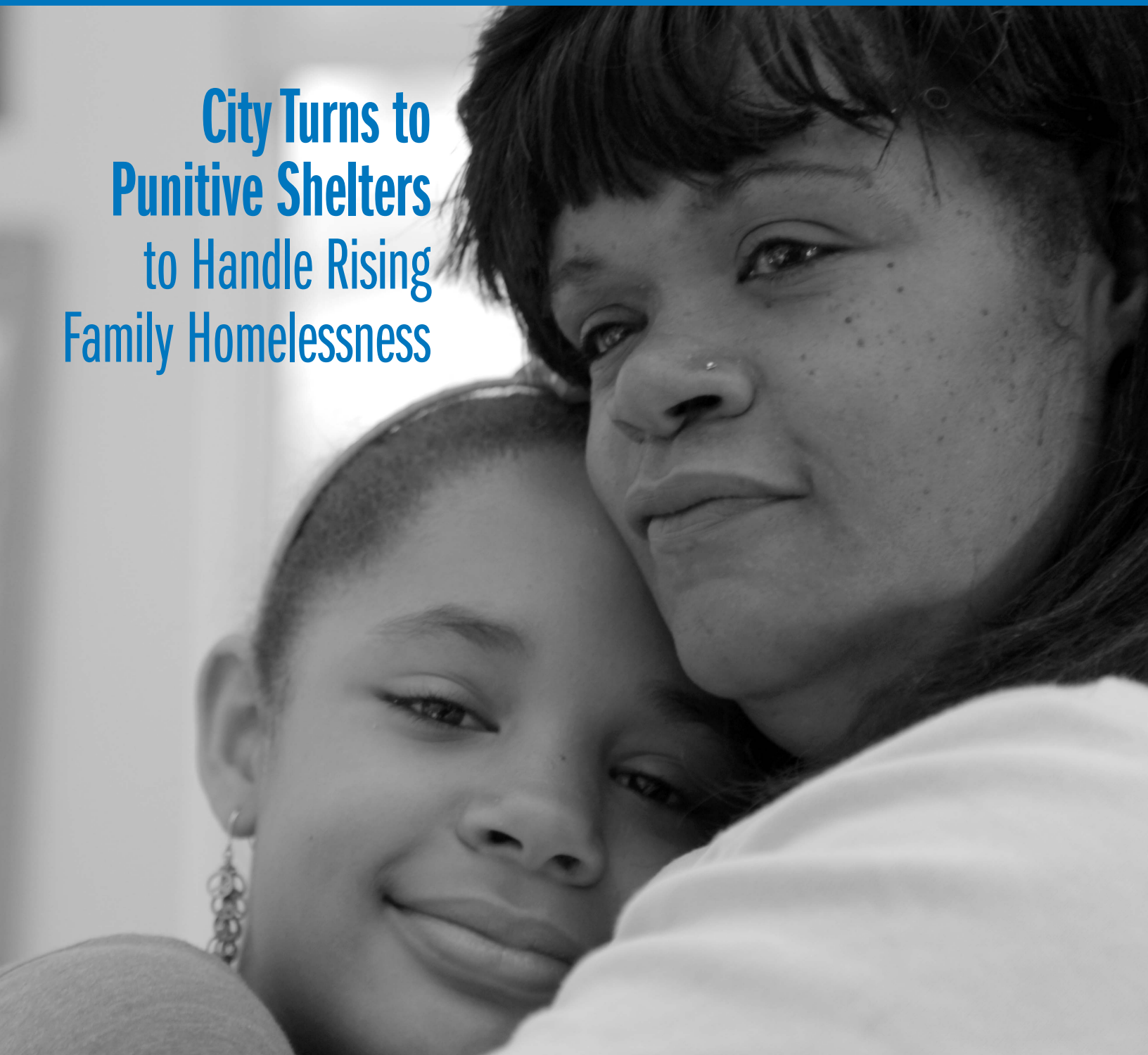


Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Autumn 2011

**City Turns to
Punitive Shelters
to Handle Rising
Family Homelessness**



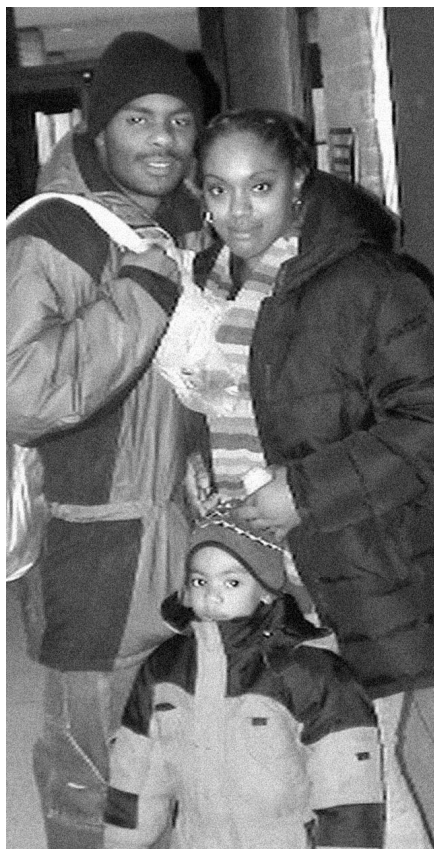
A Letter from the Families of Nelson Avenue Family Residence

To the People of the City of New York,

We, the residents of Nelson Avenue Family Residence, come to you as one. We come to you for help on a number of issues. But first and far most our main issue is that we have been informed that there are no longer any programs for the homeless. We are out here struggling with our backs against the wall. There are no programs and yet there are still no jobs. How can we manage to get out of the shelter with no programs and no jobs? There is no way we can afford New York City rent with no help.

There is no way we can afford city rent with light and water bills and public transportation on a minimum wage job, and some people in the shelter have no jobs at all but are still currently looking and trying.

Now the city is building 70 new shelters. The cost of building new shelters is very high. We believe that all the money can be invested in something more helpful to help the homeless to obtain their way out of the shelters. **We, the residents of Nelson Avenue Family Residence are willing to pay low income rent in this building if that's what it will all have to come down to.**



and we get nothing.

There are so many violations in this one building alone most of us have peeling, molded walls, mice, ceilings falling in, broken sinks, no ceiling in the bathrooms, holes in the walls, no heat in the winter, and when it rains there is water coming in our units.

But we come together and make the best of it knowing it's unsafe for our children and most adults. There is nothing much we can do with no help to get out of the shelter again. We repeat there are no jobs, no programs and the cost of living is very high these days. We have case workers threatening us every week about being thrown out if we don't find jobs or apartments. We can't get an apartment with no job, and we can't get a job when no one's hiring. What are we supposed to do with our children? They are always threatening to put us out or send us to

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Photography, Page 3
PATRICK MCMULLAN

For the case workers and the other workers in this facility to treat us like caged animals and not human beings is very unacceptable. We are innocent homeless people looking for help and a step in the door. They don't help us to look for work or other ways to get help. They talk to us how they want and treat us how they want. We don't know how they expect most of us to find two and three jobs when really there are no jobs. Folks are doing more laying off then hiring. There are so many people in here with so many problems and no family members to ask for help, so we come to the city for help

a "Next Step" shelter which is worse then the facility that we are residing in now.

We ask of you to please take into consideration our living and our health situations. We come to you because we have no where else to go or to turn. Things will be a little easier if there was Section 8 or at least a program to help us to get out of the shelter.

Nelson Avenue Family Residents are willing to pay rent and fix up this building.

Thank you kindly for your time,

*The Families of Nelson Avenue
Family Residence.*

Coalition Gears up for ARTWALK NY

By Rachel Edelman

Mark your calendars for the 17th annual ARTWALK NY benefit, which will take place on Tuesday, November 15th at Skylight Studio in NYC.

The annual event, co-chaired by Alec Baldwin, Richard Gere and Carey Lowell, will feature works from more than 100 renowned contemporary artists, including Wade Guyton, Jenny Holzer, Ed Ruscha and Andy Warhol, and is sponsored by FENDI and ELLE. Other special guests include Honorary Chair Coco Rocha, auctioneer Aileen Agopian and DJ Donna D'Cruz.

This year's ARTWALK will introduce the 'Artist as Activist' project, a unique collaboration between the Coalition and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. The project will feature an exclusive limited edition print by Shepard Fairey, which will be available for a limited time at www.artnet.com/auctions.

Summer Kick-Off Event

More than 80 guests helped kick off this year's benefit at a summer cocktail event held on Saturday, September 3rd, hosted by long-time Coalition supporter Mike De Paola and the ARTWALK Art Advisory Board.

Guests learned more about the Coalition's work and ARTWALK and enjoyed wine and cocktails courtesy of South Pacific Wines and Mercy. Art collectors also purchased raffle tickets for the opportunity to win a Danica Phelps print. The Coalition is grateful to Mike De Paola for generously hosting the event.

For more information or to pur-



Beth Rudin DeWoody, Mike De Paola, Shelly Fremont

chase tickets to this year's event, please visit www.artwalkny.org, or call (212) 776-2056.

Former Coalition Client Shows at ARTWALK

Wayne Young, a young and up-and-coming artist and former Coalition for the Homeless client, has begun to make a big splash in the art community.

Wayne is a self-taught mixed media artist with a primary focus on photography. His works are largely autobiographical and intend to promote dialogue about stigmas, prejudices and ignorance in society. Wayne first connected with the Coalition five years ago, an experience that he says was life-changing. "I'm indebted to the Coalition for valuing me as a human being and helping me find a new lease on life," he said.

Wayne's work, entitled "Don't Litter," was featured in last year's ARTWALK NY event and has helped to introduce him to a number of prominent collectors and galleries. Wayne will be holding his first solo exhibition on November 10, 2011 at Highline United at 530 West 25th Street.

For more information about Wayne Young's work and his upcoming exhibit, please visit <http://www.waynedeartisteyoung.com>.

This year's ARTWALK will introduce the 'Artist as Activist' project, a unique collaboration between the Coalition and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.



Shepard Fairey, photo by Jon Furlong

The 'Next Step' Punishment

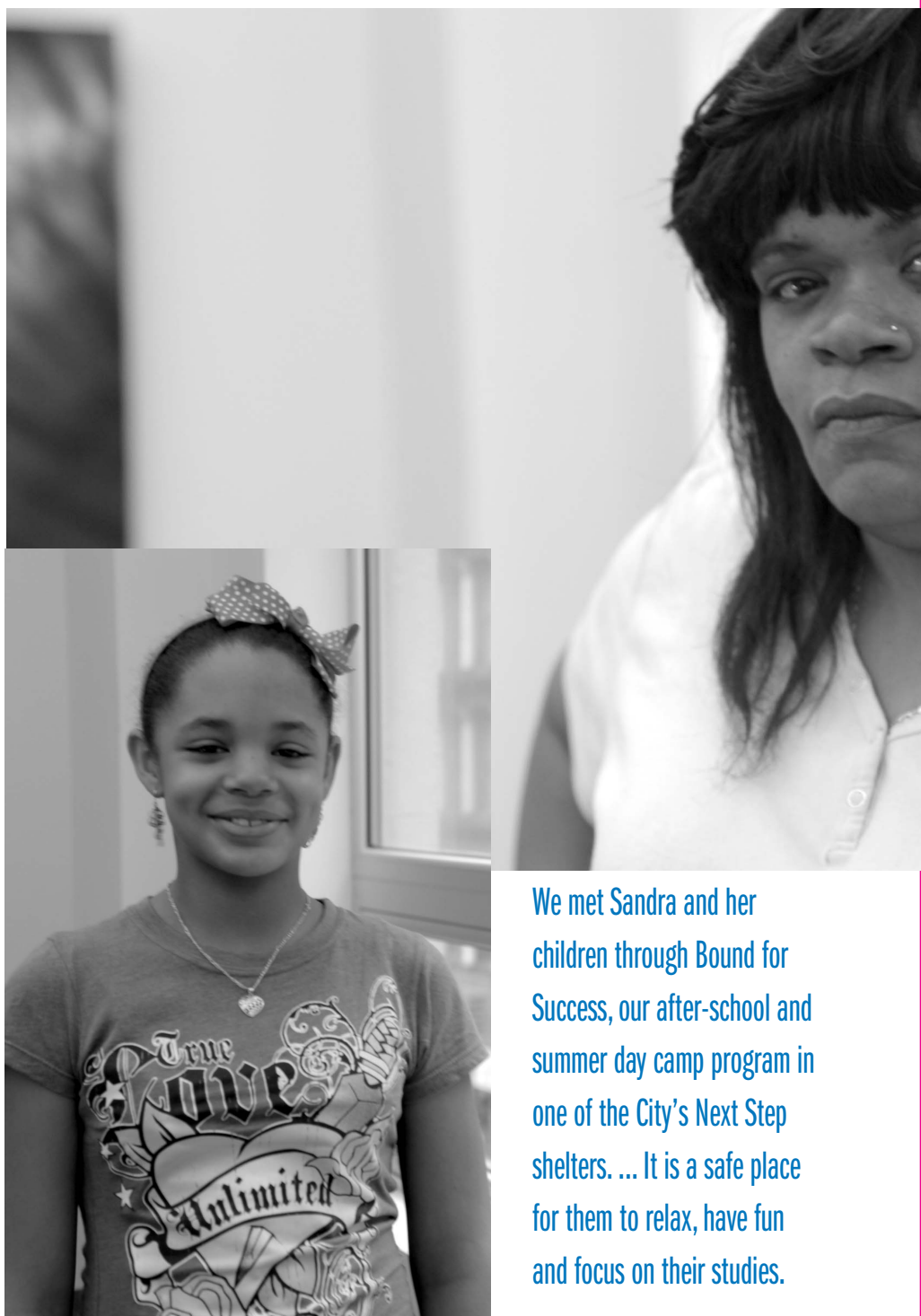
By Sarah Murphy

Imagine you live in one small room with your five children. Just to get home you have to pass through airport-like security. Men rifle through your bags and your phone gets confiscated because it has a camera in it. You hike up four flights of steep stairs with your infant in one arm and your toddler holding your hand. You finally get to your room and see rat droppings on the floor – again. No heat. The kids are hungry, and so are you, but you don't have a kitchen or even a hot plate. There is a cafeteria, but the food is often spoiled and made your children sick many times. You take your older daughter down the hall to the bathroom – you are scared to let her go there alone because you share it with 30 other people on your floor. But first you have to go back downstairs to ask for a few sheets of toilet paper. Humiliating. Back up the stairs. In the morning you'll meet with your case worker and tell her you still can't find a job. All she's ever given you is threats, no help. But now, it's time for bed. The kids are fighting. There just isn't enough space. No peace and quiet, and worse, no way out.

This is Sandra's life.

Sandra is one of the thousands of New Yorkers who live in what are called Next Step shelters. According to the Department of Homeless Services, Next Step shelters were intended to provide "intensive case management" to clients who need more attention, to get them out of shelter. But in reality, it has become a punitive system targeted at long-term shelter residents.

It wasn't always this way for Sandra. She had an apartment uptown. Sure, it had problems, but it was her home. Then one day her Section 8 rental subsidy voucher was revoked in a bureaucratic mix up. She worked for months to get it back, but after the rent piled up she received an eviction notice. To make things worse, she was hit by a car while crossing 125th Street, putting her in the hospital for two days and



We met Sandra and her children through Bound for Success, our after-school and summer day camp program in one of the City's Next Step shelters. ... It is a safe place for them to relax, have fun and focus on their studies.

causing her to miss her fair hearing. She vividly recalls that when the marshals came, she grabbed as many of her belongings as she could carry in trash bags and headed to PATH, the homeless intake center, with her five children in tow. "It was the worst day of my life," Sandra said. "I'm not a big crier, but I cried whole way there. It's not like I

wanted to be homeless."

She was placed in a Tier II shelter for families. Tier II shelters are apartment-style facilities with a cooking space and bathroom for each family. But, in shock from the eviction, Sandra fell into a debilitating depression and was unable to follow the shelter requirements to look for a job. She was threatened with



Next Step shelters were intended to provide “intensive case management” to clients who need more attention, to get them out of shelter. But in reality, it has become a punitive system targeted at long-term shelter residents.

ters. Our classroom provides tutoring, guidance, and fun activities, which give kids a sense of security and comfort in the otherwise tense shelter environment. It is a safe place for them to relax, have fun and focus on their studies.

Sandra told us about when she first heard about BFS, “I didn’t walk, I ran.” Two of her girls needed a good deal of help in school, and she wasn’t able to provide it. When her children were enrolled in BFS, Program Director Angie Carabello worked with each of them individually to see where they were academically and where they needed the most help. For Delia, it was her math.

She said, “Before BFS helped me with my math, it was hard...it was confusing, but once I got to BFS, it got fun to solve things. They encourage you to work hard at school.”

Angie noted some of the difficulties that come with being placed by DHS in the Next Step shelter. “As I walk past the lobby, I see children trying to do homework or who have fallen asleep at the entryway because their parents aren’t there to escort them upstairs to bed. There are sounds of adults cursing and people running through the halls, so when I finally get to our classroom, I feel relieved.”

This sense of relief is reflected in the faces of the kids and their moms, including Sandra. For at least a few hours Sandra knows that her children are in a safe and welcoming place, so she can focus on getting a job.

Sandra has some tough odds stacked against her. With the Bloomberg Administration eliminating all housing assistance for homeless families, she doesn’t know when she will be able to leave, “No programs, no apart-

ments. Everyone is on hold. How will we get out?”

Sandra shares her story directly in one of the first video blogs the Coalition will be posting that will allow homeless New Yorkers to personally tell us about their experiences, struggles, and successes.

To hear Sandra and others tell their stories, go to www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/video-blog.

End of Advantage

In the last issue of *Safety Net*, we discussed the end of the City’s flawed Advantage subsidy program. At that time, the City had threatened to cut off benefits for 16,000 households immediately. The Legal Aid Society, working with CFH, sued and forced the City to continue to pay rents as the litigation continued. There were delays, but as of September 13th, the court gave the City permission to terminate the program. It’s official, now. Mayor Bloomberg has nothing in place to help homeless people out of the shelter system and into permanent housing. The Coalition and other leading advocacy groups have called on the mayor to return to the proven solution of giving homeless families priority for federal housing programs. Go to www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/tell-mayor-1-in-3 to learn more.

being sanctioned (evicted), and she began to look for work. But it was slow, and landing even a job interview was impossible. Despite her efforts, her caseworker labeled her as “noncompliant,” and Sandra and her family were transferred to the Next Step shelter.

Now, each day, she and her children contend with hostile security guards, noisy hallways, often broken communal bathrooms, arguing residents, putrid smells, bad food and an overall feeling of dread and isolation. The crowded conditions, longer stays and stress of homelessness have created a perfect storm for violent outbursts among residents. Sandra’s daughter, Delia called it, “scary... like prison...and makes it hard for me to sleep. I’m afraid I’m going to fall asleep in class sometimes.”

We met Sandra and her children through Bound for Success (BFS), our after-school and summer day camp program in one of the City’s Next Step shel-

The Child Advocate

By Lindsey Davis

Barbara and her 18-month-old daughter now have a safe place to sleep, but it wasn't easy. As a child she was removed from her abusive mother and put in foster care. When she turned 18, she found herself pregnant and homeless. With nowhere else to go, she moved back to her childhood home. After the first year, the abuse escalated. Now fearful for her young child, Barbara knew she had to leave. She had no alternative but to apply for shelter at PATH, the City's homeless intake center. When DHS learned that there were rooms at her mother's home – failing to acknowledge the domestic abuse that drove her out in the first place – they denied Barbara and her daughter a shelter placement. She sought refuge in a hospital emergency room before learning of the Coalition for the Homeless and our Crisis Intervention Program. She met with one of our advocates and discussed her relationship with her mother and the circumstances of the time she spent living in the home. We noticed that Barbara was displaying symptoms of depression and referred her to our onsite psychiatrist, who provided care as well as thorough documentation that the conditions at home had deteriorated her mental health and that the home was in fact an inappropriate placement for her family. The re-application took months, but with this documentation the family was finally found eligible for shelter placement and provided with a place to stay, away from the abuse.

In October of 2007 the Department of Homeless Services implemented a policy denying access to overnight shelter placement for homeless families whom the City's investigators believe have alternative housing available. As a result, for the first time in decades, there have been children sleeping on the streets of New York City. City administrators claim that



tion advocates are the only ones there, fighting for these families and working endless hours to ensure they get a shelter placement.

Thanks to the generous support of the Deerfield Foundation, the Crisis Intervention Program has been given the ability to hire a Child Advocate whose work will focus on providing intensive case management to ensure families like Barbara's have their rights defended at PATH. The Child Advocate will perform outreach at the intake office, represent families at legal conferences and will help to navigate the complicated application process according to each family's needs. This position will be a great asset to the

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this policy is necessary to keep families who have access to other housing options from going into the shelters and taking space from families who are truly in need.

However, data published by DHS itself indicates that while two thirds of applicants are found ineligible on initial application, at least half of these families are later deemed legitimately homeless and subsequently provided shelter. This means days – sometimes months – go by as hundreds of parents who are truly homeless, but have been rejected due to careless investigations or paperwork errors, struggle to find a safe place for their children to sleep. The Coalition's Crisis Interven-

department and will allow us to reach out to, identify and serve families in need with a focus and flexibility not available to other members of our Crisis Intervention team, given the volume of families and single adults they must serve each day in our offices.

As the circumstances of the economy and City policies continue to drive families into the shelter system, we expect to see not only an increasing number of applications for shelter at PATH, but also an increased number of families wrongly denied access to shelter. The addition of this position will help us to meet this growing need and ensure that homeless family's rights to shelter are upheld.

Project: Back to School Raises \$15,500

By Marisa Butler

For many, the end of summer and beginning of fall can mean only one thing: back to school season. Picking out a new school bag in just the right color and filling it with new folders, pencils and other supplies has become a fundamental rite of passage for children of all ages.

Unfortunately, this special tradition is absent among many of the 16,000 girls and boys residing in New York City shelters tonight. Their parents fret over how they will be able to buy even the basics to begin the year, and often the children are sent to school unprepared.

For this reason, we began Project: Back to School in 2008. Over the past three years, the drive has grown from a small collection of bags at our office to become a citywide effort. Thanks to the tireless promotion of Mr. G on WPIX TV, this year's drive was a resounding success. With Pipeline PS, Capital One Bank and the support of the United Federation of Teachers, we collected over \$15,500 and distributed 3,000 bags filled with school supplies to homeless children. A portion of the funds was also used to purchase school uniforms and supplies for Bound for Success, our

after-school program. A record 40 locations hosted drives including all Manhattan Mini Storage locations, which also generously provided pickups to the drop-off stations in the Manhattan area.

The Coalition would like to thank everyone who took the time to donate funds or volunteer. We look forward to next year when we can put even more girls and boys on the path to a successful school year.



Dear Project: Back to School,
Thank you for getting me my bookbag and all the supplies in it. I like all of the folders, notebooks, tape, pencils, pens, sharpeners, and more. You picked the bookbag out just right. It's just my type! I truly appreciate it, and
THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart.

Love, Dee

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS:

Horace Mann
Lower Lab Middle School School for Collaborative Studies
Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus
PS 150 Tribeca Learning Center
PS 199 Jesse Isador Straus School
PS 234 The Independence School
PS 77 Lower Lab School
Rodeph Shalom
St. Bernard's
The Hellenic Classical Charter School
The School at Columbia
The Alexander Robertson School
P.S. 290 Manhattan New School
P.S. 107 John Kimball Learning Center
Ramaz School
Academy of St. Joseph
Poly Prep
M.S. 57 James Weldon Johnson

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Bill De Blasio
Elliot Engel
Annabel Palma

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Queens Public Library
SL Green Realty
JCC
AIG
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ING
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