



Celebrating Successes, Overcoming Homelessness

Each year on the December day of the winter solstice, the “longest night of the year,” Care for the Homeless and hundreds of other groups across America observe Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day to remember those who have died during the year without stable housing and to recognize that better policies can end modern day homelessness as we know it.

On June 21st this year, the day of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, client leaders at Care for the Homeless inaugurated a new event: a Summer Solstice Success Celebration. It’s an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the success people have had in overcoming obstacles to beat homelessness by finding and maintaining permanent, stable housing. It also recognizes that with better policies every New Yorker who is unstably housed or on the verge of homelessness could have an opportunity for the same kind of “second chance” the honorees at the Celebration were able to take advantage of.

“Homelessness is a crisis,” Care for the Homeless Executive Director Bobby Watts told the assembled crowd of over 150 at Broadway Presbyterian Church. “But with the right policies and programs we can end homelessness as we know it. As we advocate for those better policies it’s important to recognize there are people who overcome the evil of homelessness, and to celebrate their success. With each success, the individual – and society – is healthier and stronger.”

New York City Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Gilbert Taylor spoke at the event and handed out awards to the event’s honorees. Commissioner Taylor told the story of a Care for the Homeless client who overcame many health, family and personal difficulties to find permanent stable housing, saying he was “celebrating not just her success in overcoming homelessness, but really celebrating her success in life.” He presented awards to Mr. Garrett McMahon, Mr. David Broxton, Mr. William Bryant, Ms. Patricia Gale, Ms. Taje Singh, Ms. Brenda Turner, Mr. William Weidlich, Mr. Raymond West and Mr. Calvin Alston. *Story continues.*



Photo by Emily Ercolini.

New York City Adopts Municipal ID Law

Last week New York City Council passed, and Mayor Bill de Blasio promptly signed, a law authorizing an official city ID program offered regardless of US citizenship status that will be promoted by the city to encourage wide acceptance not just for city government and government related activities but also by banks, cultural institutions and city commercial enterprises. This is legislation that was publicly supported by CFH and our client leaders. Care for the Homeless testified before City Council in favor of the proposal when it was first introduced and has actively advocated for it.

The legislation, authored by Council Members Carlos Menchaca (Brooklyn), Chair of the Council Immigration Committee, and Daniel Dromm (Queens), Chair of the Council Education Committee, and supported by Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, was widely backed by organizations advocating for poor or homeless people, undocumented immigrants, the transgender community and others.

Getting and maintaining acceptable ID for government programs and community activities can often be difficult for unstably housed people. This low-cost and convenient program to make official photo IDs readily available to New Yorkers regardless of citizenship status, which includes special provisions for people temporarily residing in homeless shelters, promises relief and assistance to many people in need.

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Celebrating Success continued ...

The program also featured lunch, live music and entertainment and “stories of success” from several Care for the Homeless clients now living in permanent housing. Client leader William Bryant told the group “this shouldn’t be a celebration of one person’s success, or even of the success of many, but rather a commitment that all in need have the opportunity for a second chance that those of us being recognized today have had.”

Also recognized was Ms. Laura May, winner of the first annual Care for the Homeless “Stories of Success” Short Essay Contest, which was open to all homeless or formerly homeless New Yorkers. Those in attendance were also asked to sign in at the event’s “Wall of Success” where each participant had a chance to write what their own personal definition of success was. There were lots of different definitions of success, but for many it was something like “finding a home” or “getting a job” or “helping my family.”



Public Forums on City’s Affordable Housing Plan

Last week Care for the Homeless held two public forums on the city’s ten-year affordable housing plan and other permanent housing opportunities for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Both events included a briefing on the city plan and an open discussion and question and answer period. Those in attendance at the programs included interested members of the public including a number of current and former homeless shelter residents, CFH staffers and Board members and staff and policy advocates from other New York City providers of services for homeless people.

Presenters and discussion leaders included CFH Board Member and Policy Committee Chair Barbara Knecht, CFH Policy Director Jeff Foreman, Dr. Al Arterburn and CFH Policy Associate Dominiq Williams. In addition to reviewing the de Blasio administration’s plan for 200,000 affordable units over 10 years, including 120,000 preserved affordable units and the construction of 80,000 new units, the presentation and discussion included a review of the scope of the city’s affordable housing crisis and the cost of the program. Also discussed were plans to increase homelessness prevention programs, create a rental subsidy program to assist homeless shelter residents to transition to permanent housing, targeted priorities of federal housing resources including NYCHA public housing units to those experiencing homelessness, expanding supportive housing opportunities, greater inter-agency coordination of housing programs and policies and a pilot program to use a portion of the billion dollar budget for the Department of Homeless Services for permanent housing for chronically homeless people.

Care for the Homeless advocates for policies to fight, prevent and end homelessness because we believe that policy choices helped create modern day homelessness and better policies and programs can end homelessness as we know it.