



CFH Observes Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

On the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, for the fifth straight year, Care for the Homeless observed Homeless Persons' Memorial Day to remember those who passed away in New York City during 2016 without homes. This year we joined with several partners including Urban Pathways, Drisha Institute for Jewish Education and Masbia soup kitchen to feed about 125 people, memorialize those who died, and talk about how to end homelessness. In a program featuring City Councilwoman Helen Rosenthal, and 10 CFH client leaders, the names of 150 departed were read as a bell tolled and a candle was lit for each, while information about them was projected on a screen. Rather than PolicyMatters reporting about this inspirational event, we want to present a beautifully written article about it written by CFH volunteer and contributor Robert Nussbaum:

It is the long night's journey into day. While each December 21 announces winter's arrival and the time when daylight is least upon us, for those who live without stable housing, who have no place to call their own, there is scant light no matter what the calendar reads.

On December 21st there were memorials around the nation, honoring those who to many were the faceless, the nameless, the homeless who lived and died on our streets in the past year. New York City is now home to over 60,000 people who are are without home.

And while we worry during the holiday season about whether we have found the right present to tuck under the tree for our children, our spouses, our parents and grandparents, the homeless worry about whether their loved ones will see tomorrow's light.

Even as the basic dignities of life were denied them, in death these memorials were intended to offer some recognition of the worth of their being. Their names were listed on the walls of this room, and readers came forward to mention, maybe for the last time, the person for whom the light had been extinguished.

With each recital a bell chimed. Some had died a John or Jane Doe. Others with but a first name. But they would not pass unrecognized, not tonight.

A few in the audience came forward to tell the tale of a friend whose existence had meaning and purpose. Of efforts to move beyond the streets, of ties and jackets, of intelligence and bright smiles, of dreams and plans of better days ahead.

For those who worked tirelessly with this community, whose purpose was directed at bringing hope and help to many in such desperate need, there was talk of the light that shined in the eyes of the ones given a key to their own apartment, a key to their own place to call home, a key to their version of heaven where the water ran hot, the bed had fresh sheets, the walls kept them safe and warm. Where nightmares were finally quieted.

Many on the wall had no known birth or death dates. As if they had come and gone without notice, without creating even a ripple in the water. Some were but babies, never having a chance to experience the highs and lows, the joys and the pain, the vicissitudes that mark each of our beings.

There is no reason that they did not live our lives, nor we theirs. The twists and turns, the serendipity that elevated each of us could as easily have laid us low. For those whose had passed, the kindness of good fortune had turned away from each of them.

Care for the Homeless is dedicated to the eradication of this ongoing persistent tragedy for our nation. With each December 21 there is a prayer that this will mark the last year that this memorial will be needed, that next year homelessness will be but a distant sad memory. And there is a fervent belief that we can, acting together, achieve what at times seems near impossible. There is a will and a passion to succeed. Nothing less is acceptable.

As the last name was called and the last tear shed, the room went dark except for the lit candles each in attendance held aloft. For even as the long night's journey had ended for those who died without a home, they still provided light for those who remained and remembered that each existence has meaning and value.

May each of them sleep tonight and forevermore in their own beds, in their own homes, safe from the dangers, the demons, the difficulties and disasters that marked far too much of their time. And may each of their tomorrow's be filled only with light.



Audience holds up candles for every homeless individual lost in 2016
Source: David Brand, Gothamist



Girl with candle
Source: David Brand, Gothamist



Volunteers serving meal provided by Masbia



Councilwoman Helen Rosenthal speaking at Memorial



CFH Director Bobby Watts

We Need Supportive Housing More Than Ever, Here's How You Can Help



Advocates rally for Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing
Source: Coalition for the Homeless

Last year New York City and New York State each agreed to launch long term programs to each provide 15,000 units of supportive housing in New York City. Every last one of those units is urgently needed. The City has already awarded contracts for the first 550 units of their commitment. The legislature and the Governor made a down payment on the state's commitment by including funding for 6,000 of the units in the current 2016-17 state budget. That was over nine months ago – but there were strings attached – including a pre-condition that the Governor and state legislative leaders must execute a memorandum of understanding about how and where the appropriated funds would be spent. And that memo is still outstanding with a scant 12 weeks before the deadline for the next state budget.

As this PolicyMatters newsletter goes out the New York City Department of Homeless Services continues to report over 60,000 New Yorkers in city homeless shelters every night. The newly promised supportive housing could go a long way towards ending homelessness as we know it in New York

City. This shouldn't be a partisan matter. Providing housing for our city's most vulnerable population is the right thing to do. In the richest city in the richest nation in the history of the world, safe and decent housing should be a basic human right. Moreover, supportive housing is less expensive than shelter, and could save significant public resources with far better outcomes.

It's time – really far past time – for Governor Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Leader John Flanagan to agree to the terms of the 2016-17 appropriations, and also commit themselves to continued funding. We've provided their office phone numbers to help people interested in ending homelessness to call them and tell them that. Governor Andrew Cuomo: 518-474-8390, State Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan: 518-455-2071, State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie: 518-455-3791.

You can also join the campaign to send the Governor and legislative leaders 20,000 e-mails about the need for supportive housing by visiting <http://www.nynycampaign.org/take-action>. And each Wednesday supporters will gather in front of the Governor's New York City office at 9am at 633 Third Avenue to let our leaders know how important this issue is for us. Please join us when you can.

Concern Over Health Center Funding in Washington



CFH Provider and Client

The new 115th Congress was just seated in Washington, D.C., and we're two weeks away from the inauguration of a new administration. This comes amid new budget deadlines and concerns about cutbacks or policy changes especially about healthcare, but generally about all domestic spending. Despite any anxiety, this is a critical time for people concerned about health center funding, housing programs for people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable people, and all safety net programs.

The two looming budget deadlines are the expiration of the "debt ceiling" in March, and the need to pass another continuing resolution or budget to fund government by an April deadline. Failure to meet either deadline would result in a federal government shutdown.

Care for the Homeless has been advocating for full funding for health centers like our own CFH health clinics that serve more than 8,000 individuals experiencing homelessness each year in New York City, in over 35,000 medical encounters. Nationwide, federally funded health centers provide primary care to about 23 million vulnerable patients. The truth is that without these health centers, which provide access and quality care to many of our country's poorest, sickest and hardest to reach patients at a savings of public resources, public hospitals and health resources across the country would be overwhelmed. And federally funded health centers have already experienced dramatic funding cutbacks in recent years including a \$600 million cut in fiscal year 2011.

We urge everyone interested in providing healthcare to people experiencing homelessness, nutritious foods to people struggling with food insecurity and vulnerable people in need of housing, to call their members of Congress and let them know these important domestic programs are critical. You can reach your members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard in Washington at (202) 224-3121

The Busy Advocate's January Calendar

Wed., Jan. 11th, 9 a.m., Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing Rally, to advocate for the release of the 2016-17 supportive housing appropriations, 633 Third Ave, Manhattan, NY.

Mon., Jan. 16th, Martin Luther King Day celebrated - often by volunteering. You can volunteer at Care for the Homeless by emailing volunteerservices@cfhnyc.org.

Mon., Jan. 23rd, 10 p.m. - 4 a.m., HOPE Count, NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) will conduct its annual Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE), to volunteer please register at www.nyc.gov/hope.

Tue., Jan. 24th, 12:30 p.m., HAC Client Leader Meeting, CFH Conference Room, 30 E. 33rd Street, Manhattan, NY.

Wed., Jan. 25th, 12:30 p.m., CAB Client Leader Meeting, CFH Conference Room, 30 E. 33rd Street, Manhattan, NY.

Mon., Feb. 6th, 6:30 p.m., CFH First Monday Policy Briefing, Susan's Place, 1911-21 Jerome Avenue, Bronx, NY. Free and open to all.