

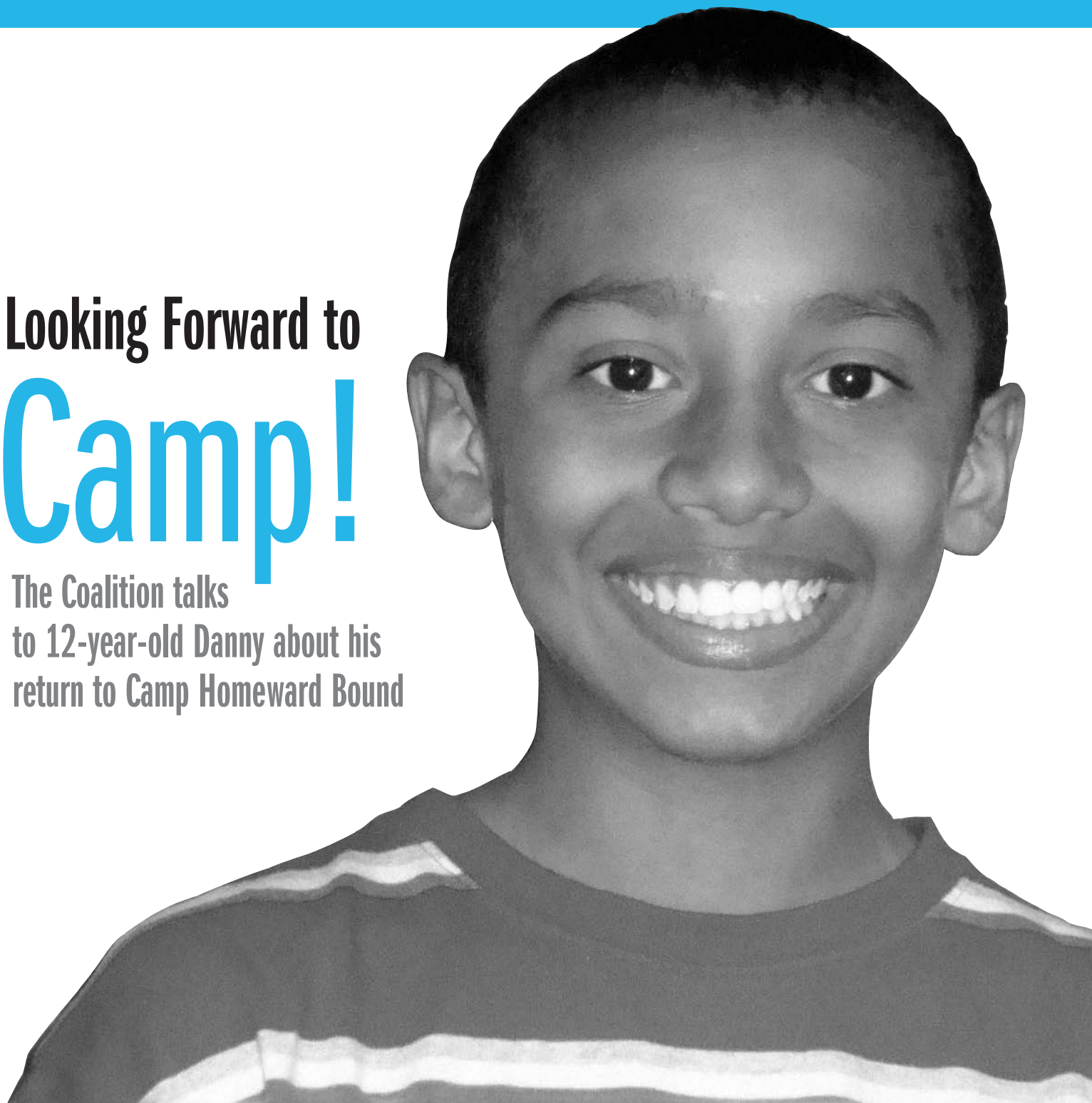
Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Summer 2010

Looking Forward to Camp!

The Coalition talks
to 12-year-old Danny about his
return to Camp Homeward Bound



A Letter from Mary

It's wonderful to report that, since our last newsletter, we've won two significant victories for our homeless neighbors.

In April, I stood with City Council Speaker Chris Quinn, Public Advocate Bill DeBlasio and the Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services to announce that the Bloomberg Administration agreed to a pilot program to stop the placement of frail homeless men and women into illegal boarding houses. More recently, in early June, Steve Banks and I joined Mayor Bloomberg, State Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblymember Keith Wright, to announce that the City would abandon its plan to charge "rent" in shelters. Instead, homeless parents will contribute to a savings plan and be able to take those savings, along with interest, with them when they move into permanent housing.

These victories didn't come easily or quickly. You may remember in the Autumn/Winter 2007 edition of Safety Net, Lindsey Davis summarized her months of research on the City's practice of putting hundreds of homeless people into extremely overcrowded and

hazardous boarding houses. Many residents had severe mental and physical illnesses. The places they wound up in were largely two-families homes, which had been carved up into dangerous warrens of "rooms" with no egress – up to 16 men sleeping in bunkbeds in a single room.

Lindsey's tireless advocacy set the stage for the agreement for the pilot program to end these egregious placements.

On the second front, roughly a year ago, the Bloomberg Administration began charging homeless families with

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working parents "rent" in exchange for emergency shelter. News of the policy, which took anywhere from \$200 to \$1700 a month from low-income wages, was met with tremendous public outcry. Moreover, it was implemented in a completely arbitrary way, and the Legal Aid Society threatened to sue. The outcry and threat of litigation forced the City to suspend implementation of the plan, but City officials continued to assert that charging rent would 'teach responsibility' to homeless people, the absence of which, they presumed, led them to become homeless in the first place.

Over the past several months, working behind the scenes with the State Senate and Assembly, the Coalition and Legal Aid helped forge an alternative – savings plans for homeless families. Parents who have jobs will put money aside each month and be able to recoup their savings and interest to move out of the shelters and establish lives in permanent housing. It took countless hours of negotiations and at times it looked like there was no way

for an agreement to be reached. But, ultimately, common sense prevailed and this is truly a victory for homeless families and all New Yorkers.

But our work does not end with these victories. It may take months or even years as it did in these two examples – but we did it. We did it because of your amazing support – not only with contributions, but with the literally thousands of letters, faxes and phone calls you made to our elected leaders, demanding change.

We owe tremendous thanks to Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblymember Keith Wright – whose leadership made the savings plan possible. Keith was particularly eloquent at the press conference, speaking about a young mother he met when the original

These are your victories, because *your* support has made them possible!

plan to charge rent was unleashed. She had two small children and was making slightly more than minimum wage. Her steadfast dream was to save enough to get her children up and out of the shelters. That dream was nearly dashed when she was told she would have to give the City fully half of her take-home pay. When Assemblyman Wright told her he was going to fight for her, tooth and nail, she burst out crying. He was proud to report back to her that he was able to make good on his promise.

These are *your* victories, because your support has made them possible!

Thanks again.



Mary E. Brosnahan
Executive Director

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Women Mean Business Luncheon Raises More Than \$170,000 for First Step

By Rachel Edelman

More than 400 guests gathered at The Pierre Hotel for the 16th annual Women Mean Business Luncheon on April 8, 2010. The luncheon was emceed by Caroline Rhea and featured a keynote address by Arianna Huffington. The luncheon raised more than \$170,000 for First Step, the Coalition's job training program for homeless women, and had the largest number of attendees in the event's history.

Arianna Huffington inspired the audience as she spoke of the economic struggles affecting millions of Americans, and urged guests to get involved in and support programs like First Step. She pronounced, "This is an unprecedented moment in American history, when instead of upward mobility, which is the essence of the American dream, we have downward mobility. I'm convinced that there is no way we'll be able to turn things around unless we all get involved."

The luncheon honored corporate supporter Credit Suisse for their longstanding support and commitment to the program. Jackie Stone and Sophia Wajnert accepted the Corporate Service Award, and spoke of Credit Suisse's efforts to support First Step. Program Director Diana Olaizola shared her experiences as a graduate of the program, and was featured in a video presentation. Guests also had the opportunity to hear from and meet several First Step graduates in attendance.



Arianna Huffington giving the keynote speech



Arianna Huffington and Caroline Rhea



Diana Olaizola, First Step Director and graduate

The Coalition is grateful for the support and generosity of the **First Step Advisory Board, Luncheon Committee, Junior Committee, and sponsors**, who made the luncheon possible:

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Looking Forward to Camp

By Sarah Murphy

Danny is a 12-year-old boy going on his fourth year at Camp Homeward Bound, the Coalition's summer sleep away camp for homeless and low-income children. I interviewed him shortly before the end of the school year. Like most kids, he was itching for the summer, and he couldn't wait to get back to camp.

Coalition: What made you first want to go to CHB?

Danny: My mom. She heard about it in the shelter where we were staying. A bunch of kids from there were going.

Coalition: Camp is located upstate at Harriman State Park – away from the city. When you got off of the bus the first time, what was going through your mind?

Danny: I always wanted to see what it was like upstate. It was definitely NOT the city.

I thought something would come out and attack me, but it looked cool.

Coalition: Now that you've been there a few times, do you still think that?

Danny: No, but last year, we did see a bear. It was far away, but we could see it from our tent. I've never seen that before, but we weren't scared.

Coalition: What were some of your favorite activities at camp?

Danny: Canoeing, gym, photography. Last year, I won second place in the canoe race and helped make a movie. We have the learning center where we have computers and play things like Jeopardy to learn about school stuff, like science and math. And swimming. I love swimming. I liked cooking. I made stir fry, and it was delicious.

Coalition: What are some of your

favorite memories from camp?

Danny: It was really beautiful when we canoed under the bridge. You could see trees everywhere, and birds. One time my canoe tipped. That was really funny. Two deer passed through camp a few years ago. It was unreal. I also loved the talent shows at the end of each year. I like to sing in it and watch all of my friends.

Coalition: What made you want to go back each year?

Danny: I don't live in the shelter anymore, but I love getting away from the craziness in the city. And friends. I met some great guys, and we see each other every year. I really liked my counselor. He was cool. I could talk to him about anything. I can't wait to see him again this year.



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Coalition: What else are you looking forward to this year?

Danny: Swimming! I'm a level four swimmer now, and the other activities – it's good just having something to do.

Coalition: Do you think other kids should go? Why?

Danny: Yes! It made me realize there was more than just what I see in the city. It's a great experience, and you can tell your kids someday that you went to summer camp and about all of the things you saw and did there.

Coalition: What would you tell a new camper?

Danny: You'll have FUN and learn about all kinds of new things. And don't be worried. You won't be attacked. It's just camp. You'll come home in one piece.

Danny with Assistant Camp Director, Thomas Semeta



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No Advantage: Thousands of Families at Risk of Returning to Shelter when City Rental Subsidy Expires

By Giselle Routhier

2010 brought about an all-time record for family homelessness, and now thousands more are at risk of returning to shelter as a result of the City's flawed rental subsidy program.

Established in 2007, Advantage NY is a two-year rental subsidy for families who are working, are on disability benefits, or who have an active child welfare case. At the end of two years, regardless of a family's circumstances or need for additional assistance, they are cut off.

This year, thousands will "graduate" out of the program – putting an end to their subsidies.

The time limit is the most serious problem for working Advantage recipients, who may be employed but do not make enough to cover food and other necessities in addition to their rent. Indeed, City data demonstrate that the typical Work Advantage family is placed into an apartment with a monthly rent of \$1,100, but earns barely more than \$1,200/month.

What we are left with is a simple math problem. Families, usually headed by single mothers working low-wage jobs, simply cannot afford their rent without financial assistance in the form of a rental subsidy.

The resulting consequences are serious. City data show that by the end of 2009, just over 2,000 families had exhausted their Advantage subsidy. By the end of 2010, 5,289 families will join them in losing their assistance. And in 2011, over 7,000 families will lose their assistance. City data also show that by October of 2009, already over 900 reapplications for shelter had been submitted by families who lost their Advantage subsidy!

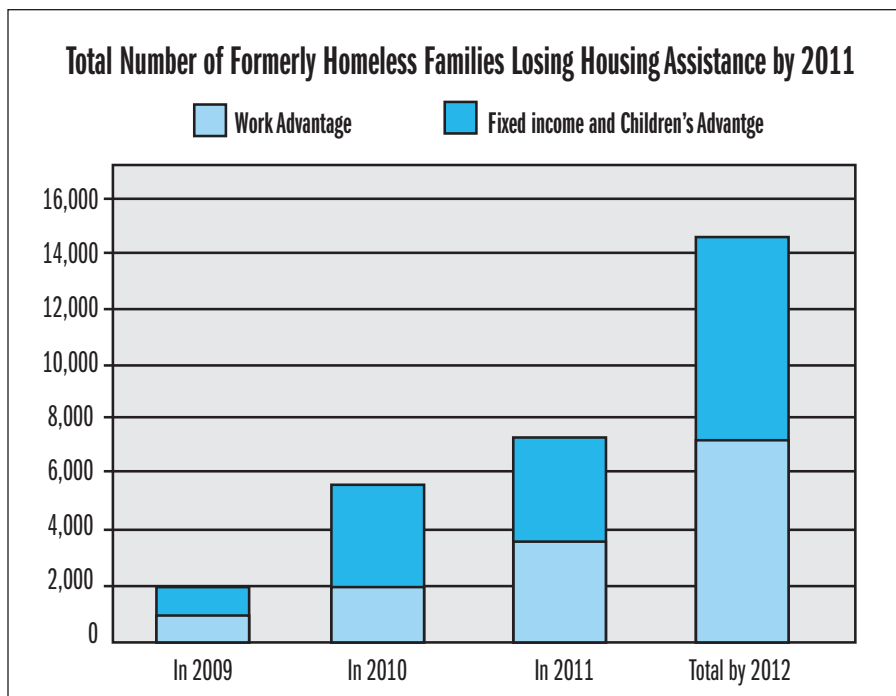
These staggering numbers pose a serious problem for formerly-homeless

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families. Many children, who have already been through the trauma of being homeless once, are now facing the possibility of a return to shelter.

Additionally, the City is proposing changes to the current Advantage program that would require greater contributions from families while offering them less assistance, making it clear that there is no end in sight to the dilemma of thousands of families reaching the end of their subsidy.

The Coalition for the Homeless continues to urge The Bloomberg



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administration to utilize proven, effective solutions to homelessness, such as long-term, flexible housing assistance similar to federal Section 8 vouchers. New York's homeless children and families deserve a real chance to succeed in their independence.

Sign up to receive email alerts from the Coalition at www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/signup

'Carnival Night For Kids' Raises More Than \$170,000 for Youth Service Programs

Central Park was transformed into a children's carnival on June 10, as Carnival Night for Kids raised more than \$170,000 for the Coalition for the Homeless' Youth Service Programs, including Camp Homeward and Bound for Success.

A record 600 guests attended the event at Victorian Gardens in Central Park, sponsored by Drafftcb and other Coalition supporters. Families enjoyed amusement park rides, tried their luck at carnival games and the balloon raffle, and frosted cupcakes from Crumbs Bake Shop and cookies from Cupcake Kids! While kids got their faces painted and caricatures drawn, parents enjoyed delicious barbeque food, as well as wine courtesy of South Pacific Wines and beer courtesy of Brooklyn Brewery.

Children had books signed by their favorite children's book authors – Nancy Krulik, Sally Lloyd-Jones and Gordon Korman. Vinny Voltage entertained the crowd and helped kids learn a few new science tricks, entertainers from Big Apple Circus, Circus to Go! impressed guests with stiltwalking and tricks, and kids got to meet some of their favorite cartoon characters.

Special thanks to Laurence Boschetto of title sponsor Drafftcb, who raised more than \$70,000 for the event, and helped make the event possible. Thanks to the many sponsors, Benefit Committee members, and supporters, who helped make the evening a success!

**Benefit Committee Chair
Elizabeth Gold and
Author Sally Lloyd-Jones**



President and CEO of Drafftcb, Laurence Boschetto, with Alice Kramer and Mary Brosnahan



Kids and adults alike enjoy a day of rides and entertainment



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Or visit www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/backtoschool

Kids for a Better Future Helps the Coalition

By Marisa Butler

Kids for a Better Future (KBF) set out to learn the issues surrounding homelessness in New York City and in February chose the Coalition as the organization to benefit from their volunteer and fundraising efforts.

In May, they organized a walk-a-thon in Prospect Park, raising over \$3,000. They made and sold tee-shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Am I Homeless?" Walking around the inner loop of the park, they enthusiastically chanted and drew people's attention to the cause.

In the past few months, KBF has met with children from our Bound for Success after school program, traveled around the city with our Grand Central Food Program mobile soup kitchen, and are currently helping prepare for our annual school supply drive, Project: Back to School. They will continue to help us throughout the remainder of 2010.

The Kids for a Better Future looked



to prove that they are concerned about the world around them and have the power to change it. Founder, Akash Viswanath Mehta, believes that all kids are deserving of good homes and the tools to lead happy lives. He affirms that anyone, especially kids, has the ability to help solve today's problems.

In less than five years, KBF has traveled around the world working on a myri-

ad of issues related to poverty and injustice. They have raised tens of thousands of dollars and spent hundreds of hours getting to know each problem in depth.

The enthusiasm and dedication that the kids of KBF have shown towards Coalition programs has inspired all of us. If you would like to get involved with KBF, please contact Akash at akasukmeh@yahoo.com.