

# The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

## Moving Out and Onward:

Congratulations to Dennis, Charmaine, Carole, Rhonda, Irvine, Kevin, Showanye, Tiffany, and Junior on recently moving into permanent housing!

## CAG Goes to Albany

By Cynthia

On Monday June 11th, several members of the Coalition's Client Advisory Group (CAG) as well as Coalition for the Homeless Advocacy staff boarded a bus at 7am to take part in the Poor People's Campaign. The Poor People's Campaign is a nationwide movement to demand a better society by challenging the injustices of systemic racism, poverty and inequality, ecological devastation, and the war economy and militarism.

The theme of this direct action was "Everybody's Got the Right to Live: Education, Living Wages, Jobs, Income, and Housing." We joined activists, faith leaders, and concerned citizens in a march around the state capital, which convened on the steps of the Legislative Office Building.

CAG member M.A. Dennis gave a profound and impassioned speech to the crowd about the humiliation and devastation of being homeless in the New York City shelter system. The Client Advisory Group is proud and grateful for the opportunity to have our voices heard and become part of the solution to ending homelessness.



## Why I'm a Member of CAG

By Dionne

The Client Advisory Group (CAG) reaches out in support of those who are homeless and living in the shelter system. CAG was created with the guidance of the Coalition for the Homeless.

CAG helps to strengthen the group's bond by advocating, hosting meetings, visiting shelters at various hours day or night, and solving issues in order to maintain unity.

We share our stories on topics such as shelter policies, housing, food, condition of our shelters, and ways the DHS staff treats us. There is never enough time to sit and talk about the negative treatment we all have encountered. We also discuss

ways in which we could change the system by telling our stories at City Council hearings and joining rallies or protests.

CAG empowers men, women, and children. Its continual help is limitless. No matter what the situation, CAG members will be there when people need assistance.

The Client Advisory Group represents who we are and what we stand for as a team.

**Once a CAG member, always a CAG member – wherever we go!**



## Current Campaigns

### House Our Future NY

The Coalition for the Homeless is spearheading a campaign demanding that Mayor de Blasio set aside 30,000 units in his affordable housing plan specifically for homeless New Yorkers, including 24,000 units to be created through new construction. Currently, the Mayor's plan commits to creating or preserving just 15,000 units for homeless people – a mere five percent of his overall plan.

On Thursday, June 7th, CAG joined the first action associated with this campaign. More than 100 children gathered in Thomas Paine Park and built toy houses for Mayor Bill de Blasio. They had just one simple question: "Mr. Mayor, if we can build houses, why can't you?" They then marched with their toy houses to the steps of City Hall, where members of the City Council joined the kids and the Coalition for a news conference. Several children spoke on behalf of the 23,000 children who sleep in City shelters each night, reminding the Mayor of their right to a brighter future that includes a permanent place to live, learn, and grow. After the rally, Councilmembers Brad Lander, Margaret Chin, Andy King, and Ben Kallos escorted some of the children inside City Hall to deliver their houses and a letter to Mayor de Blasio.

### Petition Drive for Better Food in Shelters

Earlier this year, members of CAG crafted a petition listing a multitude of grievances regarding the food in shelters, including a lack of nutritious options, shelter staff's unwillingness to accommodate medical or religious diets, and improper food handling. Since then, members have visited multiple shelters and gathered hundreds of signatures on petitions to present to the City's Department of Homeless Services.

## CAG Member Spotlight

By Dwight

After being one of the top clients on the Keener men's shelter seniority list, I recently moved into a new apartment.

My shelter journey began March 2, 2014, and ended April 17, 2018. It was a process I never want to have to go through again. But I know one thing: It strengthened my character and resolve. It made me appreciate my own home. Shelter life should be transitional, but sometimes you feel weighed down, like there's no light at the end of tunnel. You have to persevere and search within yourself for that strength to go forward. You lose focus. People get stuck in there. The journey sometimes makes you feel like getting out is unattainable. They say they're going to do a lot for you. We have expectations too. I didn't expect to be in there for four years. Rejection, waiting lists – sometimes it felt like they were really jerking my chain. I am also visually impaired, which made it rough. I felt helpless.

Right now, I feel stuck in my house, and I'm fending for myself. Although I'm having a tough transition, it's better than being in the shelter. Even so, they still need to give you services when you leave the shelter.

For everyone still in shelter, I want to say: I did everything on my own. I found the information. I submitted the applications. The shelter staff just processed my paperwork. After I got the paperwork in, then [my caseworkers] helped. But up to that point, the majority of the people that helped me weren't shelter-related.

Do whatever it takes. Don't just leave your fate up to them. I kept looking. I tried to get other vouchers. Every place I could file an application, I filed. I went to real estate places and did lotteries too. I got my place through the lottery. I didn't give up, no matter how discouraged I got. Like they say, "You gotta be in it to win it."



CAG member Dwight before moving out of a shelter.



# Untitled (The French Toast Poem)

By M.A. Dennis

Today, at the homeless shelter, they served french toast for breakfast. French toast brings back fond memories of my maternal grandmother, Lucille Gibbs Anderson. (Praise the ancestors.) Her initials are tattooed on my heart, And not even what they pump into the jets at La Guardia Airport Can rival how she fueled the family. When it comes to Gran'momma Love There's something this lovely shelter breakfast reminds me of: Syrup wasn't good enough for her grandbaby; For my entire pre-k, kindergarten, and elementary school life, My feet never touched the ground Aunt Jemima walked on. And I'm not just referring to the breakfast condiment Most folks drizzled over pancakes and waffles, Which featured a headshot of Uncle Ben's wife, Mrs. Jemima Butterworth. In the cupboards of 116-07 Mexico Street, The same street John Coltrane lived on, You'd only discover ONE flour-of-youth product: Bisquik. Top shelf – advertising remix Add former slave, Nancy Green – to milk, oil, and eggs Then beat by hand – a marketing dream Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen in a box Thinking outside of it, forbidden Yet, I only came across two Aunties in Grandma's kitchen: Delores and Helena, would listen to The Chi-Lites "Tell me have you seen her?" (No, I didn't.) There were no bandana-wrapped-around-head mascots to be found.

On the days when I'd find french toast  
On the year-round seasonal menu of my plate,  
Abuela Amore would break out the iconic



Red-and-white container of Breakstone's Sour Cream, Slather dollops of it over the french toast, Then go get her yellow, 5-lb bag of Domino's Sugar (The only brand purchased by people old enough to remember when Stores, that inflated to 99-cents over time, used to be Five-and-Dime) And she'd sprinkle granules over the rising tops of those white, Fluffy peaks – enough to change the cream's sourness into sweet. Now THAT, literally, was turning-water-to-wine type wizardry My Holy-Ghost-Filled Grandma'ma was practicing Black Girl Magic, Before y'all even had a name for it. My name for it? Breakfast Granny Miracle: Taking life's tartness, Then making it sweeter (She was good at that.)

In the early 70's this lady (who was the "Sweet Sadie" of grandparents) Faced a bitter *development*: her daughter pregnant at 13-years-old. But Gran'Momma told the Baby, that was my Momma: I don't care, if their sour-faced expressions say you SINNED; Sweetie, I will reverse the curse spelled S-I-N-N-E-D;

For a child is born and we will name him D-E-N-N-I-S.

Now Dennis, go and sin no more. My Mother's Mother was merciful; When advised to put Proverbs into action, She tasked herself with the goal: "Deliver his soul from hell," *Without* beating him "with the rod." But God-forbid, I accept an offer of food From someone outside our home (handouts were not condoned), Then it was, "Boy! Go hand me that switch." The Anderson Family Matriarch was a jealous God-fearing woman. NO ONE, except Church Mother Saint, Sister Lucille could feed Phyllis' son.

At the end, No one, except me, was there to see her last breath drawn. She's gone now... But certain things bring back Nana's presence: Like the heavenly manna she baked, known as 7-Up Cake Or my favorite, joy in the morning French toast Covered in sour cream (Pretty please) With sugar on top.

## FREE 15-week job training program for women

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Computer Training – Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint,  
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Yoga & Meditation • Support Groups • Empowerment

GED not required • New class starting soon!

**FREE Continental Breakfast & MetroCards Provided**

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[www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/first-step](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/first-step)

FIRST STEP

coalition  
for the  
homeless

CVE

JBO

## Crisis Intervention Program

*If you need help, please visit our office during intake hours. No appointment necessary.*

We provide assistance with: Problems accessing shelter, including PATH and AFIC  
Problems in shelter • Benefits (Public Assistance, Food Stamps, SSI/SSD, Medicaid, etc.)  
Establishing a mailing address • Information about housing options • Tenants' rights  
information • Problems with housing subsidy programs.

### 129 Fulton Street

Corner of Nassau Street. Located in Lower Manhattan

#### Walk-in Intake:

Mon, Tues & Thurs: We see the first 50 clients

Wed & Fri: We see the first 30 clients

Return carfare provided.

No appointment necessary, however, intake is  
limited. Please arrive before 9:00 am to sign up.

#### Directions:

A, C, 2, 3, 4, 5, J, or Z train to Fulton  
Street Station.

#### We also provide referrals for:

Shelter • Clothing • Food pantries and Soup kitchens  
Eviction prevention assistance • Legal services • Counseling  
Substance use treatment • Job training • Mental health services  
Domestic violence issues • Other services

coalition  
for the  
homeless

## 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.**