

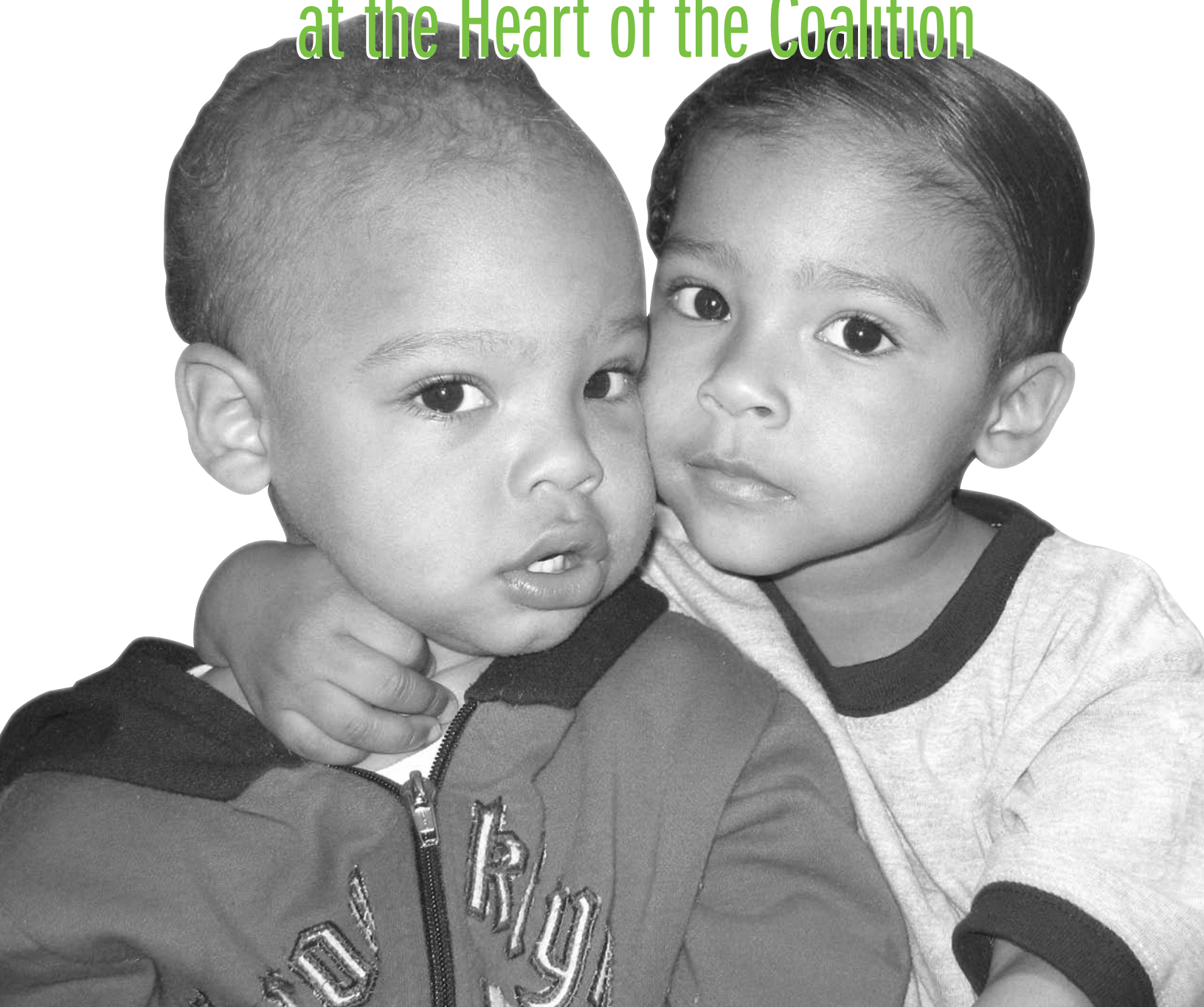
Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Summer 2006

Kids

at the Heart of the Coalition



Hope for Homeless Children

Each homeless person we meet has a story – even the youngest ones. I visited the Coalition’s after-school program, Bound for Success, recently at the LIFE shelter in Lower Manhattan and met Angela, a shy but sparkling nine-year-old, who told me how she lost the lower half of her front tooth. She and her two sisters were on the subway last year and the train jerked to a halt. Angela slammed into the pole and cracked most of her front tooth off. “Did you save it?” I asked. “No. My sister took it and threw it on the train tracks when we got out,” she explained.

There’s a lot more to Angela’s story, as you can imagine. She has two older sisters, both boisterous, and a brother, who is struggling to keep up in school. Her mother is pregnant again, even as the family searches for permanent housing.

Thanks to your wonderful support, our truly terrific Youth Services staff help Angela and her siblings with basic reading and math, and lead them in creative art projects and visits to museums. Our guardian angel dentist on the Upper West Side helped fix the nerve damage in Angela’s tooth and then made it whole



Swimming doesn’t just mean a dunk in the bathtub when you have a whole lake at your feet.

again. She recently sent us her school picture with her beaming smile.

Camp Homeward Bound is open again up in Bear Mountain and the most dramatic transformations take place with each session. About 100 boys and girls arrive for the first day of ses-

sion one, excited but apprehensive. Many boarded the busses crying, having never left the city before. But little by little, they discover what it means to be a kid again. Swimming doesn’t just mean a dunk in the bathtub when you have a whole lake at your feet. The days are no longer defined by the monotony of waiting for welfare appointments or on the hot sidewalk in front of the food pantry. They are filled with singing, hiking, laughter and learning.

If you ever need a lift in spirits this summer, call us to arrange a visit to camp. Many of my fondest experiences at the Coalition are from camp – sitting on a dock, having a girl absent-mindedly stroke my hair, while proudly counting backwards from 20. Or having twin boys race across a field, just for their own bragging rights. Children emerge from their shells of anger or numbness to feel wonder, humor and hope.

Sincerely,

Mary Brosnahan Sullivan
Executive Director

Safety Net

is published by

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Thanks for your help!

Spotlight on the Board: Mayor David N. Dinkins

By Joshua Klinski

“Before we get started, I should tell you, I’m a nut for children.”

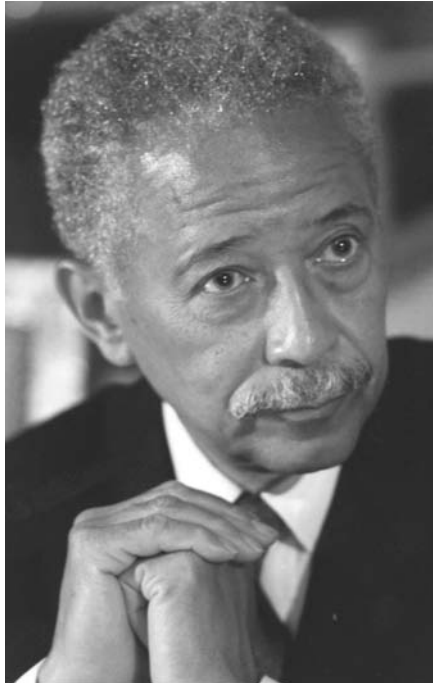
We recently sat down to speak with Coalition Board Member and former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, and right away he let us know what’s important to him: KIDS.

And it’s obvious. His face lights up when he talks about his own children and grandchildren, and shows deep concern when the topic turns to the thousands of boys and girls in New York City who are living in poverty. “Clearly it’s a tragedy in and of itself. We’re in a city with so much wealth, so much prosperity, yet there are 13,000 homeless children. And the general public doesn’t know that.”

Mayor Dinkins began his career in public service in 1966 in the New York State Assembly. He later served as President of the New York City Board of Elections, City Clerk, and Manhattan Borough President, before being elected New York City’s 106th Mayor in November 1989.

One of Mayor Dinkins’ great accomplishments while in office, indeed a great legacy, was the establishment of the landmark *New York/New York Agreement* which he signed in 1990 with then Governor Mario Cuomo to build thousands of supportive housing units for homeless people with mental illnesses. The program became a national model for solving homelessness for those with the most severe disabilities, and has been replicated across the country, including two subsequent agreements for over 10,000 additional units in New York City.

“Since I’ve been out of office,” he explains, “I’ve had more freedom to pick and choose where I go and how I spend my time. And I’m so fond of going in front of audiences to talk



“People often say that ‘children are our future,’ but we as a society don’t always act that way.”

about children.” He pauses to think. “People often say that ‘children are our future,’ but we as a society don’t always act that way.”

In 2004, after joining the Coalition’s Board of Directors, Mayor Dinkins gave the keynote speech at the nation’s first Homeless Youth Convention, organized by the Coalition’s youth advocacy group “Youth Against Homelessness.” That same year, the Mayor spoke at the Coalition’s Client Advisory Group Summit, a day-long series of workshops and lectures helping New York City’s shelter residents address issues such as housing policies, employment, and shelter conditions. His voice and presence, full of humor and compassion, continues to

be a source of inspiration for homeless New Yorkers.

“Mayor Dinkins brings so much wisdom and warmth to everything he touches at the Coalition,” glows Executive Director Mary Brosnahan Sullivan. “His love for children is especially moving. Dave frequently draws on his decades of experience in office to help guide the Coalition in our advocacy and programs. He’s really just a tremendous asset all around.”

The Mayor shares similar sentiments. “I’m a big fan of Mary and the Coalition,” he says. “They’ve certainly enlightened me over the years.”

When asked about specific ways to help ease the crisis of homelessness, he responds, “I’ve always said that homelessness means the absence

of housing. We need to produce more affordable housing.”

Coalition for the Homeless is only one of many organizations fortunate enough to count David Dinkins as a supporter. He sits on the boards of, and volunteers his time at Association to Benefit Children, Children’s Health Fund, Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone. “Most of my time is now taken up working with nonprofit organizations,” he says. “I don’t do it for political reasons. I do it because I like it.”

The Coalition is very honored indeed to count him as a member of our family.

Kids at the Heart of the Coalition

By Pam Grove

How are a nineteenth century abolitionist from Massachusetts and a homeless girl living in New York City in 2006 connected? The answer is, by a building.

In the late 1800's, Congressman Charles Sumner campaigned against slavery and a century later, a New York City junior high school was named after him. In 1999, the Sumner School building was transformed into LIFE (Learning Independence for Family Empowerment), a shelter for homeless families. Living there now is nine year-old Angela and her family, whom we know through one of our direct service programs. Charles Sumner would have fought for Angela to have shelter, food, clothing and education. The Coalition's mission is the same.

Here are three recent stories of how Coalition programs have helped children affected by poverty and homelessness.

Angela

Angela attends our after-school program, Bound for Success. Her mother loves her children, but is overwhelmed. Angela is quite bright and can guess an adult's age with the skill of a carnie, but may be held back at school this year because of lateness and absences. Bound for Success has been a good counterforce.

Angela knows that at Bound for Success, she must finish her homework before joining recreational activities such as arts and crafts. For a while, Angela lagged doing her schoolwork, but eventually she became focused and finished her tasks in time so she could start the "fun stuff" along with the other children. She saw, for herself, the benefits of good work habits and understood that there are consequences to choices.

Bound for Success also helped Angela in other ways. A couple years ago, half of her front tooth broke off in a subway accident. Her mother didn't



follow through with treatment because Angela didn't complain about pain. She also wasn't sure if Medicaid would pay for the needed work. The Coalition arranged for pediatric and cosmetic dental visits. Angela and her mother were very excited about this opportunity; Angela says, "Now I can smile when people take pictures of me." She had kept her mouth closed in school pictures for the last two years.

Latrece and her daughter KK

Thirty-four year old Latrece recently graduated from our First Step job training program, which prepares and places women in full-time jobs.

Latrece entered First Step with a history of sexual abuse and a drug problem since adolescence. Right before First Step, she had discharged herself from a treatment facility for addicted women and their children; another mother there had accidentally killed her own baby by suffocating it while she slept. Latrece was traumatized, and said it reminded her that children are a gift, but they can also be taken away. She resolved to remain



chemically abstinent, attend counseling and return to work so that she could provide a good life for her daughter.

She applied to First Step "in order to enhance my computer, resume and interviewing skills...and to grow with other women in the same situation..." Latrece was extremely diligent in the first phase of the program (practicing hard and soft skills essential in the workplace), was placed at Estee Lauder



for her internship and was then hired as a receptionist there. She now works with a job coach and is exploring the possibility of returning to college.

What does this mean to her ten-month-old daughter? Latrece shares that when she is exercising at home, "K.K. just sits and looks at me like she adores me...which is wonderful for both of us." Latrece knows that if she remains a positive role model for her baby, her own struggles will not automatically be her daughter's. And so, things will be better not only for K.K. but also for the hundreds of other children whose mothers came through the doors of First Step in the last year.

manager helped her move into a Washington Heights apartment, visited her in the hospital when she delivered her son Chris, and brought her clothes to wear home after discharge. Chris was born with a negative HIV status, so Tannie relaxed momentarily, but then decided months later to send him to live with relatives in her homeland. Tannie thought that she would die soon and wanted to work in order to provide money for her child's upbringing after she was gone.

The good news is that five years later, mother and son are doing well. The Scattered Site Housing Program taught Tannie how to live with HIV, manage her medication and stabilize emotionally. Chris returned to her, for good, in September 2005. Understandably, there was a period of adjustment, and again the Coalition supported her, this time with parenting skills. Chris thrives at a dual-language kindergarten setting. This spring, Tannie was taking him back to the Dominican Republic for a short visit and Chris said (in both languages), "Mami, don't forget and leave me there. I am coming back! My home is here now!"

All the Coalition programs do remarkable work: The Rental Assistance Program offers supportive services and rental subsidies to clients who lease their own apartments; Crisis Services helps families and individuals navigate the shelter and entitlement systems, provides eviction prevention funds and teams closely with Advocacy; The Grand Central Food Program delivers dinner every day of the year to street homeless people; Community Voice Mail provides a phone number/answering service to those without; Coalition Houses and the Bridge Building are permanent housing sites to scores of individuals and families; Youth Services also runs a Day Camp and a sleep-away Camp Homeward Bound in the summer.

Our homeless clients have had hard pasts. Our programs soften their present and future by offering hope. While the main participants of several CFH programs are adults, in reality, every member of the family benefits.



While many of the Coalition's direct services support and stabilize families with children, our Youth Services programs were designed specifically to provide educational and recreational activities for homeless boys and girls after school and throughout the summer.

Tannie and her son Chris

Six years ago, Tannie was hit by double blows: She became homeless after her mother, with whom she'd been living, died of cancer and she also learned during a pre-natal visit that she was HIV+.

Tannie is Dominican, with no relatives in this country. She applied for benefits at HIV/AIDS Service Administration, a section of public assistance for individuals similarly diagnosed and was referred to the Coalition's Scattered Site Housing Program (SSHP). At this time, Tannie was eight months pregnant, frightened about her health and more terrified about how her baby would be born.

The Coalition responded to the urgency of Tannie's concerns. Her case

For Homeless Veterans and Their Kids, the Battle Never Ends

By Lindsey Davis

The only thing two-year-old Alyssa can see through the windows high on the far wall is that it's beginning to get dark outside. The waiting room where she and her family spent the majority of the past few days is becoming empty, and her mother and father now allow her and her younger brother a bit of freedom to roam and play. She takes advantage of this opportunity and begins weaving through rows and rows of blue plastic chairs. Almost instantly she can hear her mother yell "Alyssa get back here!" But it feels so nice to run. She usually spends the day sitting in her stroller catching up on her sleep, since she hasn't been given a bed to sleep in until around 11pm each night this week. So she ignores her mother and continues to run, following the chairs along the wall until she is suddenly stopped by a pair of unfamiliar legs standing in front of her.

Alyssa looks up and realizes this is neither mom nor dad but a worker who has come to call them to a much smaller room, down a long hall. Although she doesn't understand everything being said, she hears the worker say, "We can no longer give you a place to sleep during your application – you'll have to find somewhere else to go." Alyssa notices her mother has started crying as she responds "We can't leave, we have no one. We'll be on the streets." Afraid and confused, Alyssa also starts crying. Her father quickly picks her up, frustrated as the conversation abruptly ends, and they make their way out into the cold March night.

Since that day, they have been back to that office many times, but their visits always end the same way. Alyssa and her family have been without shelter now for three months.

David Green, Annette DeJesus and their two children, two-year-old Alyssa and one-year-old Dante, initially applied for shelter through the City of New York in February 2006. Both parents are



Under the Bloomberg Administration's new rules, instead of receiving emergency shelter placements while re-applying, many families like David and Annette's are now simply denied shelter and forced to turn to the streets.

Marine Corps veterans, and after marrying they left the service and rented a townhouse near the base where they had been stationed. However, a year later Annette's mother ran into some legal trouble and the couple's commitment to assist with her legal fees slowly exhausted their savings. They could no longer afford their own apartment despite consistent work, and moved in with a series of relatives who could give them a place to stay, but each only for a short time. They were able to hold things together for over a year, exploring all available options no matter how temporary or precarious, but were finally forced to apply for shelter at New York City's intake center for homeless families. After filing three unsuccessful applications for shelter, the family was ultimately told that they were not considered homeless by the City and therefore would not be given a place to sleep during any further applications for emergency shelter.

In June 2005, the City of New York petitioned for and was granted the ability

to eject homeless families to the street when it is believed a family has another housing option available. However, the City's intake process is riddled with mistakes and poor decisions that threaten the health and safety of children and their parents.

Indeed, Department of Homeless Services data confirm the prevalence of error in the shelter intake process. Among all families ultimately deemed eligible for shelter in 2004, 35 percent were forced to file two or more applications. Under the Bloomberg Administration's new rules, instead of receiving emergency shelter placements while re-applying, many families like David and Annette's are now simply denied shelter and forced to turn to the streets.

David, Annette, Alyssa and Dante have been working with the Coalition's Advocacy and Crisis Intervention staff for the past three months. After exhausting a series of unsuccessful legal appeals, and receiving temporary shelter in hotels and church basements, the family has finally found a light at the end of the tunnel. David has obtained steady employment at the Bronx VA Medical Center, and they have been connected with the Coalition's Rental Assistance Program, which helps bridge the gap between a family's limited income and the cost of an affordable apartment. Literally, as this issue of *Safety Net* goes to print, David and Annette are signing a lease for their brand new home. However, despite the City's assertions to the contrary, this family truly was homeless, without the most basic protections. The Coalition continues to fight on behalf of more and more families with small children who are told by the City that they too will have to fend for themselves on the streets.

Events Raise Over \$250,000 for Homeless Women and Children

By Nicholas Chapman

This spring, Coalition for the Homeless had two wonderfully successful events. On March 15th, some of New York's top business people joined us for the twelfth annual Women Mean Business Luncheon at The Pierre Hotel to celebrate the women of First Step, our job training program for homeless and impoverished women. The event raised over \$100,000 to continue the work of this inspired program. Jeanette Walls, author of *The New York Times* bestseller *The Glass Castle* and MSNBC gossip columnist, delivered a moving keynote speech in which she vividly recounted her family's own experience with homelessness.

The Coalition sends out special thanks to the First Step Advisory Board, the Luncheon Benefit Committee, and our sponsors for helping to make the day a great success.



Helen Lowenstein,
S. Jeanne Hall,
and Lou Lowenstein



Derek Brown,
Cynthia Sparks,
Jeanette Walls,
and Sue Grundfest

Women Mean Business Carnival Night for Kids



Carnival Night for Kids

June got off to a great start for Camp Homeward Bound and the Continuum of Care for Children at the Coalition's tenth annual Carnival Night for Kids on June 9th, which raised over \$150,000. Hundreds of kids and adults alike enjoyed thrilling rides, games of chance, and other surprises at the Victorian Gardens amusement park at Wollman Rink in Central Park. Guests enjoyed all of their favorite carnival foods including cotton candy, ice cream and old-fashioned snow cones. The kids were delighted to play with some of their favorite characters like Elmo, Winnie the Pooh, Batman and Mickey Mouse.

The most popular game of the evening is always the balloon pop raffle which this year featured roundtrip tickets from American Airlines, a weekend stay at Hotel Gansevoort in New York City, and gift certificates to great restaurants such as Landmarc, Odeon, Fresh, Prune and Aspen.

A special thanks to our wonderful Co-Chairs for Carnival Night, Andy and Julie Kramer and Mara and Baron Silverstein, and to the benefit committee and sponsors for such an exciting evening. Also, many thanks to the volunteers and Coalition staff who worked to make both of our spring events so memorable.



Kids of all ages had a great time at Carnival Night for Kids

Camp Homeward Bound Kids Say Thanks!

I would like to say thank you for making it possible for me to be able to attend this camp. This is my 2nd time here. And every year I have a lot of fun. Before I came to this camp, I didn't know how to swim, but thanks to the lifeguards, I now know how. The most fun is when we have gym. I would like to say thank you again.

Norman



Thank you for making it possible for me to get to camp. I appreciate it. I have been having a lot of fun. My favorite activities are computers and swimming. One of the night activities was Halloween. There was this game called Fear Factor. It was funny when the people had to eat all kinds of mixed up food from breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I liked it when we went to Sebago Beach. The water wasn't that deep, but it was fun.

Anthony



This is my first year here at camp, I want to thank you all my counselors. Thank you for taking care of me. I want to thank the ones who make us the food, it is really good. My favorite subject is swimming, I like the night activities, it is really fun.

Thank you for everything. I might come back next year. I really had fun. Thank you also when I didn't have any clothes to wear, and when I didn't have any blankets, pillows, towels and shampoo. Also toothbrush and toothpaste. Thank you for every thing you did. I hope I come next year.

Bianka

Hello I just wanted to write how happy I am to be at this camp. At first I thought it was scary to come here but I realized I was wrong. I'm having so much fun and now I know that it won't hurt to meet some new people.

In a little while we will go home and I am really hoping to come here again and meet some new people. I also hope that I'll get the same counselors. They are like my second family that takes care of me during the whole summer. I am very thankful for all you've done. THANK YOU!!!!!!

Mandy

