

The Monitor

Free Newsletter by the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group

CAG Member Spotlight: Constance

by Constance

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, I was in the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system hoping to get an apartment. I was trying to stay on course so that I could receive the CityFHEPS voucher, but the pandemic frightened me and I left the shelter system and spent all of 2020 and most of 2021 living like a nomad.

I went back to the shelter system in the fall of 2021. One day, either by luck or by design (I'm not sure which), I ran into a very good friend and confided in her that I was getting ready to leave the shelter again. My friend responded to me very firmly, but with care and tough love, that the only way I was going to end the vicious cycle of homelessness was to "sit still for a while." She told me that if I would work with the process and get my CityFHEPS voucher, I would surely be able to find an apartment. I decided to take my friend's advice, and four months later I received my CityFHEPS voucher in February 2022.

By the end of March, I was completely frustrated with being turned down by landlords, realtors, and brokers. I was a victim of the disconnect between shelter housing specialists and the Human Resources Administration (HRA), misrepresentation, "ghosting" by real estate agents, and outright source of income discrimination.



Constance outside smelling flowers

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.

A friend recommended a particular broker to me who was willing to work with people who have a CityFHEPS voucher. Finding the right broker was key. By June 2022, I had found an apartment that I wanted and the landlord understood that he had to accept my CityFHEPS voucher. What should have been a relatively simple process became a nightmare of incompetence on the part of HRA and DHS. I found myself in danger of losing the apartment that I had worked so hard to secure. The landlord was growing impatient with the unending back and forth, miscommunication, and "red tape." I was at the end of my rope and threatened the shelter and HRA with legal action! I needed help.

I have been a member of the Coalition for the Homeless Client Advisory Group (CAG) for a few years and I decided to reach out to them for help. Once the Coalition came on board and investigated what the issues with my case were, the miscommunication and confusion stopped and I was able to move forward and complete the process. I finally moved into my apartment on July 29, 2022.

If you or anyone you know is in need of assistance with housing instability, contact the Coalition for the Homeless Crisis Hotline at 1-888-358-2384.

Scary Movie Scream by M.A. Dennis

In my younger years, many werewolf moons ago, I loved me a good nightmare on Camp Crystal Lake scary movie. The kind to startle, make you scream, and send extra buttered popcorn flying all over the theater.

But that was before reality scared the mess outta me. There's no on screen horror more terrifying than homelessness: the danger, the extremes, the uncertainty, the demons. If you say your CARES ID # five times, a boogeyman comes bearing candy: cafeteria food that tastes like hidden razor blades.

So yeah, nowadays, I don't do the scary movie thing. You can keep Freddy Krueger, give me some music by Freddie Jackson (or the lead singer of Queen). Keep Michael Myers, give me the store Michael's (because arts-n-craft is an ageless form of therapy). Keep Jason Voorhees, I'm not really into hockey.

I'm not really into watching a feature presentation that's going to make me scream, not anymore. I no longer have a desire to court fear, to be made artificially afraid—real life (and homelessness wanting to be your friend till the end) is scary enough.

WiFi In Shelters

by James

Free and unlimited access to the internet is not a reality for homeless New Yorkers. Yet, access to the internet is a necessity at this point in time, not a luxury. The internet is a vital tool for me and my fellow residents to search for jobs, training opportunities, education, and housing. Therefore, all shelters in New York City should be required to provide WiFi to residents, not just those shelters with school-age children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that we are dependent on technology and need regular and reliable access to the internet to partake in daily life. Personally, I have night classes most evenings from 6 to 10 p.m. that I need consistent and reliable internet access to participate in. We stress the need for more education for better opportunities, but my education has been continuously interrupted by trying to find reliable access to WiFi in a safe and stable environment. For instance, at the New

York Public Library, patrons are able to access computers, but only during their limited operating hours and only for one 45-minute session.

I spend a vast majority of my time riding the subway and searching the city for reliable internet access. This is time that I could spend doing productive things like schoolwork or searching for affordable housing. When I ask shelter staff for help in finding reliable free internet, my needs are brushed aside and I'm told to go find a local Starbucks – a business that requires I spend money to use their space. Some of the only places with consistent free WiFi in this city are subway stations, which have become increasingly hostile environments for homeless New Yorkers.

We need to eliminate the digital divide and require all shelters to provide free and unlimited access to WiFi.

Visit citybarjusticecenter.org to learn about the #WiFi4Homeless advocacy campaign.

Coalition for the Homeless Launches Disability Focus Group

by Mary

In our ongoing work toward disability justice, the Coalition for the Homeless launched its Disability Focus Group in July 2022, just in time for Disability Pride Month. Facilitated by the Disability Rights Specialist, this small group was created as an opportunity to give voice to the expertise of folks with lived experience. Disability Focus Group members have lived experience with both

disability and homelessness and their participation in this group presents a meaningful opportunity to discuss nuanced issues of accessibility and inclusion in the shelter system as we continue to monitor the implementation of the *Butler v. City of New York* disability rights settlement. We look forward to what will emerge from this group in the months and years ahead.

Where You Can Find Food In NYC by Casey

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on our city has been profound, and with the price of essential goods – including food – on the rise, more New Yorkers will struggle with hunger.

Are you experiencing food insecurity and need reliable access to hot meals daily? Free food is available to all New Yorkers in need; however, knowing where to go and how to access these services can be challenging. Throughout the pandemic, the Coalition for the Homeless has monitored available resources, including food, across the five boroughs. You can access our emergency resource guides at coalitionforthehomeless.org/erg for the locations of food pantries and soup kitchens in each borough.

You can also visit foodhelp.nyc.gov for food pantry listings and foodbanknyc.org/get-help for “grab and go” distribution sites.

The Coalition for the Homeless is committed to providing free and easily accessible hot meals daily to New Yorkers in need. The Coalition's Grand Central Food Program (GCFP) is the country's largest nightly mobile soup kitchen and has never missed a night in its 37 years of operation. Hot meals are available

seven days a week between 5:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. at St. Bartholomew's Church, 108 East 51st Street (between Park and Lexington Avenues) in Manhattan. The three GCFP vans then distribute food along routes through Downtown Manhattan, Uptown Manhattan, and the Bronx until roughly 9:30 p.m. Routes are listed at coalitionforthehomeless.org/gcfp.



GCFP volunteers handing out food

Update on the Coalition for the Homeless' Advocacy

by Jacquie and Deborah

In June, Mayor Adams released his housing and homelessness blueprint, *Housing Our Neighbors*, which we were pleased to learn incorporated feedback from homeless and formerly homeless individuals. However, the Adams administration failed to set housing production goals that adequately address the city's affordable housing crisis. We responded in the media and via testimony before the City Council by urging Mayor Adams to create 6,000 housing units for homeless households and 6,000 units for extremely low-income households each year moving forward. Two Coalition for the Homeless op-eds were published that advocate for a more appropriate response from the Adams administration to the crisis: “[Adams' Affordable Housing Fumble](#)” in the New York Daily News and “[To Turn Around the City's Homelessness Crisis, Embrace Housing as the Answer](#)” in Crain's New York.

Since mid-July, the Coalition, along with our lawyers at The Legal Aid Society, have put pressure on the City to improve its response to the capacity crisis in the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system, which started with the end of the statewide eviction moratorium in January 2022, increased with the predictable summer surge following the end of the school year, and has been exacerbated by the arrival of asylum

seekers from the U.S. southern border in recent months. We had warned DHS that the vacancy rate in the families with children shelter system was dangerously low and asked for their plan to ensure sufficient capacity going forward. Despite conversations about our concerns and the need for a plan, we learned in late July that the City violated the right to shelter law for families with children by not providing at least five families who timely arrived at the PATH intake center with shelter placements. We testified before the City Council about these violations and the need for improved DHS systems that will allow families and individuals to more quickly exit shelters into permanent, affordable housing rather than languish in them for years. We continue to monitor the increased demand for shelter placements throughout the DHS system, and DHS' opening of new shelters to ensure that everyone in NYC who wants a shelter bed can receive one.

During the summer of 2022, we also began tracking DHS' response to the monkeypox public health crisis. We have strongly encouraged DHS to provide more client-facing education about monkeypox and the risks for transmission within congregate living settings. For more information about monkeypox, visit nyc.gov/monkeypox.

First Step

A Free 6-week, Virtual Job Training Program for Women Interested in Human Service Careers

Next Class:
October 31st-
December 13th

*Sign up by
October 27th*



Social Service Skills

Stress Management
Conflict Resolution
Narcan Certificate
Empowerment



Computer Skills

Google Suite
Salesforce
LinkedIn
Zoom



Career Development

Transferable Skills
Interview Prep
Cover Letters
Resumes

Scan
or Call



347-731-2339

For more
info

Requirements

Identify as female
18 or over
Live in NYC
US Work authorization
HS Diploma/GED
Have a computer & wifi



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.**