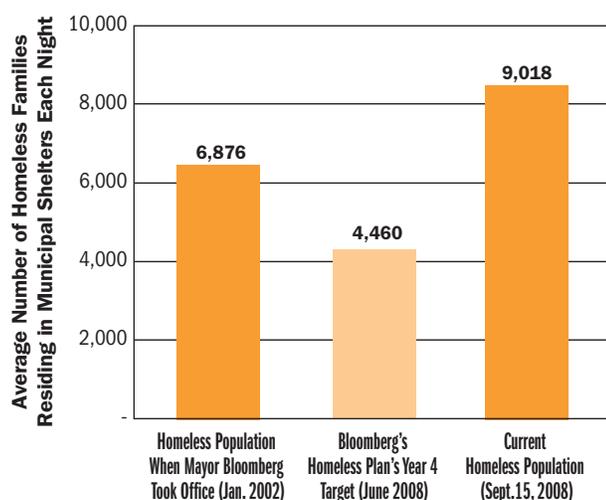
The city should repair the flaws in the "Work Advantage" program and ensure that families in need are guaranteed housing assistance after the time limits.

### 3. Expand Homelessness Prevention Services:

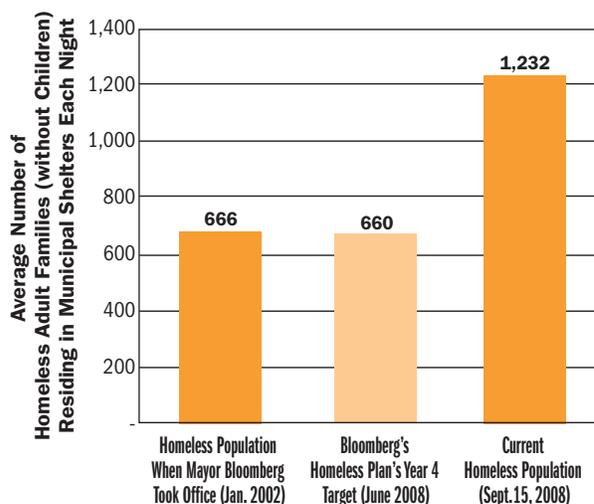
The annual cost of sheltering a homeless family is \$33,000. In contrast, prevention services, which help keep struggling families in their homes, cost a fraction of that amount. The Independent Budget Office found that, while the city spends more than \$650 million annually on shelter, it spends less than \$200 million on homelessness prevention. The recently adopted budget actually cut homelessness prevention legal services and other prevention programs by more than \$3 million.

The City should expand homelessness prevention legal services, the Homeless Prevention Fund, and other prevention programs.

## Total Number of Homeless Families in NYC Shelters



## Homeless Adult Families in NYC Shelters



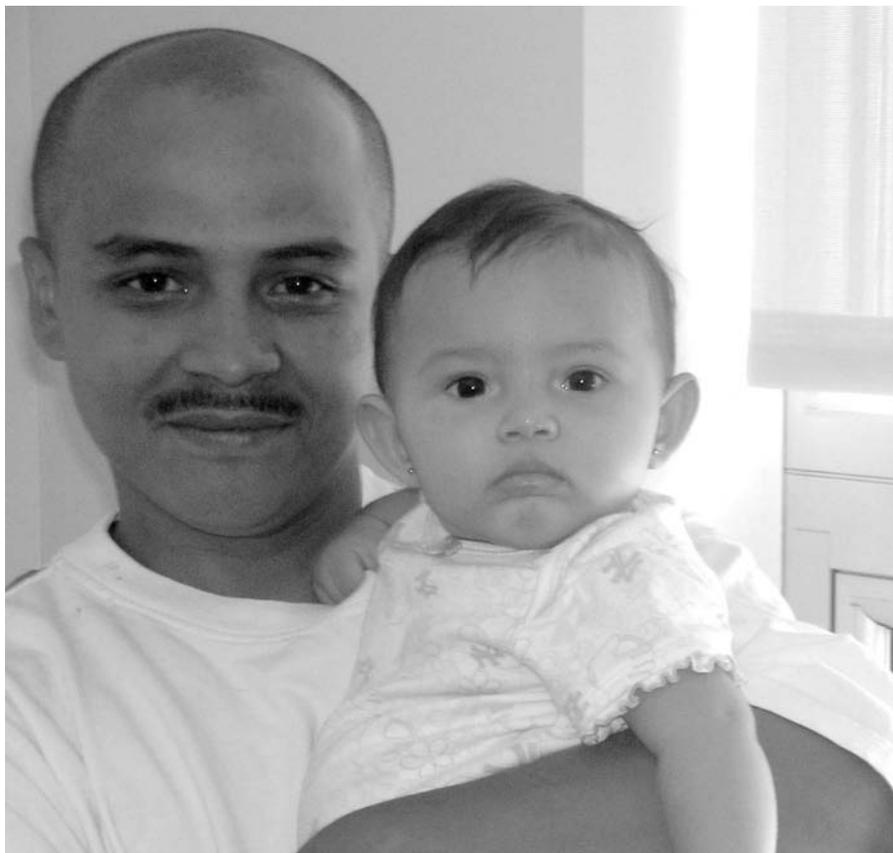
# Nowhere Else to Go

By Lindsey Davis and Sarah Murphy

Anthony and his wife, Lucy, never thought they would become homeless, but that is exactly what happened to them earlier this year. The couple had been living in a small basement apartment with exposed wiring and toxic mold. Despite frequent, serious violations cited by the City, their landlord refused to make any renovations. A few months after their daughter Natalie was born, the situation was so unbearable that they were forced to leave. With nowhere else to go, and unable to find an affordable apartment, they applied for shelter at the PATH office in the Bronx, where they discovered an application process which can be extremely long and complicated. Applicant families must meet a list of requirements and present supporting documentation, including proof that they have no alternative housing options before they can be provided a shelter placement.

For a short time, they were provided with a temporary place to stay while the City reviewed their case. However, because Lucy had lived with her mother before moving to her husband's apartment, the City denied their application, determining that Lucy's mother had the space to house the family. The City refused to acknowledge that Lucy was thrown out of the home several years prior and mother and daughter are no longer in communication with one another. With no other options, Anthony and Lucy continued to reapply for shelter, bringing with them new documentation stating that the mother's home was not a housing option, only to be repeatedly denied eligibility for shelter.

In June 2005, the Bloomberg Administration began ejecting homeless families to the street when caseworkers determined a family has another housing option available. According to guidelines issued by the City, such a housing option must be both safe and available.



Anthony and Natalie, along with Natalie's mother, Lucy, face the daily challenge of finding a place to sleep.

Unfortunately, as with most large bureaucracies, mistakes happen. The result? Families with vulnerable children were left out on the streets to fend for themselves.

Unfortunately, as with most large bureaucracies, mistakes happen. Frontline workers at the Department of Homeless Services frequently do not take into consideration all relevant information or help the family gather what is obviously needed – letters from doctors, notarized forms from landlords, etc. The result? Families with vulnerable children out on the streets, left to fend for themselves.

This is exactly what played out in the lives of Anthony and Lucy. Despite

numerous attempts, Lucy's mother refused to allow them back into her apartment. In fact, when Coalition staff attempted to mediate, Lucy's mother would barely stay on the phone long enough to say "No!"

As a result, seven-month-old Natalie sleeps on the floor of a friend or relative each night, while her parents brave the increasingly cold streets.

When Anthony came to the Coalition last month, he was intimidated and demoralized. He and his wife were doing everything to try to get ahead. Lucy had a new job, while he worked as a handyman. But months of not knowing where they would sleep or find their next meal had taken its toll on his health and confidence.

The staff of the Coalition's Crisis Intervention Program is currently helping Anthony and his family appeal the City's decision through a fair hearing. While the fight isn't over yet, Anthony and Lucy remain hopeful.

# 14th Annual ARTWALK NY to Honor Robert Rauschenberg

By Rachel Edelman

On Monday, November 3rd, the Coalition for the Homeless will join with Co-Chairs Richard Gere and Carey Lowell, and honored guests Alec Baldwin, Chuck Close, Theodore W. Kheel, Darryl Pottorf, and Christopher Rauschenberg for its annual ARTWALK NY. This year's event will honor the legendary artist, Robert Rauschenberg, in a tribute to his work and legacy.

Now in its 14th year, ARTWALK NY is one of New York City's most anticipated art auctions, and the Coalition's largest fundraiser. To be held at the Metropolitan Pavilion in Manhattan, the event will feature a live and silent auction with works from renowned artists, along with a lively cocktail party. ARTWALK NY brings together artists, collectors, and Coalition supporters to raise money to help our homeless neighbors.

Robert Rauschenberg is one of the most acclaimed American artists of the 20th century. His work reflects a broad vision, and his paintings, drawings, sculpture, and photography are in every major museum collection. A longtime friend to the homeless and supporter of ARTWALK NY, the Coalition is honored to remember this revolutionary artist and dedicated humanitarian.

This year's live auction includes works by artists Donald Baechler, Chuck Close, Wade Guyton, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, and Pat Steir. Last year's event, honoring Donald Baechler, raised more than \$700,000 for the Coalition's programs.

In addition to the benefit, art lovers and Coalition supporters alike are invited to attend a series of artist studio walking tours on Saturday, November 1. The walking tours, led by art journalists and curators, offer attendees a rare glimpse into the intimate workspace of top contemporary artists. Reservations are required and may be made by calling 212-776-2056.

# ARTWALK NY 14TH ANNUAL

November 3, 2008 – Metropolitan Pavilion, NYC

6:30 PM Silent Auction + Cocktail Party 8:00 PM Live Auction



Richard Kind, Richard Gere, Carey Lowell, Mary Brosnahan, and Donald Baechler at ARTWALK NY 2007



Richard Gere and Carey Lowell speaking at ARTWALK 2007



ARTWALK NY Junior Committee, chaired by Bettina Prentice and Kipton Cronkite, at summer cocktail party at "Hearthstone" in Sagaponack, NY, in honor of 2008 ARTWALK NY

## Buy Tickets Online Today!

To purchase tickets online or for information on the walking tours, please visit us online at [www.coalitionforthehomeless.org](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org) or contact us at 212-776-2056.

# Letters from Camp

I had so much fun at CHB this summer!! We had swimming, sports, nature, cooking, arts and crafts, Learning Center and a Halloween banquet. I especially enjoyed swimming here. I finally learned how to swim, and I like the counselors. I also like the food, and CHB introduced different things to me like how to make spaghetti and meatballs. They also showed me how to go fishing, boating, and live outside in nature. CHB is an awesome camp! From,  
Henry



Thank You So Much!

I had a great time at Camp Homeward Bound. I liked going boating because it is so relaxing. Going to camp benefited me because if I wouldn't have come here I wouldn't have learned how to swim.

I love music class. She taught me how to play Twinkle Twinkle Little Star on the keyboard.

Cooking was the best! We got to bake bread, and it also taught adjectives because we had to eat a fruit and describe the different flavors. The older kids got to do photography and some are saying they're going to get a career involving photography.

Thank You!

Jakara

I had so much fun at Camp Homeward Bound. This year was the most fun. My favorite activity was music. I love to sing. In the talent show, my tent is singing a new song. In music we also played a guitar and piano. I also loved the fashion show. So cool! I never can forget Learning Center this year with Mollie! Sincerely,

Tyana



I LOVE CHB! It's the best camp ever!

I love the swimming lessons we have, and I absolutely love the food here! My counselors are so nice and sooooo FUNNY! I really love camp and wish I could stay here forever!

Sincerely,

Nahjae

Visit [www.coalitionforthehomeless.org](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org) to purchase your copy of

## “Home for the Holidays, Volume 1”

digital music compilation, on sale starting November 18th. We are pleased to partner with Warlock Records on this exciting initiative – 100 percent of the proceeds benefit the Coalition!

