

Citizens
Advice
Bureau

CARING ABOUT the BRONX

The Newsletter of the
Citizens Advice Bureau

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IN THIS ISSUE

A New Eviction Prevention Program

A Holistic Approach to HIV/AIDS

CAB Kids Do Community Service

Message from the Executive Director

At this year's vice presidential debate, moderator Gwen Ifill asked the candidates about the enormous toll AIDS is taking on African American women, noting that black women 25-44 years old are 13 times more likely to die of the disease than their white counterparts. Dick Cheney admitted he was not aware of the numbers and John Edwards sidestepped the question. But as they say, all politics is local. Our workers on the front lines know too well that so many of this country's social problems – such as homelessness and AIDS – strike Bronx residents the hardest.

It is easy to look at the statistics for the Bronx (like those listed inside this newsletter) and be discouraged. They are indeed a sign of great need. Yet our staff and program participants also see reasons for hope in their everyday experiences. People are living longer now and leading healthier lives with HIV and AIDS. When you visit CAB's AIDS programs, the atmosphere is happy and optimistic. Those infected are more likely to see the disease as a condition they can live with rather than a cause for shame or despair.

This issue of the newsletter also contains a story about the youngsters CAB works with. I am inspired by how enthusiastic these children and teenagers are to do activities that help other people. Seeing their energy when they take on a new community service project fills me with even more hope for the future.

Warmest wishes for the holiday season,



Carolyn McLaughlin

NY Yankee Ruben Sierra Sponsors PS 130 After-School Program



CAB Executive Director Carolyn McLaughlin, Ruben Sierra, PS 130 Principal Daniel Garcia, and Express to Success Assistant Coordinator Juliet McBride.

Sierra visited PS 130, bringing with him dozens of baseballs, basketballs, and footballs as well as other sports equipment. He spoke with the children and signed autographs. The athletic equipment was donated by Sierra in conjunction with the sporting goods manufacturer Spalding.

About 250 youngsters are enrolled in this popular after-school program named Express to Success. Children participate in fun activities that reinforce basic academic skills and promote social development, creativity, and critical thinking. Now, thanks to Ruben Sierra and Spalding, physical fitness is part of the curriculum.



Spalding Community Relations Director Ray Negron and Express to Success Program Coordinator Yolonde Van Putten with Sierra. Several children show off their new Ruben Sierra #24 wrist guards.

HOMEBase: AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION



CAB's new HomeBase team

CAB has just opened the doors to HomeBase, a unique homelessness prevention program that focuses on families. It serves the residents of Community Board I, which is made up of the Mott Haven, Melrose, and Port Morris neighborhoods. Statistics from the Department of Homeless Services have shown that more families land in the shelter system from Bronx CBI than from any other community district in New York City. The DHS chose CAB to implement these services because we are a leading provider of homelessness prevention with a strong presence in that location.

HomeBase specifically targets subpopulations that are most at risk for homelessness. For example, when families live in a doubled-up situation, conflicts with the leaseholder or landlord can easily lead to the secondary tenant being forced out. Those who already have legal proceedings against them in Housing Court may also be in imminent danger of being evicted. Young men and women who have recently aged out of the foster care system are a high-risk group, as are ex-offenders returning from prison. One of the goals of HomeBase is to reach out to these groups as a preventive measure.

When people come to the HomeBase office, staff members evaluate their situation and determine what solutions are available for their problems. Doubled-up situations

often attract unwanted attention from landlords and neighbors and can lead to an eviction notice. In this event, we work with the various parties to resolve any concerns and make sure that the living conditions are safe and fall within the legal terms of the lease. Case managers help maximize the combined household income by making sure tenants are receiving all the public benefits to which they are entitled.

As a last resort, HomeBase will use DHS funds to provide either a one-time grant to settle rent arrears or ongoing assistance to prevent eviction. However, anyone who receives monetary assistance is required to take financial literacy workshops, since many families have trouble managing their incomes well. The overall purpose of this program is to help people achieve stability and self-sufficiency.

Living in a shelter is a painful and disruptive experience for families, especially children. Beyond the human cost, however, is the toll on the city's economy. There are nearly 9,000 families in the NYC shelter system, more than double the number from just six years ago. In that time, the DHS budget has ballooned from \$380 million to \$720 million. Focusing on prevention makes good financial sense: It costs on average \$3,000 a month to keep a family housed in a shelter, whereas a subsidy of just a few hundred dollars can keep a family from losing their apartment in the first place.

The HomeBase program has a strong support component. A significant portion of families facing homelessness (roughly 20-25 percent) have members with significant emotional problems. The most common condition case managers encounter is depression, which hinders people from holding down jobs and taking steps to avoid eviction. Referrals will be made for mental health, employment assistance, and substance abuse – anything people need to attain stability and live independently.

HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS FOR NEW YORK CITY

In September 2004, 15,400 children, 12,800 adult family members, and 8,500 single adults slept each night in the NYC shelter system.

Over the past six years, the NYC homeless shelter population has increased by 74%, from 21,100 people to 36,700 people per night.

Since 1998, the number of homeless families sleeping in NYC shelters and welfare hotels has increased by 101%, from 4,429 families to 8,881 families.

In the same period, the number of homeless single adults increased by 43%. The number of homeless

singles is now at its highest point since 1990.

The average stay for homeless families in the shelter system has approximately doubled in the last decade, from six months then to nearly twelve months now.

In total, 35% of all families

eligible for shelter services come from the Bronx.

More homeless families come from the South Bronx than from any other NYC neighborhood.

Over 4,000 Bronx children under 18 years old are homeless.

CAB Kids Serving the Bronx

Our after-school, summer camp, and teen programs have always played an important role in fulfilling CAB's mission. We are very proud of the way the youngsters we serve have also been eager to help improve quality of life in the Bronx and beyond. These are just a few recent examples of ways in which CAB children and teens have involved themselves in community service.



CAB Girl Scout Domonique Johnson talks with Al Roker on the NBC Today Show.

GIRL SCOUTS

CAB sponsors Girl Scout Troop #1106, whose members come largely from our after-school and summer camp programs. The Girl Scouts have been involved in numerous community service projects including: a clothing drive for Covenant House, which helps homeless and runaway youth; visits to residents of a local home for cerebral palsy patients; and helping the homebound elderly with the city's Meals-on-Wheels program. This Christmas, our troop will serve dinner to homeless persons and individuals who are alone for the holidays at the Goddard Riverside Community Center, a Manhattan-based settlement house.

BLOOD DRIVE

This past July and August, New York City saw its worst blood shortage ever. In response to this emergency situation, the CAB summer camp's Community Service Club held a blood drive at our Community Center that collected 31 pints. A representative from the New York Blood Center talked to the children about the importance of giving blood. The club then went around the Community Center and surrounding neighborhood to recruit donors. Armed with facts and statistics about blood donation, the children made it difficult to say no. On the day of the blood drive, they helped sign people in, escorted donors to the recovery area, and served juice and cookies.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

CAB is the lead partner in the Community School for Social Justice, a small public high school which trains students to be agents for social change. Last year, the school's Social Action Club sold candy to raise money for Keep a Child Alive, an organization that provides health-care to African children with AIDS. They were inspired by a Nigerian activist who spoke to the school about the pandemic. Although their advisor gave some guidance, the idea for this project and all the effort belonged to the students. At a high-profile event, Reebok presented the Club with a human rights award for their work.

Over the summer, CAB selected ten students to participate in its month-long Community Youth Employment Program. The teens were taught how to critically observe and analyze the assets and needs of their community. They were also trained in proper techniques for conducting interviews and surveys so that they could ask local residents about their views. For their final "action project" which was based on their findings, they created informational pamphlets about drug use in the South Bronx and distributed them throughout the area.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Beginning in August, CAB conducted a voter registration drive. The most eager volunteers were teenagers who participate in our Adolescent Development Programs at the Community Center. They clearly felt driven to engage in the political process. In the space of a week, they signed up 59 people, including friends and family as well as themselves if they were old enough. Most of their outreach was to people under the age of 30 who had never registered before.



The Community Service Club serves refreshments to donors at their blood drive.

Positive Living Makes a Positive Difference



Program Coordinator Felicia Thomas performs the intake of a new client.

to face this challenge. For the last fifteen years, CAB's Positive Living unit has offered a wide array of programs that address not just the disease itself but also the social, economic, and health conditions associated with it. Positive Living takes a holistic approach to HIV and AIDS, providing services to help people lead better, healthier lives.

CAB provides long-term, comprehensive case management for HIV-positive individuals and their families. Each participant is assigned a team of three CAB staff who assist them on a regular basis with managing their health care, entitlements, housing, and other issues. Clients often have a variety of needs, sometimes complicated by mental health problems or substance abuse, and require considerable ongoing support. There is also short-term case management and crisis intervention for those with more immediate concerns.

The Harm Reduction Center features a day treatment program which provides services for HIV-positive individuals struggling with drug abuse. Located in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, it offers a safe, nonjudgmental environment where our clients can spend the morning or afternoon. Participants in the day treatment program have access to support groups, individual counseling, acupuncture, yoga, and recreational activities. Case managers check on each person's progress and make referrals when needed.

The Nutrition Program plays a key role in maintaining the well-being of people living with HIV or AIDS. It is designed to prevent disease complications by providing healthy meals and teaching sound nutritional habits. Staff dietitians make home visits, offer nutritional counseling, create personalized diet plans, and lead support groups on food and health. Clients can also get free breakfast and lunch at our Community Center and Harm Reduction Center.

Although AIDS has become a sad fact of life in the Bronx, which has been disproportionately hit by the epidemic, forces in the borough have come together

Access to Health is our healthcare outreach program specifically aimed at anyone who is HIV-positive. CAB helps register uninsured or underinsured people with HIV/AIDS for New York's AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), which covers doctor visits, AIDS-related medications, laboratory tests, mental health visits, and more.

CAB is also heavily involved in community outreach targeted at Bronx residents who are already infected with HIV as well as those who are at risk (teenagers, for example). We conduct educational workshops throughout the borough that explain what HIV and AIDS are, ways the virus is transmitted, prevention methods, and

risk reduction. The Families Together Program provides therapeutic and support activities for families that have been affected by HIV.



Nutritionist John Haviland (left) serves a healthy lunch.

An additional benefit to Positive Living participants is that they have access to the full network of services CAB offers. Many clients come for housing assistance such as eviction prevention, apartment searches, and help in negotiating with landlords. Others require help in areas of their lives not necessarily related to AIDS. Following CAB's guiding philosophy, the Positive Living unit is committed to meeting the needs of the whole person.

HIV/AIDS FACTS FOR THE BRONX

- The Bronx has more people living with HIV and AIDS than 45 states.
- 42% of the people with AIDS in the Bronx are African-American and 51% are Hispanic.
- 33% of adults diagnosed with AIDS are women, more than in any other borough.
- The Bronx has more pediatric AIDS cases than 48 states.
- 13% of adults diagnosed with AIDS in the Bronx are 50 and older.

Flu Shots for Bronx Seniors

In response to this year's flu vaccine shortage, CAB arranged for shots to be administered at our Morris Senior Center. Over 200 people lined up in the lobby on October 25 as early as 6 a.m. Staff verified that individuals met the Department of Health's requirement that they be at least 65 years old or suffer from a chronic illness. By the time supplies ran out, 111 Bronx residents most at risk had been vaccinated.

Shelter Residents Celebrate Thanksgiving



Jackson Avenue Youth Worker Naomi Yiadom hands out Thanksgiving dinners.

In November, all 95 families at our Jackson Avenue Family Residence were given the ingredients for a complete Thanksgiving dinner, including a turkey. It was funded by the family of Karen Hagerty, a senior vice president at Aon Risk Services who had adopted the Jackson Avenue

shelter. For six years Hagerty donated food and toys so that homeless children could enjoy Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas celebrations. After she died in the attack on the World Trade Center, Hagerty's family chose to honor her memory by continuing this tradition.

Another Successful Job Fair

CAB's employment services ran its fourth annual Job Fair in October at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Around 800 job seekers attended the event, getting a unique opportunity for personal access to 40 employers in the private and public sectors. A good number of individuals were hired as cable technicians, drivers, retail workers, customer service representatives, and administrative assistants, among other jobs.

Family Childcare Network Fundraiser

On September 18, CAB held its fifth annual dinner celebration for the Family Childcare Network. Since 1995, the FCN has trained over 1,000 low-income women to run childcare businesses from their own homes, which helps them achieve financial independence and provides quality childcare to Bronx parents. CAB honored Ronda Zawel, Program Officer at the Guttman Foundation and former Director of the Neighborhood Networks for Family Child Care project at United Neighborhood Houses; Mauro Sardonapoli of the Human Resources Administration; and St. James' Church, who have been great supporters of the FCN.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Early Childhood Education
- After-School
- Summer Day Camp
- Adolescent Development
- The Community School for Social Justice

FAMILY SERVICES

- Walk-in Information & Referral
- Family Childcare Network
- Eviction Prevention
- Foster Care Prevention
- Health Insurance Outreach
- Food Stamp Outreach

SERVICES FOR SENIORS

- Senior Centers
- Housing Assistance & Minor Repairs
- Elder Abuse

HOMELESS CARE

- Homeless Outreach
- Drop-in Center
- Family Residences
- Relocation Assistance

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

- Job Readiness Training
- Skills Training
- Job Placement

POSITIVE LIVING HIV/AIDS SERVICES

- Case Management and Housing Assistance
- Family Support Programs
- Nutritional Assistance
- Prevention Education

IMMIGRATION

- Legal Assistance
- ESL and Citizenship Classes

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Bronx Works Opens New Computer Lab for Job Hunters

On October 26, CAB celebrated the opening of a new state-of-the-art computer laboratory at our Bronx Works employment center. IBM donated 20 computers and a printer, while the Verizon Foundation provided funding for interactive software to teach job skills and vocational English for non-native speakers. Bronx Works will integrate the technology and computers into its training programs.

Bronx Works offers employment counseling, job placement assistance, help with resume writing, and interview practice, as well as ESL instruction since many of its clients are immigrants. Job seekers can enroll in on-site training for security guards, health care workers, and food service workers, or get help finding training programs at other organizations. All of these services are free. Last year 635 Bronx residents found jobs with CAB's help. The new computer lab will be a powerful resource to help even more people.

At the dedication ceremony, CAB thanked IBM and Verizon for their generosity and commitment to helping low-income communities bridge the digital divide. CAB also honored its Bronx Works partners for the



From l. to r.: Joel Rivera, NY City Council Majority Leader; Michael Benjamin, NY State Assemblyman; Carolyn McLaughlin, CAB Executive Director; Diane Baillargeon, President, Seedco; Hope Harley, Director of Community Affairs, Verizon; Pamela Haas, Program Manager, Corporate Community Relations, IBM.

last six years, Seedco (the Structured Employment Economic Development Corporation) and the Department of Education's Adult and Continuing Education Program. After remarks and a formal ribbon cutting, guests saw a demonstration of how the new technology will complement existing services.