



# Homes for the Homeless

*Serving NYC Families In Need Since 1986*

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## 2012 WINTER

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# HOMES FOR THE HOMELESS BULLETIN

SERVING NYC FAMILIES IN NEED SINCE 1986

2012  
Winter

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the Winter 2012 edition of the *Homes for the Homeless Bulletin*.

As a friend of Homes for the Homeless, you were probably saddened, but not likely surprised, that the most recent U.S. Census numbers showed 30 percent of New York City children were living in poverty. Unfortunately, in these tough economic times, it is children who suffer the most.

Rather than be discouraged, Homes for the Homeless is working harder than ever to support New York City's families. With your help, we are able to operate our quality family shelters; the Prospect Family Support Center, which gives emergency care to families in crisis; after-school programs; summer camps; and our newest program, Milk from the Heart, which provides free, fresh milk for New York City's low-income families.

Your support makes all of these programs possible, and ensures that, for our clients, shelters are more than just places to sleep.

We encourage you to follow the developments of Homes for the Homeless by visiting our Web site at [www.HFHnyc.org](http://www.HFHnyc.org), and keeping up with us on Facebook and Twitter.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to New York City's struggling and homeless families.



**Ralph da Costa Nunez, PhD**  
**President and CEO**  
**Homes for the Homeless**

## 2012 WINTER SEASON

# SPOTLIGHT on...

### Sharon Lewis

Assistant Administrator, Saratoga Family Inn

Sharon Lewis is an assistant administrator at Saratoga Family Inn (SFI), but to many staff and residents she's known as "the counselor" or even "Miss Saratoga." Lewis is also a breast cancer survivor. When she spoke in October to the children who live at SFI about her experience battling the disease, Lewis remembered, "They asked me, 'Was I sad? Did it hurt when they cut off my breast? How did I get cancer?'"

The children were also moved to action. Spurred by her story, and under the guidance of Education Program Coordinator Tinnyqua Williams, the youth at SFI walked to raise money for breast cancer research during the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. They donated more than \$200 to the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

"It was really touching to see how much everyone cared about what I've gone through," Lewis said.

Lewis has worked at Homes for the Homeless for 24 years. And even when she was going through breast cancer treatment, she wanted to come back to work. "The people here are like my support group," she said. Her colleagues noted her dedication.

"She'd just come in every day. She just kept on moving. She's definitely a great example of determination and will,"

said Saratoga Administrator Frank Martarella. "She's a clear-cut inspiration."

Lewis also serves as unofficial counselor-at-large at SFI.

"I make it a business of mine, when I see residents standing there, to say, 'Hello, how are you doing?' Then you become approachable," Lewis said. "Residents walk into my office to get a car fare or pay for a key, and I ask, 'Where are you with permanent housing? Do you have a high school diploma?' Then I say, 'Here are the resources, take classes, start working to get a job.' Months later they'll come back and say, 'I got my high school diploma,' or 'I got a job.' And I say, 'Yeah!'" Lewis is inspired by the residents at HFH, and serves as an inspiration to them all.





**In a rough economy**, nothing is more in demand than sound advice for managing finances and navigating the job market, and at Prospect Family Inn (PFI), regular courses give residents the chance to learn directly from experienced financial professionals.

Credit Advocate Counseling Corp. (CACC) has taught five rounds of financial literacy courses at PFI since the beginning of 2011. CACC, a not-for-profit agency specializing in financial and consumer education for low-income clients, tailors an eight-class curriculum specifically to shelter residents.

Steven Burman, the president of CACC, developed the curriculum, but most often lets residents guide discussions with questions about their own financial issues, fostering robust talks among participants.

“Most of the people that are sharing are going through issues affecting the other people in the room,” Burman said.

Workshop topics include how to develop a spending plan and manage a budget; good consumer habits and staying out of credit trouble; and advice for job searches and interviews.

PFI was inspired to schedule the workshops after residents requested more adult education programming in the shelter. Typical workshops attract 10–15 residents—overwhelmingly young mothers—and most residents who come to one workshop have returned for more.

The importance of employment training in shelters has grown as New York City’s public assistance programs move toward supports tied to employment, and particularly after the Advantage rent-subsidy program ended last year.

In class, residents calculated that their expenses — including food, transportation, and other necessities such as cell phones—totaled \$400 to \$500 a month. From there, talk turned to how to advance to the next stage: affording a studio apartment.

Burman said class discussions dispelled the misconception that residents don’t have expenses while they are living in shelters.

Clients at the Prospect Family Inn attend a financial literacy course provided by the Credit Advocacy Counseling Corp.



# IN FOCUS: PEACE BY P.E.A.C.E. KIDS TALK THROUGH CONFLICTS

Nationally, 90% of fourth through eighth graders were victims of some kind of bullying in 2010. This alarming statistic is one reason why every Friday, four Columbia University undergraduates volunteer at Peace by P.E.A.C.E., an after-school program for children at the Prospect Family Inn in the Bronx that teaches communication skills and conflict resolution.

During the Fall 2011 session, volunteer Yechiel Wolgel said that for the first two weeks the students “were really quiet, but they’ve since opened up to the leaders.”

The leaders begin each session by having the 10–12 children in the class share recent good and bad experiences. The kids are fairly open, often explaining fights they had or negative feelings from the past week. The group discusses conflicts in order to come up with resolutions other than fighting.

At one class, two students, Cherish and David, both 9, discussed a fight they had earlier in the day. David recounted that the two had been building ramps for toy cars, when Cherish claimed hers was better, and also made the generalization that “girls are better than boys.” While telling the story, David said that he thought girls and boys were equally good at doing things, which the volunteers supported.

“Just because one girl does something better than a boy doesn’t mean all girls are better than boys,” volunteer Miriam Kaplan explained to the class.

In order to help the children learn how clear communication can help resolve conflict, the group takes part in activities such as “Hey you!,” a game similar to charades, where each participant acts out a specific emotion that the other participants have to guess.

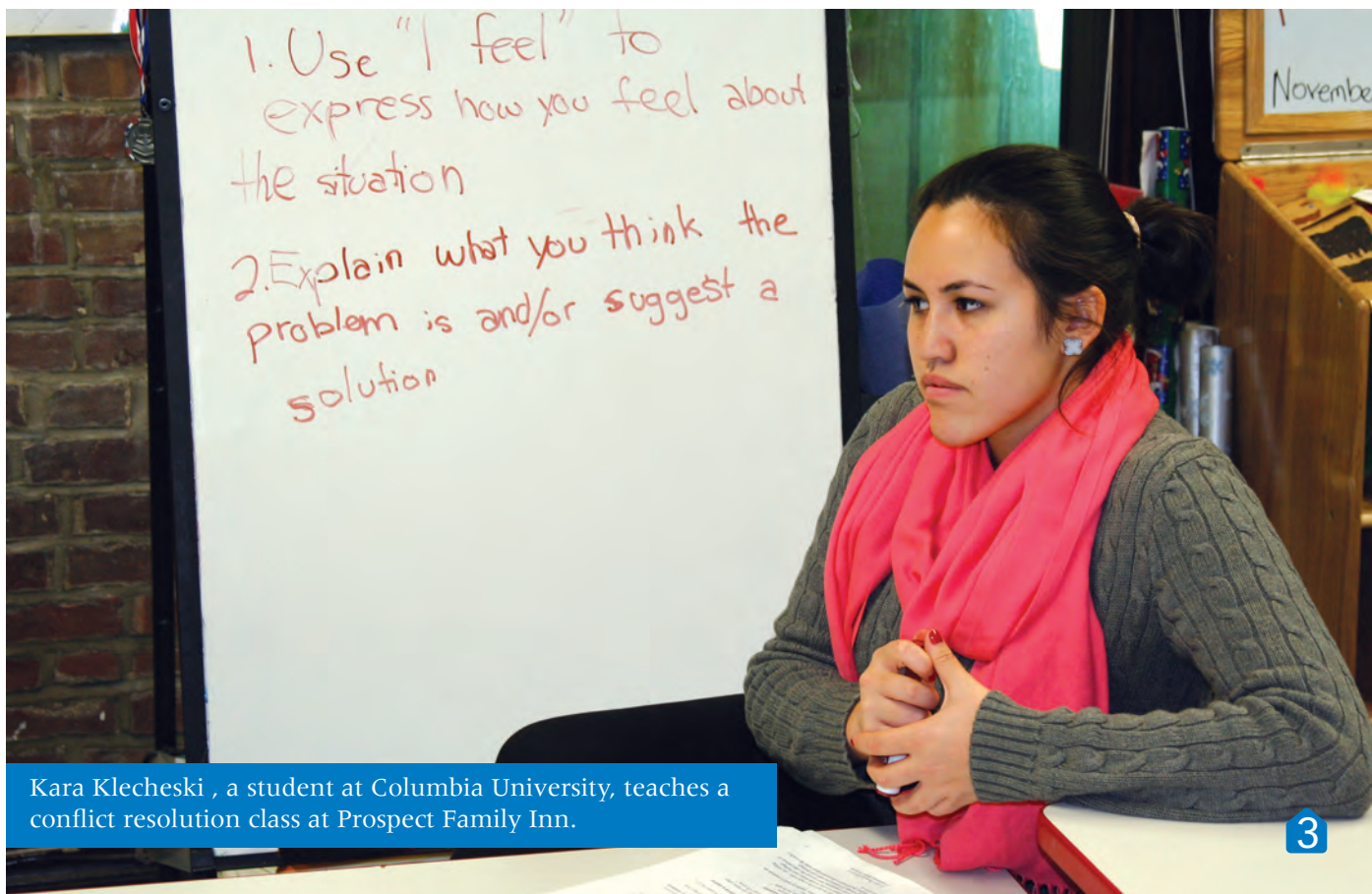
“The whole point of this is to be aware of how you say things,” volunteer Jane Brennan told the class. “To avoid conflict, it’s important to let people know what state of mind you’re in.”

Eight-year-old Haven consistently attends the Peace by P.E.A.C.E. program and said it’s fun to come every Friday, especially after he’s had a rough day.

“Sometimes when we get punched at school we can still come here and have fun,” he said, adding that he likes that he can talk to the leaders about what happens at school.

Brennan said she and the other leaders try to serve as mentors to Haven and the other students.

“We want to be people they can talk to,” she said. “We make it a safe space.”



Kara Klecheski, a student at Columbia University, teaches a conflict resolution class at Prospect Family Inn.



# SNAPSHOTS OF THE HOLIDAYS IN NEW YORK CITY

For the seventh straight year, children from the early-childhood education programs at all four American Family Inns went trick-or-treating at the Bank of Tokyo offices in Manhattan. Children chose from costumes donated by Bank of Tokyo employees and The Nightingale-Bamford School.







The Clinton Family Inn partnered with Temple Emanu-El to help children and their families celebrate Thanksgiving. Families came together for the traditional holiday meal — one of their favorite activities of the year.



Teens at the Saratoga Family Inn practiced their culinary skills while celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month in September. The after-school program provided the teens with authentic homemade meals and smiles to start off the holiday season.



During the holiday season, volunteers and donors provided toys, games, and many a Christmas celebration. One event, KidCare's annual holiday party, was even featured on the nationally-syndicated Better Show, so television audiences could see how volunteers make the holidays special for children at Homes for the Homeless.





# ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

## TOUCHDOWN FOR SARATOGA EAGLES

Children at the Saratoga Family Inn have never been in better shape. They have learned to eat healthier by cooking with vegetables from their community garden, continued their academic studies in Saratoga Family Inn (SFI)'s after-school programs, and in 2011, 10 of them made it all the way to the DePhillips Athletic Club (DAC) NFL Flag Football League finals.

The Saratoga Eagles Flag Football team is composed of eight- and nine-year-old boys and girls who live in the shelter or attend the shelter's after-school program. Every year beginning in mid-September, children come together under the direction of Coach Harvey Robinson, the SFI's director of recreation, who the players call "Mr. H."

"It really builds relationships among the children," Robinson said. It was Robinson who began the Flag Football Program at the Saratoga 12 years ago, and for the past eight years he has been working with DAC.

Most of the children on the team had never played football before. Yet despite the inexperience, this year's Eagles completed the season with a 10-4 record, and made it to the finals in November.

Although they spent time together in the shelter or after-school program, children often don't know each other well. Flag football gives them a chance to build relationships with their peers and coaches. The children spoke very highly of the experience.

"I like football and my teammates. Mr. H is the best coach I've had," said Andre, an eight-year-old team member. "I learned a lot and I liked the season."

According to Robinson and Education Programs Coordinator Tinnycua Williams, the children learn about a lot more than just football. Participants are motivated to work harder in school, help their parents, and become leaders off the field. "They take it really seriously," Williams said. "They have a lot of pride, and they've bonded as a team."

Parents take note of these improvements in their kids' attitudes as well. Yemis, mother of eight-year-old Isaiah, explained how her son learned about teamwork. He learned that "it's not a one-man show," she said.

SFI will continue to partner with DAC for other sports, including a T-ball league for younger children. Robinson looks forward to watching a new team bond in the upcoming seasons. "Before you know it, we've got a lot of friends here," he said.



The kids on the Saratoga Eagles Flag Football Team score points and gain friends.







# HELP HOMELESS CHILDREN LEARN YEAR-ROUND

At Homes for the Homeless Summer Camps Lanowa and Wakonda, learning doesn't stop just because it's summertime. For the 600 homeless campers who spend two weeks at sleep-away camp in Harriman State Park in Upstate New York, an essential part of the experience involves journaling. The youth write about their experiences swimming, hiking, and making friends as a way to practice writing, chronicle their memories, and bring home stories to share with their families in New York City. To make this activity possible, Homes for the Homeless is asking for donations of 300 composition notebooks for the 2012 season. Help homeless children chronicle an extraordinary summer by donating at our Web site: [www.HFHcamps.org/Donate.asp](http://www.HFHcamps.org/Donate.asp).

## A SPECIAL THANKS

Homes for the Homeless would like to thank our partners, friends, and supporters for helping to make our Fall/Winter programs a success.

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