

Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Spring 2009

First Step Reflects on Our New President



Hope Wins the Day

It takes conscious effort lately to be fully cognizant of economic tragedies playing out around us, yet remain hopeful that amidst this suffering, progress is still possible. Not only possible, but happening each day.

This balancing act takes on particular poignancy at the Coalition. On a macro-level:

- Governor Paterson's Executive Budget steals \$270 million in revenues promised to fund affordable housing and directs it to help fill the hole in the general fund. He then proposes cutting \$111.5 million from the State's housing programs.

- New York recorded a new, all-time record for the number of homeless families in shelters each night.

- The Bloomberg Administration is pushing forward to eliminate nearly 1,000 beds from the men's shelter system and to close down the main intake facility in Manhattan. Church and synagogue shelters, long providing smaller, more humane accommodations, are being closed by the dozens.

- Governor Paterson has proposed dramatic cuts to housing and homeless programs, including a \$5.1 million cut to funds for homeless prevention. Last



week, we learned that all State contracts for this current fiscal year have been cut by 25 percent – our Crisis Intervention program will be hardest hit, along with our work to help long-term shelter residents win federal disability benefits that enable them to leave costly shelters.

- City cutbacks have forced us to turn away 100 families this year from our Eviction Prevention program. Our average grant to ameliorate rental arrears for working families who have fallen behind due to an illness or other unforeseeable tragedy is roughly \$1,000. The cost for each of those families who were not able to get our assistance and who wind up in the municipal shelter system is over \$36,000 a year. The math is a no-brainer. Tallying the personal cost to the children who are uprooted is impossible.

This week, I met Anna, a 70-year-old woman who is about to be ejected from a women's shelter in Jamaica Queens. The only thing standing between her and the streets is Diana Olaizola of our Advocacy Department, who is defending Anna against city bureaucrats, who say she must go as soon as the mercury tops 32 degrees. The director of the privately run shelter does not want to put Anna out, but fears her agency will lose their contract to run the facility if she allows her to stay.

I also met a young mother on our mobile feeding program – I did not get her name, or that of her son, who looked to be around four or five. What she needed on that bitterly cold night was a hot meal and a warm jacket for her child “with a hood, if you can find one.” We were able to give her both, thanks to you and your support.

You also helped us provide job training, computer skills and job placement for many of the women who graduate from our First Step program. The most recent First Step class wrote so eloquently about what the inauguration of President Obama meant to them, we chose to put them on the cover of this issue of *Safety Net*. They embody the hope that we see in the eyes and smiles of those who we help at the Coalition.

I am reminded daily that for so many of our homeless neighbors, economic uncertainty has been a life long struggle. I learn so much from them in their resiliency and grace.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Brosnahan
Executive Director

Safety Net

is published by

COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

129 Fulton Street
New York, NY 10038
Telephone: 212-776-2002
www.coalitionforthehomeless.org

MARY E. BROSNAHAN
Executive Director

Editor
SARAH MURPHY

Photography
KETURAH BARDOUILLE,
SARAH MURPHY

Design
CLARE MANIAS

Making the Holidays Happier for Homeless Kids

By Sarah Murphy

There is no doubt, this year's holiday season was a difficult one for the record number of homeless families in New York City shelters. On Saturday, December 13th, for a few precious hours, hundreds of boys and girls living in local shelters had a special opportunity to celebrate the holidays with the Coalition at our annual Holiday Party for homeless kids.

This year's event took place at the historic Alhambra Ballroom in Harlem. Children were welcomed with goodie bags filled with GUND® stuffed animals, crossword puzzles and other treats. A face painter and costumed characters were on hand to make sure everyone was having a good time, while a professional DJ spun the latest hits for the kids and volunteers to boogie down on the dance floor. After a delicious meal, there was a special visit from Santa, and each child left with their very own gift.

The Coalition would like to extend a special thank you to everyone who donated and wrapped gifts to help make this day so special. With your help, we were able to brighten the holidays for hundreds of homeless children.



Children were all smiles at this year's Kid's Holiday Party

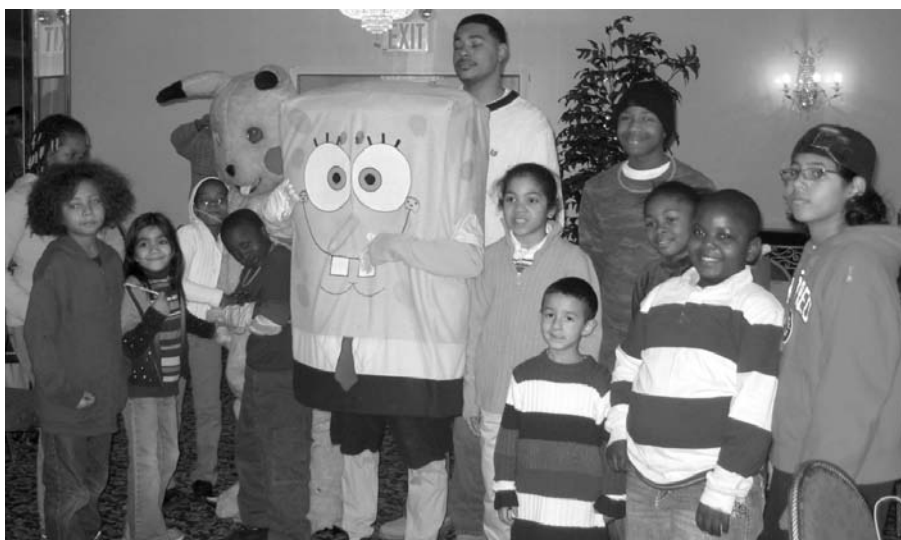
Dear Santa,
Thank you for my gifts. It was nice. Because of you, Christmas was special. I like playing with my new toys.
Merry Christmas Santa!



Dear Santa,
Thank you Santa for making this Christmas a special one. I really loved my gifts, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. See you next Christmas. Happy Holidays!

Thank You—We couldn't have done it without you!

Donald B. and Catherine Marron
ANSAC
Association of Legal Administrators
Brotherhood Synagogue
Nursery School
Citrus Restaurant
Dave Giffen
Gearbulk, Inc.
General Chemical
GUND®
Hall Capital Partners, LLC
Independence Plaza North
Residents
Jeff Pundyk
JP Morgan Chase
Kidding Around
Lou and Helen Lowenstein
McKinsey Quarterly
Mrs. Behr's Fourth Grade Class
New York City Economic
Development Corporation
Olive Brooks & Michael Schaeffer
Pillsbury Law
PQ Corporation
Rand Insurance, Inc.
Sue-Ann Greenfield



First Step Students Reflect on Our New President

By Sarah Murphy

The Inauguration of President Barack Obama brings to mind change, not only in political party, but for many, a cultural shift toward greater equality.

The Coalition, too, shared in this excitement. Ellen Bogart, a former teacher and literacy skills instructor for our First Step Job Training Program for homeless and low income women, saw the Inauguration as a unique opportunity to reach her students. A volunteer with First Step for nearly two years, she has seen class sizes grow and the women excel in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Using tools such as videos, poetry, and the *New York Times*, she is able to gauge each woman's literacy level and "stretch" her to continue improving.

On January 20, 2009, the First Step class gathered to watch the ceremony and Inaugural speech. According to Ellen, "There was careful and thoughtful attention being paid, spontaneous applause, and tremendous pride."

Afterward, she posed several questions and asked the women to write an essay on the subject. Ellen expected the writings to be touching, but she didn't realize exactly how moving they would be. "These essays blew me away! I try to create an environment where the students feel secure and unthreatened, and these responses make me feel successful. I felt it was another piece in their First Step experience – that is, a new beginning for all of us."

The women opened up and provided an intimate glimpse into their personal thoughts on President Obama and the meaning of the day. Here are a few excerpts from those essays:



"The inauguration today was a big flag of unity for all, waving high for everyone to see! ...It was a dream and is now a reality! It gave me a sense of pride to be an American and a sense of dignity. And also the strength to understand that above all, we can unite and be as one, and from the looks of things, we will!...A change has come!"

—Ariann M.

"I gave thanks everyday that times were different when I was growing up, now I give thanks for the change we are about to forgo to better ourselves as one nation and help to establish this same freedom and love for one another throughout the world. We will lead by example, starting in our homes. The question was asked, 'Do you think the barriers of race and ethnicity still play as much of a role in a person's ability to succeed?' My answer is, we began to chip away at these barriers decades ago. We are now using a sledgehammer to destroy or take out all barriers that attempt to keep us as a people where we once were long ago."

—Georgette L.



There was careful and thoughtful attention being paid, spontaneous applause, and tremendous pride.

"The inauguration of Barack Obama was a wonderful, unforgettable moment for all of the world. It was a day the world looked through blue, green, and brown eyes to see one man become living proof that with time everything is seen. With patience, there shall come a day that dreams become a reality. For today, unlike any other, a man stands before us on January 20, 2009, with a new beginning. One for all. No more do we fear. No more do we point. No more do we blame, because today everyone gets to live the American dream!"

—Ebony D.

"I have very high hopes and expectations from not only a new President but the whole political administration of this country. Today, I live in extreme hope and confidence that other nations and countries will put their differences to the side."

—Yvonne L.

"There will never be another day in my life that I will feel as proud to be an African-American woman as I feel this day....I am truly overwhelmed that my sons know this day, that they can aspire to be anything they choose. Today, they have a role model, Barack Obama!"

—Charlotte W.

"To me, this is history. I cried because I was so happy that I was alive to see an African American President."

—Ama S.

"I feel this Presidency is going to let other countries look at the U.S. with dignity and respect again. At the end of the day, people all over the world will realize that it doesn't take one race to rule a country or to succeed in life. We are all one."

—Sandy L.

"The inauguration of President Barack Obama means to me that my ancestors who were enslaved and died did not do so in vain. It means a new day in America. This inauguration means my young black sons see in their lifetimes what my grandmother who picked cotton could never imagine."

—Debra H.

"I feel good because I voted to put in him in office. If I was still using drugs, I would not have been able to vote or see the inauguration."

—Carol B.

For full essays, please check out our website, www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/safetynet.

The Economic Recession and Surging Family Homelessness in New York City: What City Officials Can Do to Stem the Tide of Rising Homelessness

By Patrick Markee

With rising unemployment and mounting job losses in New York City, the number of homeless families has soared. Late last year the homeless family population reached the highest levels since modern homelessness began. And amidst signs that the economic recession is only getting worse, there is every sign of further increases in New York City homelessness over the coming year.

The good news is that a growing body of research and evidence show how City officials can successfully reduce the number of homeless families: target Federal housing assistance to help homeless families move from shelters into their own homes and remain stably housed. Unfortunately, Mayor Bloomberg continues to deny Federal housing aid to New York City's growing number of homeless families. Coalition for the Homeless urges Mayor Bloomberg to abandon this failed approach, and to prioritize homeless New Yorkers for Federal housing assistance.

The Background: Record Number of Homeless Families in New York City

Recent data released by the New York City Department of Homeless Services show that, as the current economic downturn worsens, the number of homeless families sleeping in municipal shelters has reached the highest point since modern homelessness began. Following are highlights of the new record number of homeless New York City families:

- During the current decade both the number of homeless families and the total homeless shelter population have increased dramatically in New York City. At the start of the decade, there were 5,000 homeless families in shelter each night and the total homeless shelter population was 22,800 people. At the end of November 2008 there were 9,720 families in municipal shelters and the total homeless shelter population was an estimated 36,655 people – including nearly 16,000 children.

- During the final months of last year, as the economic crisis deepened, the nightly census of homeless families has

The good news is that a growing body of research and evidence show how City officials can successfully reduce homelessness.

soared by 13 percent, from 8,607 homeless families in municipal shelters at the end of May to 9,720 families at the end of November – the highest number since the city began reporting this data more than 25 years ago.

- Altogether, the last six months of 2008 have seen the highest number of new homeless families enter the municipal shelter system – more than 1,300 families each month – a 44 percent increase over 2007.

How to Stem the Tide of Rising Homelessness

While the current rise in New York City homelessness is enormously troubling, there is fortunately a proven way that City officials can not only stem the tide of rising homelessness, but actually reduce the number of homeless families in New York City. A growing body of academic research has shown that Federal housing programs and similar, long-term housing assistance are remarkably effective in reducing family homelessness – both in helping homeless families move from shelters to permanent housing, and in ensuring that these families remain stably housed.

Past New York City mayoral administrations have targeted scarce Federal housing resources to homeless families residing in the municipal shelter system, thus directly resulting in tens of thousands of New York City families successfully moving from shelters into their own homes. The reasons for this are threefold:

1. **Scarcity:** The Federal government does not provide sufficient Federal housing assistance to help all those eligible to receive it. Currently more than 135,000 New York City families are on waiting lists for Federal housing programs.

2. **Efficacy:** Given the mismatch between need and the availability of Federal housing aid, New York City may-

ors and policymakers have recognized that these scarce resources must be effectively targeted to the neediest households – i.e., homeless families who need help moving from shelters to permanent housing because private-market housing is out of reach.

3. **Fiscal Policy:** Emergency shelter for homeless families, costing nearly \$36,000 per year, is both expensive and largely paid for by the City and State governments, while Federal housing programs are not.

Further, the benefit of giving homeless families priority in federal housing programs such as Housing Choice Voucher program (also known as Section 8 vouchers) and public housing (administered by the New York City Housing Authority) has been confirmed repeatedly in academic research studies. One longitudinal study by Shinn and Weitzman, of New York University, demonstrated that the vast majority families with a history of substance abuse, mental illness, physical illness, or history of incarceration – all traits of the chronically homeless – remained “stably housed when they received subsidized housing.”

Unfortunately, since 2004 the Bloomberg administration has actually eliminated homeless families’ longstanding priority for scarce Federal housing assistance. Currently homeless families in New York City have virtually no access to the two major Federal housing programs available to low-income households. Instead, the Bloomberg administration has directed Federal housing assistance to other low-income and working families and individuals. In the last fiscal year, for instance, 11,847 low-income households were placed into housing with Section 8 vouchers, while 5,220 low-income households were placed into public housing apartments – almost none of them homeless families.

With the already staggering number of homeless families and the grim outlook for unemployment and foreclosures, it is only inevitable that more families will be faced with losing their homes. We strongly encourage Mayor Bloomberg to reverse this harmful policy and give homeless families the access to federally subsidized housing they need to once again become independent of the shelter system.

14th Annual ARTWALK NY Raises Nearly \$700,000

By Rachel Edelman

The 14th annual ARTWALK NY benefit took place on Monday, November 3, 2008. More than 750 art collectors, artists, philanthropists and celebrities attended the live and silent art auction and cocktail party, raising nearly \$700,000 for the Coalition's life-saving services and long-term solutions.

This year's benefit honored the late Robert Rauschenberg, one of the most influential American artists of the 20th century. Co-chairs Richard Gere and Carey Lowell, along with special guests Alec Baldwin, Chuck Close, Kayce Freed Jennings and Darryl Pottorf paid tribute to his life and work. Pottorf accepted the award on Rauschenberg's behalf, and spoke of his immense contributions to the contemporary art movement, as well as his humanitarian efforts.

Sotheby's auctioneer Christopher Gaillard led the evening's live auction proceedings, entertaining the crowd with his witty and knowledgeable remarks. Highlights included works by Rauschenberg, Close, Jenny Holzer, Wade Guyton, Ed Ruscha and assume vivid astro focus. The silent auction featured pieces by more than 100 renowned artists, like Yoko Ono, Donald Baechler, Swoon, Kiki Smith and Louise Bourgeois, among many others.

Guests mixed and mingled throughout the evening, while bidding on their favorite works, sipping donated champagne by Palmes d' Or and wines courtesy of Wines of Chile, and enjoying delicious cocktails from Diageo. DeeJay 3SKI generously donated their services and kept the party energized late into the night.

The Coalition is grateful to the many artists, sponsors and Benefit and Junior Committee members who made the



above: Carey Lowell and Richard Gere



left: Agnes Gund, Jane Eckart, Lydia West, Darryl Pottorf

below: Chris Dorland, Kyle DeWoody, Jonah Fay-Hurvitz

event possible. Our success is due to their incredible donation of time, energy and resources.

We hope you can join us for our 15th annual ARTWALK NY in November 2009. For more information on how to get involved, please contact 212.776.2056. Stay tuned for details!

ARTWALK NY

14TH ANNUAL



Coalition for the Homeless
& the First Step Job Training Program

Invite you to the 15th annual

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS LUNCHEON

Tuesday, March 31, 2009, 11:30am - 2:00pm
The Pierre Hotel, Fifth Avenue at 61st Street

Hosted by Caroline Rhea

Corporate Honoree Time Warner Cable

For More Information or to purchase tickets, please contact
212.776.2056, or visit www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wmbi



SAVE THE DATE!

Carnival Night for Kids

Thursday, June 4, 2009

5:30PM - 8:00PM

Victorian Gardens in Central Park, NYC

Save the Date for the 13th annual Carnival Night for Kids, benefiting the Coalition's Youth Programs.

For more information, please contact redelman@cfthomeless.org or 212.776.2056