

The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

CAG Member Spotlight: Morleen

By Cynthia

Morleen became homeless in September 2020. She worked all her adult life as a teacher's assistant and after she retired from that career, she took a job in a parking garage to help make ends meet. Then the unthinkable happened: She suffered an injury on the job that left her permanently disabled. This was the final straw, and Morleen could no longer maintain the apartment that she had lived in and loved for over a decade. With nowhere to turn after she lost her apartment, she went into the shelter system. "It was a sad situation, and I learned the true meaning of 'never say never,'" said Morleen as she remembered the shock she experienced entering a shelter for the first time. "It was what I imagine jail would be like. You're told when to go out and when to come in. You have to go through metal detectors and are forced to discard food and toiletries because they aren't allowed in the shelter," she added.

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@cfthomeless.org. Please include your name, phone number, and the name of your shelter.

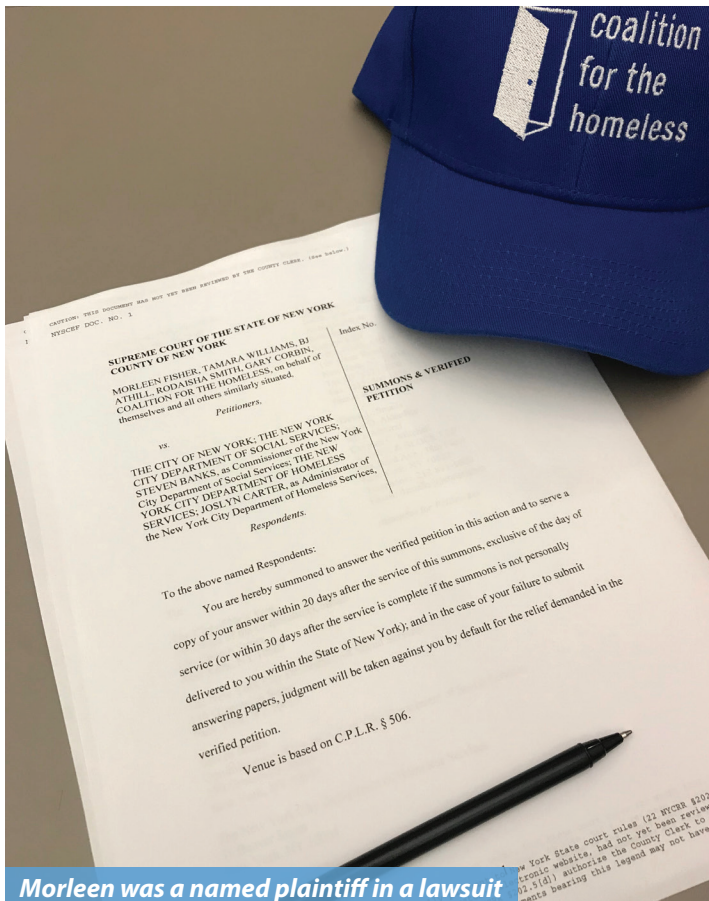
VIRTUAL CAG

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

Morleen's situation was further complicated by the fact that she has diabetes, and her permanent injuries from the job accident left her debilitated. The food in the shelter worsened her diabetes, and she became very ill because the staff in the shelter were unwilling to accommodate her dietary needs. Morleen said that the shelter's housing specialists were so useless that she felt as though they were actually sabotaging her efforts to get permanent housing.

Then one day, Coalition for the Homeless Shelter Specialist Sam came to the shelter asking the residents if they needed help. Morleen described her medical conditions and disabilities, which supported her need for a single-occupancy room in a hotel to keep her safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Morleen soon became a named plaintiff in a lawsuit filed by The Legal Aid Society and Jenner & Block LLP on behalf of the Coalition for the Homeless and homeless single adults. The lawsuit sought single-occupancy hotel rooms for all homeless New Yorkers who needed them for the duration of the pandemic. Morleen was eventually granted a reasonable accommodation and was transferred from a congregate, dorm-style shelter to a hotel-based shelter. She thereafter became an active member of the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group (CAG).

After several months in the hotel, Morleen found an apartment through a lottery she signed up for through NYC Housing Connect (housingconnect.nyc.gov). She moved into her new apartment on September 1, 2021. She is now able to travel and spend time with her grandchildren. She is very grateful for the support she received from the Coalition and CAG. She plans to continue being a member of CAG and looks forward to continuing to advocate for others who are still homeless.



Morleen was a named plaintiff in a lawsuit

Negro Spiritual Remix by M.A. Dennis

*Before I'd be a slave
 I'd be buried in my grave
 And go home to my Lord
 And be saved*
 O, this is the remix
 O, we the best
 O, take that take that
 O, this is the Negro Spiritual Remix
 Before I'd be a slave
 I'd see Massa buried in my grave
 And send him home to his lord
 And write on his white tombstone:
 Keep messin' with my Black ass
 And this is what happens
 Ain't no blond-haired, blue-eyed
 Saviour gonna save you
 O, this is the remix
 O, we the best
 O, take that take that
 O, this is the Negro Spiritual Remix
 Before I'd be a slave
 I'd see Massa buried in my grave
 And send him home to his lord

Because if I can't live free
 If I can't have liberty
 Somebody getting' Patrick Henry'd
 This is for John Henry
 This is for Juneteenth
 This is the old saying remix
 This is a dollar short
 And two & a half years late
 And there's no statute of limitations
 On reparations
 When the IRS notified me
 My back taxes are two & half years late
 I wrote back:
 Juneteenth!
 When Sallie Mae reminded me, "no payments
 have been made on your Stafford Loan in two
 & a half years," I replied:
 Juneteenth!
 June 19th is my Visa to travel into any Diner's
 Club; never waiting for a table, always given
 American Express treatment; it's priceless as
 Mastercard, seeing the maître d's reaction
 when they

Discover I'm not paying the bill
 Put it on my Tab
 Juneteenth, my diet cola soft drink
 Since 1866
 Juneteenth, my Frederick Douglass
 What is July 4th to the Slave?
 Juneteenth, my Emancipation,
 My newfound freedom Proclamation:
 Before I'd be a slave
 I'd see Massa buried in my grave
 And send him home to his lord
 Lord knows,
 I'll kill 'em dead
 Kunta must be free
 Give us free
 Free free free free free
 O, this is the remix
 O, we the best
 O, take that take that
 O, this is the Negro Spiritual Remix
 O, we the best
 O, take that take that

Health Is Wealth By Constance

I think back to a time before the COVID-19 pandemic, and how I used to walk from a drop-in center at 6:30 in the morning to St. Bartholomew's Church for a dignified, sit-down breakfast, served on a white linen table cloth. It was the highlight of my day. The breakfast served was actually something one would eat for lunch or dinner. I found this odd until I learned that many people complained that a typical breakfast meal wasn't substantial enough to last throughout the day. I was told that chefs and nutritionists carefully planned the alternative meals served at breakfast time.

The volunteers greeted me with warmth and seated everyone as if we were at a five-star restaurant! Rain, sleet, or snow, St. Bart's and the good Samaritans who volunteered there provided the community with warm clothing and smiling faces. Leon, whom I respectfully referred to as the bouncer and manager of operations, did not play! Shout out to Leon for extra cups of coffee on a cold day or an umbrella replacement on a rainy day – he always obliged while giving us "the business"!

Sundays at St. Bart's were special. Following the delicious traditional Sunday breakfast, I would head over to Sunday worship service at St. Bart's Church and was greeted with more hot coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and a warm congregation. After the service, I would stay for an educational lecture hosted by the St. Bart's community. It was very enjoyable.

I am sharing this story because during a recent Coalition for the Homeless weekly Client Advisory Group (CAG) meeting (via Zoom), there was a guest speaker who is an employee of the Coalition's Grand Central Food Program (GCFP). The presentation brought back memories of my first-hand experiences with GCFP, which starts each evening at St. Bart's before it sends off its three vans to serve meals to people in the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, and Lower Manhattan. These memories gave me hope and reminded me that there will be light at the end of this currently miserable situation.

I am pescatarian and my food choices are both slim and challenging. I often feel that homeless people seem to have no right to request healthy dietary choices and are expected to be grateful for what they get. I understand that not everyone can have their dietary needs met while in shelters. That is why alternative food sources like SNAP benefits, St. Bart's, and GCFP are so important. GCFP provides incredible mobile food services to the poor and homeless community.

If my experience resonates with you, speak up and don't be ashamed to be an advocate for your health. Health is wealth. A healthy immune system is necessary in these uncertain times. And, if you haven't already—please get vaccinated, wash your hands, and keep social distancing.

Visit CoalitionForTheHomeless.org/GCFP for more information about the Coalition's Grand Central Food Program.

Client Advisory Group In-Person Meeting By Cynthia

The pandemic hit the world hard in 2020, and the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group (CAG) was no exception. This vibrant group of homeless and formerly homeless New Yorkers had to pivot and find a way to keep going in this time of remote EVERYTHING! Normally, we would meet at the Coalition's main office every Tuesday evening. We would have dinner together and then discuss the news and actions of the day. We organized around issues that concern the homeless and came together for local rallies at City Hall, hearings before the City Council, and trips to Albany. Besides the pizza dinner, we all looked forward to meeting with each other, supporting and encouraging each other, and sharing

our experiences with – and our desire to end – homelessness in New York City. These are the ties that bound us together. When the pandemic hit, we missed being together in person but consoled ourselves with weekly Zoom meetings and phone calls. Our last pre-pandemic, in-person meeting was on March 10, 2020.

With vaccines now widely available, and the August heat finally behind us, a window of opportunity showed itself: On September 14, 2021, we were able to meet in-person once again! This meeting was a bit different than our previous meetings: 25 CAG members met outdoors at Manhattan's Elevated Acre Park. We ate a picnic dinner and didn't mind not having the pizza that had become a beloved tradition of our in-person meetings. We all look forward to the end of the pandemic so that we can resume our regular, in-person meetings in the Coalition's conference room. Until that time, please email monitors@cft homeless.org if you would like to learn more about our weekly Zoom meetings.



Update on the Coalition for the Homeless' Advocacy

By Deborah and Jacque

The summer was a particularly busy time for the Coalition's Advocacy team. Mayor Bill de Blasio announced in June 2021 that the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) would end the use of de-densification hotels, which had provided safer shelter during the pandemic for homeless single adults who would otherwise sleep in crowded, dorm-style shelters. As the moves began, our shelter monitoring team met dozens of hotel residents with disabilities who were scheduled to move to congregate shelters that could not accommodate their needs, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the 2017 settlement in *Butler v. City of New York*, a class action lawsuit filed to end DHS' discriminatory practices against individuals with disabilities. On July 8th, The Legal Aid Society and Jenner & Block LLP filed a motion in *Butler* to force the City to comply with the 2017 settlement. The judge issued an order that temporarily paused the moves so that DHS could work with the Coalition and our lawyers to create a plan that protected the rights of homeless individuals with disabilities once the moves resumed. As we continued to monitor the move-out process, the Coalition learned that DHS failed to properly implement several of the steps that we agreed would be part of the move-out process. We went to court two more times over the summer to ensure DHS considered the unique needs of individuals before deciding where and when to assist them in moving out of the hotels. The Coalition's dedicated shelter monitoring team was present during each move to assist shelter residents.

The CityFHEPS rent supplement program has finally been

improved! Thanks to a multi-year campaign led by homeless New Yorkers and supported by organizations like the Coalition for the Homeless, the City Council voted in May 2021 to raise the CityFHEPS rent limits to reflect the true cost of housing in New York City. The new limits now align with Section 8 voucher payment standards. Homeless New Yorkers with CityFHEPS "shopping letters" have been able to rent apartments with the higher maximum rents since September 1, 2021, thanks to the tireless advocates who fought for these long-overdue improvements.





First Step Virtual Learning

.....

Free Six Week ONLINE Training Opportunity

Provides additional skills and certifications for women interested in working in the human services field

Gain Skills in G-Suite, Salesforce, De-escalation Strategies, Conflict Resolution and more...

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 have childcare in place if applicable

January 18th - February 25th
Monday - Friday 9:30am-2:30pm
Limited Space Available!

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

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 1-888-358-2384. We will return your call as soon as possible 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@cfthomeless.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 individuals and families. 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.**