

The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

SHELTER MONITOR HOTLINE

We want to hear from you about conditions in shelters, including those related to bathrooms, elevators, excessive or inadequate heat, general maintenance, laundry, meal service, rodents/vermin, security, etc. Call the Shelter Monitor Hotline at 212-776-2003 or email monitors@cft homeless.org. Please include your name, phone number, and the name of your shelter.

VIRTUAL CAG

The Coalition's Client Advisory Group (CAG) meets every Tuesday via Zoom! *See back page for details.*

IN REMEMBRANCE

We dedicate this issue to Montgomery "Monty" Hukill (1978-2020), a member of the **Coalition for the Homeless** family who passed away this summer. At our virtual memorial service on September 23rd at 5 p.m., we will honor Monty and other homeless and formerly homeless New Yorkers, as well as those serving them, who have lost their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Please email monitors@cft homeless.org for details.*

CAG Member Spotlight



BY MARIA
(Interview by M.A. Dennis)

Homelessness is when you have no place to call your own. I have been homeless for three years. I have lived with people and it was good in the beginning, but I became the babysitter, the maid, the cook, and the banker. I have dealt with uncomfortable statements when I didn't have any money, or if I really didn't want to babysit. For example, I was told that I had no choice but to be a slave, unless I wanted to live on the street. When I didn't have any money, I wasn't allowed to make myself something to eat. (I had to wait until everyone else ate, and pray that there was something left.)

My "homelessness" didn't seem that

bad at first because I had a roof over my head (and it could've been worse), but I was very uncomfortable. I couldn't live my life for me. I had to make sure everyone was happy in order to not hear the words "get out."

My belief and faith in God kept me going. I have five grown children and nine grandkids who love me, so when I feel like giving up, I pray for strength and guidance 'cause I know one day I'll have my own place.

If my experience with being homeless was a movie, I'd call it "A Light at the End of Darkness." I would want Angela Bassett to play me; the villain would be my ex-boyfriend, and my hero would be Tyler Perry. The movie would end with me in my own apartment/house and being so happy and content. I would open up a women's shelter and own a couple of buildings with affordable rent.

Some women don't want to go into a shelter because you have to live with individuals who have all kinds of issues. They may not feel comfortable around a lot of women because they may think it means dealing with a lot of pettiness, but for me to be free and get my own place, I had to go.

Stepping Through Quarantine BY CONSTANCE

Sometime before the coronavirus arrived and the world witnessed the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, an elderly Black man on the subway platform asked me, "What will it take for us Black people to stand up and fight like the old days?" My response: "It will take a revolution and radical leadership."

After my train arrived, I took a seat with a sigh of relief, thinking about the exchanges of awareness that just took place and my experiences as a Black homeless woman who craved

change. If someone told me then that a global coronavirus pandemic; an executive-ordered, multi-month, quarantine-like "pause;" and an international Black Lives Matter protest would all soon rewrite history, I would not have believed them.

I spent multiple months in self-quarantine, sharing my story with *Time Magazine*, dancing in Club Quarantine on Instagram, which was founded by DJ Nice and includes other talented DJs, taking bold steps away from homelessness, and making a difference in the lives of others.

Advocacy Team Monitors City's Response to Pandemic



BY JACQUELYN AND DEBORAH

The Coalition's Advocacy team has monitored the City's response to the pandemic since before the first homeless individual was diagnosed with COVID-19 in New York City. Our staff has made countless recommendations to the City on how to improve shelters and outreach services to protect homeless individuals and families who do not have access to private space in order to practice social distancing. We have commented extensively on ever-changing guidance and policies issued by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). We continue to track DHS' transfer of thousands of single adults out of congregate shelters and into hotel rooms.

In June, we also released the report "COVID-19 and Homelessness in New York City: Pandemic Pandemonium for New Yorkers Without Homes," which outlines the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on homeless New Yorkers as demonstrated by an age-adjusted mortality rate for homeless individuals that far exceeded the rate for the general population. The report also notes that homelessness is unequivocally an issue of racial justice by highlighting deep-rooted disparities between the rates of homelessness among Black, Latinx, and White New Yorkers.

In addition to monitoring the nightly subway shutdown that began in May, our team created "Know Your Rights" materials about the impact of the subway shutdown and the June citywide curfew, so people living unsheltered in the subways and on the streets could be aware of these changing policies and assert their rights.

A Changed City and Our Beloved Neighbor J. Doe



"...we should do everything that we can and more, when appropriate, to honor the legacies of those who have suffered."

BY BENNETT

As I write this in the second week of June, New York City begins its Phase 1 reopening program and the start of a long process designed to ease America's most populous city back to standard operations in as safe a manner as possible. This includes new best practices for activities like shopping at stores (wear masks in the aisles), taking public transportation (keep social distance between riders), and attending cultural events and programming (limit capacity). But people will do so with many thousand fewer New Yorkers as neighbors, including those who lost their battles with the coronavirus after becoming infected during this year's pandemic. A significant number of these individuals were unhoused, living in the shelter system, or experienced homelessness sometime during their life. Many of their names have been or will be read at the Coalition's series of virtual memorials, along with those whose names we do not know and who were memorialized as J. Doe (coalitionforthehomeless.org/covid-memorial). And it is impossible to reverse the hands of time, to diminish the toll of this terrible illness. With this stark and unfortunate reality, I am

sure of one thing: Like the digital memorial services, we should do everything that we can and more, when appropriate, to honor the legacies of those who have suffered.

It has been incredibly hard (there are really no words), especially for those who have stayed in New York City from the beginning of the virus' spread to its peak and along its slow but steady downturn as of late. Others have been able to leave the city for the time being – folks have left to be with family, to protect health, or, in my case, because classes were cancelled. With many under restrictions that limit movement and activity, we all have been doing a lot more thinking. Sometimes we have read books or watched television programs or movies. But even these hallmarks of entertainment are different. When I watched some of a program partially shot in a mall, for example, I missed something – it was startling knowing that the world in which I lived was not the world in which the show was shot, in which the cast members were living at that time. Here's hoping we get back to that world soon, in New York and everywhere else.

My COVID-19 Journey: More Than 100 Days Later

BY KAT

I was diagnosed as “presumed positive” with COVID-19 on March 20, 2020, with the initial default “stay quarantined for 14 days even if you feel better after 10” instructions.

However, on April 1st and April 4th, doctors via internet-based virtual telehealth clinics confirmed it was looking like I was going to be in it for a second round, or what others have since called “long-haul.” I am now writing this on day 128, having had about five major flare-ups caused by COVID-19 that different doctors have different names for, each lasting between one and three weeks, with generally five to 10 days in between. And no, I have not re-caught the virus – even marathon runners with no pre-existing conditions are in similar situations. And yes, others starting in less stable health have COVID-19 for the more common 10- to 14-day period and return to work fine!

Some people have COVID-19 and are asymptomatic. That is why everyone needs to keep washing their hands, wearing masks – that properly cover the nose and mouth! – and disinfecting their areas.

Experts believe the virus can live on clothes, but it is unclear for how long. For people living in shelters, changing clothes as soon as coming into one’s private space from the outside or common areas may also be helpful in preventing the spread of the virus. This can be accomplished by keeping an “inside” outfit handy and keeping “outside” clothes (including those worn in common areas) in their own plastic bags, etc. Remember to wash your hands in between handling your clothes or have hand sanitizer or hand wipes nearby.

For those of us in the long-haul group, we share each other’s stories and symptoms, though in varying levels and at various times. With that, I will share some of mine. While in hopes of thinking the third round would be my final round, I had begun what was later diagnosed as a secondary sinus infection with a spiked fever, seven weeks after my initial COVID-19 symptoms. It took my primary care physician 10 days before deciding to treat it with antibiotics, which finally brought the fever down, as it had been unresponsive to Tylenol or NSAIDs.

My fourth round turned out to be a pain in my right leg – it was not discolored nor generating heat, so

I figured it was a Charley Horse, like a shin splint but in the calf. I informed the doctor at our next telehealth appointment eight

days later, although it had been feeling better. She asked me a few other questions that I said yes to – things I had figured were related to asthma or my costochondritis – so she had me come in (IRL!) to listen to my heart and lungs and order blood tests. The results led to a suspicion there may have been clotting, so a directed ER visit led to an inpatient stay for four nights where they found two groups of clots that apparently had traveled from my leg to my lung. I now have a new team of specialists to help me, and I am grateful that they seem to be already familiar with the long-haul concept.

As of July 27th, I am entering week 17 and having another, albeit mild, round of SOB (shortness of breath) and body aches and pains resulting from my COVID-19. There is still rehab work for me to rebuild endurance, but the spontaneous spikes for some

“I am grateful that they seem to be already familiar with the long-haul concept.”

A Poem of Remembrance

BY M.A. DENNIS

COVID-19

Collectively

Our dark night
Of the tortured soul
Taking an unimaginable toll
On hearts
Lungs &
Peaceful minds
Making us go before our time
Making us go crazy.

Imagine, if Prince Nelson
Mister Rogers were here
He’d say, Dearly Beloved
Neighbor, we are gathered here
Today, neighborly
With present troubles & far less than
Six feet apart from future worries
About winding up six feet under, trying
To get through this thing called
Death, this thing called coronavirus.

A pandemic has grabbed hold of the globe
And refuses to let go
Showing itself to be no respecter of person
Hurting the most vulnerable among us
The downtrodden who are down on their luck
The poor & huddled masses on mass transit
Like modern day messiahs
No place to rest their head
No place to stay home
No place to save lives, starting with their own.

If the strain of trying to survive
Doesn’t give you a migraine, nothing else will
We’ve seen the enemy & it cannot be seen
This foe possesses the power to overcome
One’s will to breathe
How can we stay afloat
When it’s sinking the boats of our Battleship?
One by one, we’ve suffered incalculable losses
Our community
Our tribe.

other long-haulers seem to have left. Scientists, doctors, immunologists, and nurses are all working to continue to learn more about long-haulers – some of them, too, were/are part of this group of patients whose COVID-19 symptoms continue to persist.



VIRTUAL
Learning

Free Six Week First Step Human Services
ONLINE Training Opportunity

REQUIREMENTS

- Be 18 or older
- Identify as female
- Access to a desktop or laptop computer with a camera (All classes held via Zoom) and reliable internet
- Live in one of the 5 boroughs
- Have work authorization
- GED or High School Diploma
- Ability to commit to the time frame and ability to complete independent assignments

Gain Skills in the Human Services Field

Monday - Friday 9:30am-2:30pm

Limited Space Available!
To register for our upcoming information session, please call us at (347) 731-2339.

Website: www.cftfhomeless.org

Crisis Intervention Services

Due to the public health crisis caused by COVID-19, Crisis Intervention Services are available remotely, but we still want to hear from you!

Please call us if you need help with any shelter, housing, or benefits issues, including:

- Finding or accessing shelters
- Shelter placement problems
- Reasonable accommodations in shelters
- Applying for benefits
- Problems receiving benefits
- Information about housing options
- Finding food, a shower, or clothing
- Obtaining a mail account
- Your rights on the streets and in the subways

Call our emergency Crisis Intervention Services hotline at 212-776-2177. We will return your call the same day and do our best to answer your question or advocate on your behalf. Be sure to leave your name and phone number.

About the Client Advisory Group

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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CAG will not meet in person. Until further notice, CAG will meet every Tuesday from 5 to 6 p.m. via the Zoom app. All are welcome to join!

Please email monitors@cftfhomeless.org to request an invitation containing a link to the virtual meeting. You can join by phone even if you do not have consistent internet access.

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.**