

The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

Moving Out and Onward:

Congratulations to Maureen, Kevin, Mike, and Danny on recently moving into permanent housing!

House Our Future NY

By Giselle

We cannot accept sustained, record homelessness in New York City as inevitable or normal. That is why the Coalition for the Homeless has spearheaded a campaign to pressure Mayor de Blasio to build more housing for homeless New Yorkers. The House Our Future NY campaign is calling on Mayor de Blasio to set aside 30,000 units of his 300,000-unit affordable housing plan for homeless New Yorkers, including 24,000 units to be created through new construction.

Sixty-two organizations and 38 elected officials, including the majority of City Council Members, have signed on in support of this campaign in addition to over 2,300 caring New Yorkers who have signed a petition addressed to the Mayor.

So far, we have organized marches, rallies, and press conferences. We have asked the Mayor directly to commit to this pledge at town halls and on the radio. We even occupied the lobby of City Hall for an hour and a half in December with a sit-in protest! So far, the Mayor hasn't budged, but we will keep up the pressure until homeless New Yorkers get access to the housing they need.



CAG member Robert. Photo & interview by M.A. Dennis.

CAG Member Spotlight

By Robert

My experience in the shelter system wasn't traumatic. It was freeing and very liberating. It freed me from being dependent upon other people. It freed me to be more humble. I held the system to task by doing everything that was asked of me and, in turn, received the proper services I needed to get my life back in order.

I used the word "liberated" because I finally got out of my own way and accepted and allowed myself to be helped. Yes, it was a struggle not to go back to old behaviors and ways of thinking, but I had to keep moving forward. I stayed at many shelters, including Ward's Island, Bellevue, Camp LaGuardia, Bowery Mission, Pamoja House, and Ready, Willing & Able (where I graduated twice).

The last year I was in the shelter system was 2011. I moved out and got a job working for BronxWorks as a homeless outreach worker helping the street homeless population. I no longer work for BronxWorks –

now I drive an ambulance, but I still help out whenever I can. I strive to encourage and give a positive word whenever possible.

What I have learned from being in shelters is that there are folks willing to help you, but you must be willing to help yourself first and accept the struggle. Focus on your purpose, not everything that's going on around you. What I have also learned is that there are a great many levels of needs and services that must be provided to individuals, especially those with drug addictions and mental health struggles.

However, as humans we can overcome most obstacles and setbacks as long as we do right and do not give up.

I am honored and humbled and very grateful to share my experiences and my story. I hope you find it useful and it gives you strength and hope. Be blessed and never give up on yourselves!

The Prison of Homelessness

By Felix



We are mothers and fathers doing everything and then some to avoid seeing their children grow up in the system.
We are doctors, carpenters, graduate students, nurses, sons and daughters of and immigrants, men, women, and children.
We are taxpayers, registered voters, persons with civic awareness home after leaving institutions, law-abiding citizens.
We are the elderly, the disabled, taxi drivers, crossing guards, activists, advocates, organizers, domestic violence victims, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.
I promised myself this morning I would speak light into the situation homelessness is a prison.
There is not much difference between you and I but three paychecks, a lease and a residence to call home, existing in between margins of marginalization creates no sense of belonging.
The struggle is real to not lose one's humanity finding the will to fight to be stronger than to sleep at night, to normalize feeling stomach touching back is insanity.
Prayer changes things! Good orderly direction guiding our steps every day,
We need community more than excess; we want to be invited to sit at the table adding to the conversation on community building or we're wasting our breath.
When speaking about housing we have to recognize that what proves affordable to others is out of reach for some.
We don't need ineffective case workers without hearts who have no moral compass or work ethic. We will overcome!
We need safe spaces to heal from experiential traumas, and to be heard. Shelter is not synonymous with home not just for today but the day after, the day after that, and the day after that.
A chance to live the American dream and place to lay head to rest proves a necessity, to that low-income housing offers hope.
We are the people of New York, help us, hear our voice and on a personal level see to it we have a place to call home.



CAG Lobbies for Personal Needs Allowance

By Cynthia

During the spring and summer months, members of the Client Advisory Group actively lobbied members of the State Assembly for an increase in the personal needs allowance (PNA). The PNA is money that a shelter resident receives from Public Assistance for their everyday expenses.

The current allowance for a single adult is \$22.50, received twice

a month. Bill number A10317, introduced by Assemblymember Hevesi, proposes to raise this allowance to \$144 dollars per month.

We would like to thank Assemblymember Hevesi for sponsoring this bill on behalf of New Yorkers surviving in the shelter system.



We Will Not Be Erased

By Abena

As a queer homeless youth, there is so much more to my story than just being homeless and gay. The cycle of homelessness for many queer youth like me starts when one begins to live in their truth. When we as queer folks push back against our family's abuse and trauma, we often find ourselves with no place to stay. Along with facing bigotry and shame for identity, youth who are homeless also deal with mental illness. Youth depression is on the rise, and every year, someone like the person described above walks around hurt, discouraged, and helpless.

As a homeless youth who is a part of the LGBTQ community and living with mental illness, I have to navigate through a lot of services. Finding healthcare that is suitable for me, and applying for housing programs, while also working through the shelter system to find a place that allows me to continue to feel safe and also works with my mental health needs, are just some of the services I navigate through as a homeless youth.

There is a level of comradery amongst the queer homeless youth of New York City. Once someone learns something new regarding housing apps, a new procedure with public assistance,

free classes, or updates to vouchers, we find time to share those things with each other.

Homeless folks in NYC have found many ways to share information with each other and one of those ways is through attending CAG meetings at the Coalition for the Homeless every Tuesday at 5pm. This has been a great place for me to give feedback on issues in the shelters, talk about what the shelters are doing that is good, and get general information that is important for my journey through homelessness. It is also a day that I look forward to. I see folks who look like me and who share in the experience of homelessness. I see how they have survived and continue to survive, and that brings me hope.

As I've grown and fought for myself, I've learned to value people not based on the color of their skin, but on the character of their soul. I have also realized that with the power of education, I can write my future and have a better tomorrow. My past is not going to stop me from succeeding. I will not allow myself to fall in a trap in which I blame my past, my parents, or my upbringing for my failure to succeed. I control my destiny.

CAG members at City Hall to support HOFNY



CAG Member Maureen raises awareness about overdoses.

Untitled

By Maureen Reardon

Subterranean drift in the wake of harassment and assault_hope streams forth in word, and in view of a huddled wanderer shrunken in to the size of an unawakened child. Inwardly spoken, "Move!" "Make you known!" "Breathe!" An illusion of a scholar's stone molded by a river of time.

Affixed to a place of reflexology heals; tongues of rubber extend out. A lost soul set free to passions. Lean in bone black jeans frame the shadow side of the form emboldened by escape. reminiscent of a shroud in juxtaposition to a light field of black poppies the size of coffee cups – Black and White – Black and White – splattered and splintered energy emitting from a core of rotten hope, wrapped akin to a traditional gift waiting to be presented.

A stirring. Aha! Life! Yellow tipped riptides of a diaper read as exclamation points of vulnerabilities haunting purpose. Zen-like movements almost imperceptible choreographed from the interior of a sound suitz emerging from a turtle shell, slowly, extending out through the orifices of the shirt in return from a sacred world.

Delicate hands clasping, seemingly rehearsed, releasing as an enigma of humanity emerged.

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Who We Are

About the Client Advisory Group (CAG)

Formed nearly two decades ago, the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group (CAG) helps organize New Yorkers living in NYC shelters. CAG is a multifaceted mutual support and activism group that engages in advocacy, education, empowerment, and socialization. *The Monitor* is written by homeless and formerly homeless members of CAG.

Each CAG meeting is facilitated by the Coalition's Shelter Specialist, Cynthia, who leads the group in discussions about topics relevant to the members' needs, such as Department of Homeless Services policies and procedures, voting

rights, and ways to cope with the trauma of being homeless.

The group reviews issues they have experienced in the shelters. As the court- and City Hall-appointed independent monitor of the City's shelter system, the Coalition is responsible for making sure shelters are responsive to residents' needs. Shelter monitors help residents advocate for themselves and empower them with information and education.

The roundtable style of the weekly meetings gives 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 belonging and purpose.

Outside of the meetings, CAG plays a central role in the Coalition's advocacy efforts. In addition to informing other residents about their rights, CAG members join the Coalition at press conferences, rallies, and marches – even going up to Albany to challenge government and social policies.

CAG meets 5pm-7pm every Tuesday at the Coalition's office: 129 Fulton Street in lower Manhattan. Dinner and MetroCards are provided. All are welcome!

About the Coalition for the Homeless

The **Coalition for the Homeless** is the nation's oldest advocacy and direct service organization helping homeless men, women, and children. We believe that affordable housing, sufficient food, and the chance to work for a living wage are fundamental rights in a civilized society. Since our inception in 1981, the Coalition has worked through litigation,

public education, and direct services to ensure that these goals are realized.

The Coalition's effectiveness derives from our unique role as both an advocacy and direct service organization. Our programs, shelter monitoring, and grassroots organizing enable us to meet homeless people

where they are – giving voice and hope to the most marginalized among us. Our advocacy is informed by the very real daily struggles of our homeless neighbors, and seeks practical, humane, and cost-effective long-term solutions proven to work. **Because every New Yorker deserves a home.**