

# The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

## In Memoriam

By Janet and Rhonda



Anthony Manson  
Nazario Vazquez Villegas  
Chuen Kwok  
Florencio Moran

These are the names of people who were murdered because they chose to sleep outside in Chatham Square in October 2019. Another of our neighbors, David Hernandez, was severely injured. This should make every New Yorker afraid. Afraid because not one of us is safe.

Although New York City has a right to shelter, many individuals choose not to go into the shelter system because they feel unsafe. Many feel the shelter system has failed them. Being on the street puts you in a “defensive mode” all day long.

The city needs more Safe Haven beds and, more importantly, more low-income housing. We also need more supportive housing – housing with support services. This is especially important for those who are living with mental health issues.

We as a city must do better. We must elect officials that will take the needs of the underserved into consideration, and find a way to make it better. As we stood there at the vigil amongst vacant buildings, it was hard not to wonder that if these men had their own homes, this all may have been averted.



CAG member  
Dustin. Interview  
by Antonio.

## CAG Member Spotlight

By Dustin

I was living with a friend and I was unaware that my friend was not paying rent. Once evicted from the apartment, I saved money and tried to find affordable rental units. I even tried to stay at hotels to avoid the shelter system. By September 2017, I had to come to terms that I had to enter the shelter system. I was first placed at 30th Street Men’s Shelter and then transferred to Wards Island. After 36 months, I finally received a transfer due to the way I was treated.

The Sergeant demanded that I stand before entering the shelter. I use a wheelchair. I responded, “No.” When I did, I was not allowed to enter the shelter that night and I immediately called my attorney and the Coalition for the Homeless. I was then transferred to Clarke Thomas Shelter. Being disabled and experiencing homelessness made me feel like I was forgotten.

Transportation is also a huge issue. I had to work at 9:00 a.m. and there are only a few buses that leave Wards Island. I would be fighting with other homeless individuals with mobility issues for a spot on the bus. Clearly, the City must invest in more buses and improve the frequency of buses at certain shelters.

Finally, I received a housing voucher. The voucher I received was set at \$1,268, and I could not find an affordable apartment that was also accessible. Unsurprisingly, most rents are very high and for individuals with visual and physical impairments, there

are not a lot of housing options. I tried using the “Housing Connect” portal, but I didn’t qualify for any “affordable” housing. The most common minimum yearly gross income was \$30,000 or more.

My housing specialist in the shelter system would often offer me housing that was not accessible or in an unacceptable environment. The common borough to send clients with mobility issues is Staten Island, where there are less transportation options. There was also high turnover among caseworkers. At one shelter, there was no housing specialist. This made the search for housing much more difficult.

Finally, I was able to find housing, and I am in a new building, but it is haunting me that I may end up back in the shelter system. One shocking thing about moving out of the shelter is I was only provided \$500 for furniture. The Coalition helped me secure a better bed.

The City needs to come to terms with how complex affordable housing is. Affordable housing needs to be for low-income New Yorkers. Also, there needs to be strong leadership on issues such as accessibility within housing, transit, and public space.

Without the Coalition, I would still be navigating the shelter system. Shelters are not prepared to handle clients like me who have mobility issues.

## City Hall Park Sleep Out



CAG members at City Hall Sleep Out

By Cynthia

On the night of September 26, 2019, members of the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group, in partnership with several other advocacy groups, gathered in City Hall Park to spend the night as part of an overnight vigil. Our goal was to further spotlight the very grave reality of homelessness in New York City as part of the House Our Future NY Campaign.

The House Our Future NY Campaign demands that Mayor Bill de Blasio increase the total number of apartments for homeless families and individuals in his housing plan to 30,000, including 24,000 apartments to be created through new construction. For nearly two years, Coalition for the Homeless and our allies in the House Our Future NY Campaign have been trying to get the Mayor to realize that what we need is truly affordable, permanent housing.

As we marched around the park by candle light, we let out the rallying cry:

*"What do we want?"*  
**"Housing!"**  
*"When do we want it?"*  
**"NOW!"**

Our chanting could be heard for blocks, and several local news agencies were present to memorialize our efforts.

We spent one night outside in solidarity with our fellow New Yorkers who have no choice but to sleep outside or in city shelters night after night. We had good food, warm sleeping bags, and the warmth of our common goals. However, our thoughts were focused on our fellow New Yorkers who continue to sleep outside without the option to go home.

Come the dawn, we packed up our sleeping bags, drank our coffee, and went back to our daily lives. For us, it was one symbolic night; but for too many New Yorkers, this is a never-ending way of life!



Members of the House Our Future NY Campaign celebrate the passage of Intro. 1211-a at City Hall in Dec 2019.

## Landmark Victory for Homeless New Yorkers

By Deborah

On December 19th, just after the one-year anniversary of a sit-in at City Hall demanding more housing for homeless New Yorkers, members of CAG and the House Our Future NY Campaign (HOFNY) watched the New York City Council pass Intro. 1211-a. This legislation will require the majority of new housing developments that receive City financial assistance to set aside at least 15 percent of apartments for homeless individuals and families. The legislation was sponsored and steadfastly championed by Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr. of the Bronx. City Council Speaker Corey Johnson called the legislation a "revolutionary change" in the way the City finances affordable housing.

Passage of Intro. 1211-a is a bold step toward ending the city's record-breaking homelessness crisis and helping to achieve the HOFNY campaign goal of 24,000 newly constructed apartments for homeless New Yorkers. Intro. 1211-a, which also requires annual reporting on the number of apartments created for homeless

New Yorkers, became law in January 2020 and goes into effect on July 1, 2020.

The Coalition's Policy Director Giselle Routhier explained the significance of the passage of Intro. 1211-a: "Since the beginning of the Housing New York plan, half of all projects financed by the City have created no units for homeless New Yorkers. By codifying a requirement on a project-by-project basis, this bill could create 1,000 additional apartments each year for New Yorkers who need them most. Through the House Our Future NY Campaign, we have worked to demonstrate the urgency to create more permanent housing for homeless New Yorkers. We applaud the leaders on the frontlines of this campaign, many of whom have experienced homelessness, who helped make this a reality."



# CAG Members Testify on Food Access and Quality at DHS Shelters



By Jacquelyn

On November 21, 2019, the New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare held an oversight hearing on "Food Access, Quality, and Inspections at Department of Homeless Services Shelters." The hearing was held in response to disturbing reports that residents of an adult family shelter became ill after they were served expired chicken salad in October 2019.

For months prior to the news report and hearing, CAG members circulated a petition

and survey to individuals living in shelters to ask about their experiences and advocate for better and more widely available food options.

At the hearing, six members of the Client Advisory Group (CAG) presented compelling testimony about their challenges accessing quality food in DHS shelters, and several more submitted written testimony to the Council. Here are some of the quotes submitted to the committee:

“

*The cafeteria staff often harass and the portions are so small. It is embarrassing.*

**CAG Food Survey**

“

*The milk is going bad or is sour, the bread is moldy, and mice are seen in the kitchen area running around.*

**Cece**

“

*I think they have to ask people in the shelter what they want. Not everyone can eat that food. People need quality food. They should make a questionnaire for people in shelter. We want more interaction, more of our opinion.*

**CAG Food Survey**

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*If we don't have a healthy meal, how are we to handle the trauma of homelessness?*

**Felix**

“

*I eat less. I have to spend my money on outside food. This impacts my savings.*

**CAG Food Survey**

## In The Wind Blowing

By Felix

Experiencing hardship on every level,  
The American Dream is it the stuff of fables?  
Weaponizing blemishes against you,  
how can you feel you have a seat at the table?  
When a home appears place of no belonging,  
rest can't be achieved by weary bones  
the reverberation from all traumas past and  
present presenting within the calm owed  
entirely. Question gone unanswered,  
"Suffer silently or choose to keep in wind  
blowing?"

Better is it stay the course to actualize goals  
set for oneself, how are children homeless?  
In this, the land of opportunity must  
you justify being an opportunist to make ends  
meet?

Must you in public plea with every molecule  
of your being for recognition of dignity?  
Having and not penny in pocket and  
food to eat outside the realm of a civilized society  
we wait to be invited for much of life to  
hold a conversation with those whom dictate  
policy?

We born under the same Son, all sleep  
parallel with the horizon regardless of where.  
Change is necessary, more than just on the  
surface,

conviction being cross to bear  
take what is yours not from another's mouth,  
Yours is all gained from applying sweat  
to move a millimeter. Measuring progress by  
the distance traveled between breaths  
I refuse with everything I am to be held in  
captivity  
by emotions as the common factor  
binding humanity is its response to  
darkness present in the now and the hereafter.

CAG members celebrate Thanksgiving at the CFH office.



## FREE 15-week job training program for women

### First Step Program

Computer Training - Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook • Internet Research • Resume Writing  
Interviewing Skills • Job Placement Assistance  
Self-Esteem Building • 2 Month Internship  
Case Management • Typing • Literacy Building • Mentoring  
Yoga & Meditation • Support Groups • Empowerment

GED not required • New class starting soon!

**FREE Continental Breakfast & MetroCards Provided**

For more information, please call (212) 776-2074

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



## 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



## 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 a Coalition Shelter Specialist, 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 Specialists 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 news conferences, rallies, and marches – even traveling to Albany to challenge government and social policies.

*CAG meets 4 - 6 p.m. every Tuesday at the Coalition's office: 129 Fulton Street in lower Manhattan. Dinner and MetroCards are provided. All are welcome! **No one will be admitted after 5:30 p.m.!***

## 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.**