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About This Newsletter . . .

New York City has made tremendous progress in reducing the number of street homeless in recent years. According to the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the number of men and women on our streets has declined by 25 percent since 2005, from 4,395 to 3,306.

The Citizens Advice Bureau is determined to continue this downward trend. Working closely with DHS, other city agencies, and several community-based organizations, CAB has been the deciding factor in the 52% reduction in street homelessness in the Bronx between 2005 and 2008. This was largely achieved by CAB's implementation of a "street to home" strategy that greatly expedites the process of finding housing for the homeless. CAB was the first organization in New York City to implement this strategy for an entire borough.

Over the years, CAB pioneered a number of other strategies in our work with the homeless. For instance, we were the first to develop cold weather guidelines for the staff of our **Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)** as cri-

teria to meeting urgent needs. To ensure our outreach program extends into every corner of the Bronx, we were the first organization to track the movement of our vehicles with GPS devices. Our use of sophisticated computer-based mapping techniques to document concentrations of street homeless persons has been another innovation.

Almost as much as finding homes for the homeless, our outreach program is also concerned with their safety while they are on the street. We constantly monitor individuals in extreme cold or hot weather conditions. Through doing this, we have developed excellent relationships with New York Police Department precinct commanders throughout the borough.

Street to Home also cites the important role of CAB's **Living Room** drop-in center. The Living Room has been a turning point for hundreds of street homeless persons since its opening in 1997, as the center's staff worked with individuals to get identification, obtain



Social Security or other benefits, get treatment for health problems, and secure housing.

Our work with the homeless population is quite challenging and takes considerable time. However, we believe that transforming the lives of the street homeless is a wise investment and the right thing to do.

Carolyn McLaughlin,
Executive Director

Scott Auwarter,
Assistant Executive Director

CAB works closely with the Department of Homeless Services and other institutions to find housing for the most vulnerable



Helping the Homeless ... Helping the Bronx

The Citizens Advice Bureau is the leading provider of services that help the street homeless in the Bronx transform their lives. CAB is proud of the successes it has achieved with this extremely vulnerable segment of our population.

Largely because of CAB's continuum of services and targeted outreach, the number of street homeless persons in the Bronx declined by 52% between February 2005 and February 2008, compared to the 25% decline for New York City as a whole. Over the last two years we found permanent housing for 300 individuals who had been living on the streets.

CAB's successful outreach to homeless individuals is based on two components that work together to assist a population with great needs.

The first is staff — the dedicated men and women who make up our **Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)**. They check streets, underpasses, grassy areas near highway ramps, vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and parks to identify and talk to the street homeless. Through ongoing contact, they encourage homeless individuals to take the first steps towards returning to mainstream life. Street homeless people learn to trust the men and women of HOT, which has been in operation since 1995.

The second is a sanctuary — **The Living Room**, the only 24-hour drop-in center in the Bronx for the street homeless. On the average, some 75 homeless individuals spend time at this site each day. Last year the Living Room accommodated 2,027 clients, including people who dropped by for a brief visit during the day as well as homeless people who board there temporarily while long-term housing is sought for them.

Reducing Street Homelessness One Contact at a Time

It all starts with personal contact, greeting and offering help to a person who may have been living on the streets for months and is accustomed to being ignored by passersby every day. Acknowledgement of a homeless person as an individual with a unique

personality and particular needs is the all-important first step on the way to recovery.

Homeless Outreach Team members work 24 hours a day (working in three shifts: midnight to 8 a.m., 8 to 4 p.m., 4 to midnight) to identify and talk to the street homeless. (In the winter, when it is below 32 degrees, two teams work each of those shifts.) HOT workers make contact with 15 to 20 prospective clients every day, getting to know street homeless individuals firsthand.

It is the chronically homeless individuals who are the real challenge for HOT. Many are substance abusers and a high proportion, about half, have mental health problems. And hard-bitten street homeless people are often resistant to outreach, and must be coaxed to accept help. CAB has developed effective, assertive ways to persuade even the most recalcitrant to try our services. Although we are reluctant to take "no" for an answer, nothing is ever forced on them. The objective is to restore dignity to these individuals and help them to rejoin society's mainstream and resume productive lives.

First Step: The Living Room

CAB opened the Living Room, with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 1997 as a one-stop refuge with a range of social services to assist homeless individuals. These include treatment of health problems, help in finding housing, nutrition counseling, and medication management. Individuals get meals, a hot shower, and temporary accommodations in a safe, supportive, and structured setting.

Through an arrangement with Care for the Homeless (which is affiliated with Montefiore Hospital), a nurse practitioner works at the Living Room four days a week to perform basic medical services and refer Living Room clients to medical specialists as needed.

For many of the chronic homeless people, entering the Living Room is the first step toward securing permanent housing. Over the last two years, HOT and Living Room personnel moved 119 chronically

Helping the Homeless . . . Helping the Bronx



homeless individuals off Bronx streets and into transitional housing, as well as another 70 into permanent housing.

The homeless people who agree to Living Room services are assigned to a case manager who tracks and oversees each individual as s/he takes the steps toward a more productive life. Some cases are resolved quickly, while others take time. Typically, we secure transitional or permanent shelter for homeless individuals within three months, although it may take a year or longer for particularly complex cases.

To expedite our work, CAB and other citywide organizations helping the homeless instituted a new strategy called **Street to Home** which combines their resources to take a task force approach to serving the homeless, streamlining the process of finding permanent or supportive housing and supplying follow-up and support services.

The Street to Home program is an example of the synergies that come into play when organizations partner with each other. The Project for Psychiatric Outreach of the Homeless (PPOH), another partner, assigns a psychiatrist to CAB three to four hours a week for psychiatric evaluations and care (these evaluations are mandatory for every application for housing for the homeless). Personnel from Visiting Nurse Services work with clients with severe mental illness. CAB also partners with Part of the Solution (POTS), which operates a food pantry and provides entitlements assistance. As mentioned earlier, Care for the Homeless supplies medical care for Living Room clients and also assigns a nurse practitioner to go out with HOT once a week to provide medical assistance and referrals to street homeless.

CAB also partners with many New York City agencies, including the Department of Homeless Services, the New York City Police Department, the Department of Transportation, the Parks Department, and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. These agencies coordinate frontline assistance with HOT staff.

Surveys that Prioritize Our Services

CAB each year surveys Living Room visitors to evaluate how helpful we have been. The 2008 client survey confirms CAB is fulfilling its mission:

- 90% agreed that the CAB staff is knowledgeable and were able to help them.
- 89% said they were pleased with the help CAB gave them.
- 85% said CAB staffers are “polite, committed and caring.”
- 81% affirmed that CAB referrals for other services were “helpful.”
- 56% reported that their alcohol consumption has declined since coming to the Living Room.
- 54% said their use of drugs declined.

The Living Room has been so well received that CAB is planning to combine its drop-in center with a safe haven that will provide more comprehensive services. CAB expects to soon begin construction of the new space.

Keeping count of the homeless is a priority. **The Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE)** in which CAB participates is an annual survey started by the City's Department of Homeless Services. According to HOPE, the population of “unsheltered individuals” in the Bronx was reduced by 52% since 2005 and by 12% since 2007, declining from a count of 325 to 279 over the past year.

It is estimated that one in 2,485 people in New York City is unsheltered, the 2008 HOPE survey pointed out, by far the smallest homeless population among major cities in the U.S. For example, one in 1,780 people in Chicago is unsheltered . . . one in 1,741 in Miami-Dade County . . . one in 269 in San Francisco.

Looking Ahead . . .

While CAB and partner organizations have greatly reduced street homelessness in the Bronx in recent years, the difficult economic climate we are encountering now could have a great impact on our efforts in the years ahead. In contrast to the many resources we can apply in a healthy economy, the continuation of affirmative long-term trends in coping with the homeless may be more difficult to sustain as the economy contracts. However, CAB has withstood difficult times in the past working with this population, and we believe we have the talent, resources, and know-how that will enable us to continue to yield good results. **CAB**

Above, a CAB case manager, left, assists a client

Below, a member of CAB's Homeless Outreach Team (center) shares a laugh with two of her clients



Three Bronx Success Stories

From an SRO to a Studio Apartment



“Mike” had been homeless for the past 24 years before CAB’s Homeless Outreach Team made his acquaintance. He was alcohol dependent and had emotional problems. He had been spending most of his time on the streets of Riverdale, living outside in a doorway on a dead end road. Mike, here with CAB case worker Joy Starke, supported himself by working for local bars, taking out the garbage, cleaning the floors, and doing any other small task that the bar would pay for. When HOT workers encountered him, he was sleeping under many blankets and obviously intoxicated. After CAB found a room for him at a transitional residence, we saw a significant decrease in his drinking and he was able to tend to his serious medical issues. Now he has his own studio apartment, attained through the Fixed Income Advantage Program in which the Department of Homeless Services helps pay the rent.

How to Clean Up a Needle-Littered “Home”

“Charlie,” now 49, was a long-time drug abuser who was homeless for ten years, spending his last three years on the streets underneath a footbridge over Bruckner Blvd. at Bryant Ave. This was a notorious gathering place for drug addicts and sex workers, constantly littered with used hypodermic needles, old mattresses, and other debris. The location was finally cleaned up and sealed off by a steel fence in a classic example of what can be done when organizations cooperate, in this case, the collaborative efforts of CAB’s Homeless Outreach Team, the Department of Homeless Services, the Department

of Transportation, and the Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Unit. DOT cleaned up the area, welded shut the access door to the location, and constructed the fence around the property. Charlie was cleaned up, too. After initial resistance, he eventually warmed up to HOT and agreed to go to the Living Room drop-in center. Within four months, he was permanently placed at St. John’s Residence where he has his own apartment. There he became such a model resident that he was hired to do maintenance at both of the St. John’s buildings. Charlie no longer abuses drugs.

Trading a Vehicle for an Apartment



“John,” 57, was homeless for over ten years. He suffered from substance abuse and mental illness. For all that time, he made his home in an abandoned van behind the main Post Office on Grand Concourse and East 150th Street. CAB’s Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) worked hard to persuade John to leave this location in the winter because it was too cold for us to feel safe about him sleeping in those conditions. We found him a bed the day his vehicle was towed away. Recently we found John his own rent-subsidized apartment in a new building where he can live the rest of his life.

He will be receiving ongoing intensive case management services from another provider for as long as he needs them. His new case manager will make sure he takes his medications, eats well, and pays his rent. **CAB**

For a vivid glimpse of CAB’s work with homeless people, watch “An Introduction to the CAB Living Room” on YouTube.

“Our work has demonstrated that the street-to-home initiative is a success. We have been able to rehabilitate chronically homeless people and move them into housing right away.”

CAROLYN MCLAUGHLIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

