

The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

CAG Member Spotlight: Winston

by Cynthia

Throughout the years, Winston has become a vocal and powerful advocate for the homeless. His lived experience in both the youth and adult shelter systems has taught him the importance of speaking up and advocating for himself. Winston first became homeless at the age of 20 in 2006 as a result of serious family issues that ended with his father locking him out of the house. Winston lived unsheltered on the streets until the fall of that year. He frequented Union Square Park, where he learned of two organizations that give aid and/or shelter to homeless youth: The Door (door.org) and Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project (safehorizon.org/streetwork).

The Door provided him with training and referral services while the Streetwork Project served as a drop-in center for



Winston next to a vending machine bearing his name

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 other Tuesday via Zoom! See back page for details.

him to frequent. He also briefly stayed at Covenant House but felt that it was not a good fit for him. Winston aged out of the youth shelter system in 2010 and had to go into the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) single adult shelter system, where he remained until 2014. By then, he was employed and was able to rent a room in an apartment. Unfortunately, he later lost his employment and was forced to re-enter the DHS system in early 2015.

In 2016, he left the shelter system again to stay with relatives. This didn't work and ended with him being illegally evicted in spring 2018. After failing to get adequate support through the housing court process, he found himself back in the shelter system by the fall of that year. He stayed in the system until he got his current apartment in late 2021.

Winston is now working toward his dream of becoming a software engineer and entrepreneur. He is an active member of the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group (CAG). Winston is also an advocate with VOCAL-NY and Neighbors Together. He is living proof that perseverance coupled with self-advocacy and knowledge can get you through the toughest times. There is no doubt that Winston will succeed in his future endeavors.

From Shelter to Housing by Anonymous

My story began in 2019 when I first became homeless. I had a hard time at first, not knowing where to go or what to do. I am an active member of my church, and they supported me and promised to walk with me through my journey.

I went through the DHS shelter assessment process and was assigned to a women's shelter in Brooklyn in June of 2019. I immediately realized that I wouldn't get much help from the in-house caseworker. Consequently, I became frustrated and started seeking help from outside the shelter, but I didn't know whom I could trust or whom to turn to. I was in despair.

After several months, I was potentially approved for an apartment, but I did not yet have the Section 8 voucher I expected to receive. During this time, I found out that I was being transferred to another shelter, and I was in tears because I was afraid that the transfer would cause me to lose the apartment. A fellow resident that I had become friends with told me

about the Coalition for the Homeless' Client Advisory Group (CAG) and their meetings.

I went to the very next CAG meeting. While there, I met the Coalition's shelter specialists who facilitate the CAG meetings. In turn, they referred me to the Coalition's Crisis Intervention Program, which has advocates who are very knowledgeable. They walked me through the various steps I needed to take to obtain a Section 8 voucher, which I learned is difficult to get in NYC, and how to qualify for the CityFHEPS program. I found an apartment that qualified for the CityFHEPS program on December 30, 2019. A few weeks later, I received a phone call stating that my apartment would be ready on February 2, 2020. I moved into my apartment and am now very happy and comfortable.

I decided that I would stay connected to the Coalition, and I still attend CAG meetings, which have been held via Zoom since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Even though I am in

my apartment, I realize that situations may occur with my permanent housing and I continue to go to the Coalition for guidance, resources, and assistance. The shelter specialists that I met at CAG, as well as other Coalition staff members, continue to stand by me and they support me every step of the way.

I tell everyone I meet who struggles with homelessness or housing instability to get connected to the Coalition for the Homeless. I tell them about the CAG meetings and one of my favorite meeting rules, "Listen to learn and learn to listen." I encourage them that they, too, will eventually end up out of the shelters and in their permanent homes!

I am very grateful for the ongoing support and assistance that I receive from the Coalition. I especially appreciate the knowledge that is shared with me at the CAG meetings. These meetings have taught me how to advocate not only for myself but for others as well. I look forward to growing in this work and plan to remain an active member of CAG for as long as possible.

Art for Change: The Artist and Homeless Collaborative by Cynthia

On April 3rd, members of the Client Advisory Group and Coalition staff were given a special treat in the form of an invitation to "Art for Change: The Artist and Homeless Collaborative," an exhibition at the New-York Historical Society in Manhattan that ran from December 3, 2021, through April 3, 2022. The exhibit told the history of the Artist and Homeless Collaborative, which was founded in the 1990s by artist Hope Sandrow at the Park Avenue Women's Shelter, where professional artists and shelter residents created art together. The exhibit featured art made by the



Annie, Black Woman for President (2019), a drawing by Annie Faye Wilson-Rodgers and Francis Palazzolo

recently by homeless youth and adults, was also included.

The final room of this special exhibit featured a portrait titled, *Annie, Black Woman for President*. The subject of this very moving piece is Annie Faye Wilson-Rodgers. In 2019, Ms. Wilson-Rodgers, who is formerly homeless, created this portrait in collaboration with professional artist Francis Palazzolo, who is the artist-in-residence at BronxWorks. We had the distinct honor of meeting Ms. Wilson-Rodgers and Mr. Palazzolo at the museum. Mr. Palazzolo was our very interesting and



Installation view of the exhibit, featuring posters from the Coalition's collection

Collaborative, as well as photos and videos from the era that documented homelessness and activism in the city. The history of the Coalition for the Homeless and the legal right to shelter in NYC, as well as art made more

enthusiastic guide through the exhibit.

We wish to thank the museum, curators, artists (both professional and amateur), and activists for putting a spotlight on the urgent crisis of homelessness in NYC.



Coalition staff and CAG members pause for a group photo

My Not-So-Great Experience in a DHS COVID-19 Isolation

Hotel After Testing Positive in a Congregate Shelter by Constance

I tested positive for COVID-19 on January 6, 2022, during the height of the Omicron variant surge and realized that, no matter how careful I had been, contracting COVID-19 proved unavoidable while living in the congregate shelter system. Upon receiving the positive test result, I was quickly transferred from my shelter dorm of eight women to a six-bed triage dorm to await transportation to a Department of Homeless Services (DHS) COVID-19 isolation hotel. I waited in this triage dorm for less than 24 hours.

The hotel intake was very quick. A residential aide then took me down a long corridor to find an available room. I became concerned that I would have a roommate in the event the COVID-19 surge worsened. The hotel, I was told, had no control or power over room capacity and private rooms were not guaranteed, even though public health officials advise people who contract COVID-19 to isolate by themselves. I was told that if I refused to comply, I would be at risk for losing not only my shelter bed but also my CityFHEPS housing subsidy eligibility. Because of this, I could not leave the hotel and I was now in this new system! Fortunately, I had a private room throughout my stay.

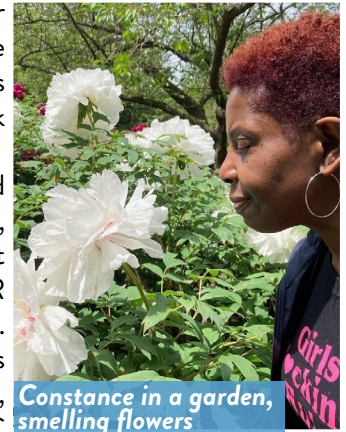
While in isolation, I had to remind the staff every day that I don't eat meat. I was informed that there were no special dietary options at the hotel and, as a result, I threw out a lot of food – something that I strongly oppose doing. Early in my stay, I filed complaints with 311 and the hotel nurses, eventually reaching the program director. Over the next couple of days, the food situation got worse. I made calls to my shelter community manager and the DHS ombudsman's office to register complaints about the absence of vegan-like food options. Between the uncertainty of my hotel accommodations, ignored dietary needs, and lack

of information about whether I would get a PCR test before returning to my shelter, I was exhausted with the game of back and forth.

On Day 6 in the hotel, I called the ombudsman's office again, expressing my concern about not knowing if I would have a PCR test before being discharged. I informed them that I was completely vaccinated, boosted, and that per current CDC guidelines, fully vaccinated and boosted people only needed to quarantine for five days. (I later learned that it is DHS' policy that clients isolate for 10 days, regardless of their vaccination status or whether they are experiencing symptoms.) The ombudsman's representative took my information and promised to look into it. Finally, on Day 7 in the hotel, I received a knock on my door informing me that I had been discharged. I was told that I would be contacted when transportation was available or I could use public transportation to travel to my shelter.

With that said, I did not receive a PCR test before being discharged. I was driven back to my shelter in a crammed Toyota minivan with six masked isolation hotel clients. The following day, I took a PCR test and the result was negative. I found out later that the isolation hotel does not administer COVID-19 tests.

DHS should be able to do better! We have been dealing with this pandemic for over two years, and my experience should not have happened. Proper social distancing and the use of single-occupancy rooms are key to preventing infection.



Update on the Coalition for the Homeless' Advocacy

by Jacquie and Deborah

Informed by discussions with the Client Advisory Group, the Coalition's Advocacy department has spent much of 2022 responding to misguided plans advanced by the Adams administration regarding unsheltered homelessness. On February 18th, Mayor Adams and Governor Hochul announced a plan to clear the subway system of people who shelter in it through the strict enforcement of transit system rules and a zero-tolerance policy for sleeping on the trains. In the media, the Coalition pushed back on this policy and emphasized that people need beds in single-occupancy rooms in Safe Havens and stabilization hotels, permanent housing, and more accessible mental health services – not heavy-handed policing. In late March, Mayor Adams announced an intense effort to clear hundreds of encampments from the streets. The Coalition again spent many days speaking with the press to underscore that policing and sweeps are counterproductive and harmful, and that the City should instead offer people a better option

than the streets by investing in single-occupancy, low-barrier shelter options and permanent housing.

On March 22nd, the Coalition released *State of the Homeless 2022: New York at a Crossroads*. This annual report highlighted that a record number of New Yorkers died while homeless last year, amidst the City's and State's continued failure to address the underlying causes of the homelessness crisis. The report also found that affordable housing production has lagged population growth, leaving about a half million households with incomes below \$30,000 at risk of homelessness. The annual report card graded the City and State on their efforts to meet the needs of unsheltered New Yorkers, provide access to shelters and permanent housing, and prevent homelessness, with several failing grades. The report included numerous recommendations for Mayor Adams and Governor Hochul. *You can read the report at coalitionforthehomeless.org/soth.*



First Step
Job Training Program for Women

Next Class
July 11 - August 17
Monday- Friday
9:30am-2:30pm

- Social Service Skills**
Stress Management
Conflict Management
Narcan Certificate
Communication
Women's Empowerment
- Computer Skills**
Google Workspace
Zoom
LinkedIn
Salesforce
- Career Development**
Transferable Skills
Resumes
Cover Letters
Interview Prep
Networking

Call
212-776-2074
For more info

Requirements
-Identify as female
-18 or over
-Live in NYC
-US Work authorization
-HS Diploma/GED

coalition for the homeless

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 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 other 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.**