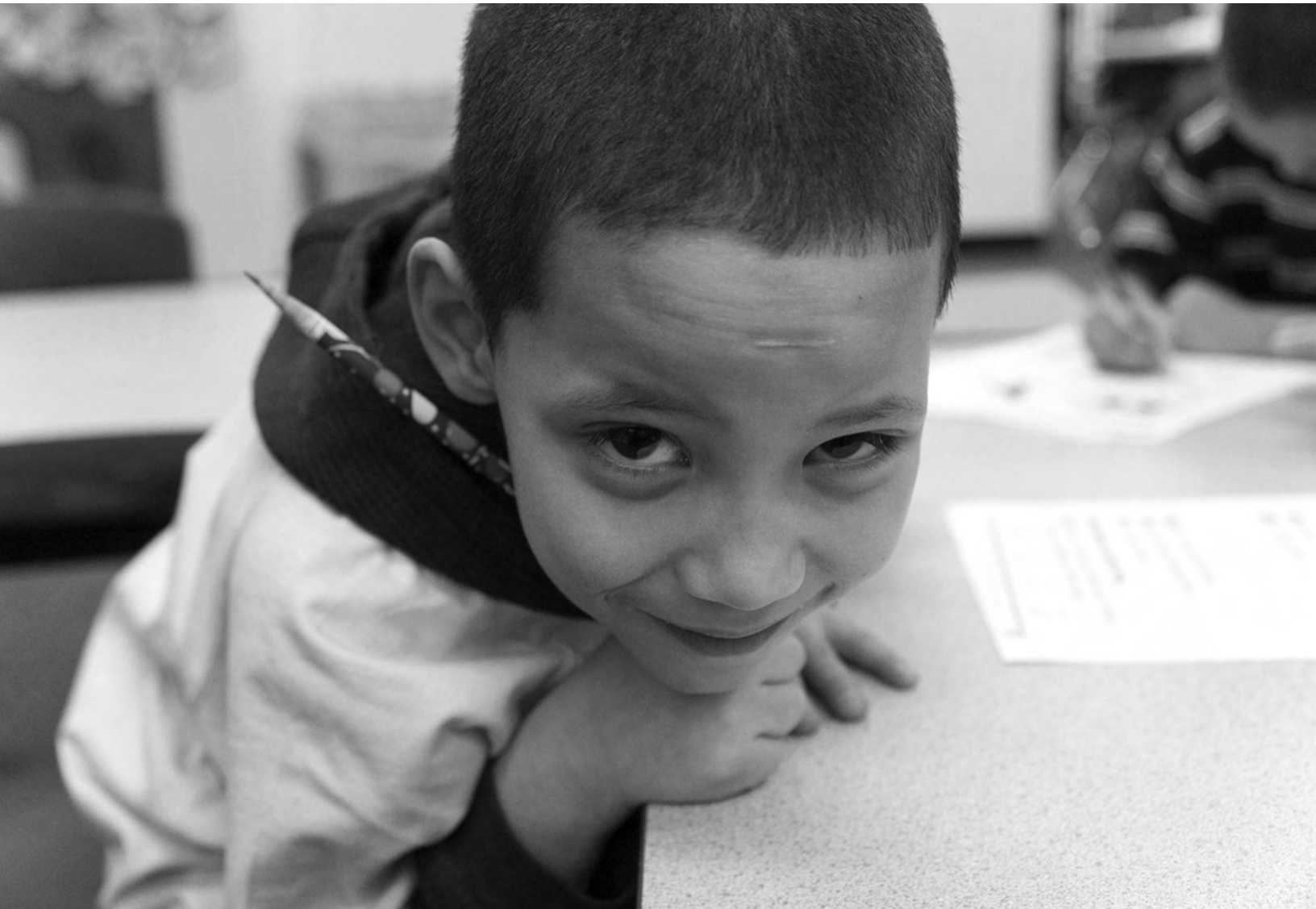


# Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Summer 2007

## When School's Out What Happens to Homeless Kids?



# A Letter From Mary

**H**ow many homeless kids did you see this morning? It sounds like a strange question, but often, when I'm taking the subway downtown to work, I wonder if the boy or girl, teen or infant I see on the platform or right next to me on the train is homeless. Unlike many of their single adult counterparts, they tend not to stand out in a crowd. They don't panhandle or bed down in shop doorways. They don't scream at unseen tormentors or bathe in park fountains.

But since our city is experiencing an all-time record high in the number of homeless families sleeping in emergency shelters each night, there are over 14,000 homeless children in our midst. Chances are most of us, myself included, are walking by them in our daily travels – unaware of the struggles a particular child faces. They are often exhausted, because the City will only give their family a single night placement – meaning they must pack up everything they have each morning and return to the intake center in the Bronx to reapply for shelter each morning. They have given up hope, because the daily chaos of being homeless has made it impossible to get to



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school in several weeks. If they were able to go to school today, they have no place to do their homework – their mom is often too weary to help them with their reading or math.

Thanks to landmark litigation by the Coalition and Legal Aid Society, New York City residents are entitled to a placement in an emergency shelter. So unlike other major cities – Los Angeles, Miami, Seattle – you won't see entire families camping out on our streets or in parks. But this fundamental right is under attack.

In the past several months, our Crisis Intervention workers have seen a surge in the number of families who have been repeatedly denied emergency shelter. Even our best efforts to assemble the litany of paperwork for the fami-

lies often fail. Here are a few recent examples of what City bureaucrats have deemed insufficient grounds to provide emergency shelter:

- A letter from a pediatrician imploring the city not to send a child with severe asthma back to a cramped apartment with grandparents who both chain smoke.
- A memo from a school social worker and physical therapist, documenting that a child with severe cerebral palsy will not be able to continue his physical therapy home treatments if he returns to the one-bedroom apartment already housing three adults and two other children. There is insufficient space to conduct the needed physical therapy.
- A letter from the manager of a City-run Housing Authority building, stating the family cannot return to the sister's apartment, or the sister will be evicted.

Sounds grim – and the daily reality of a homeless child is. But, gladly, the Coalition is a place of hope. We tackle these cases daily and make sure not a single child winds up on our streets.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Safety Net* – there is so much we can do to help homeless girls and boys and your support, both moral and financial, makes it all possible!

Sincerely,

Mary E. Brosnahan  
Executive Director

## Safety Net

is published by

### COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

129 Fulton Street  
New York, NY 10038  
Telephone: 212-776-2000  
www.coalitionforthehomeless.org

MARY E. BROSNAHAN  
Executive Director

#### Editors

RICHARD GELBER, JOSHUA KLINSKI

#### Photography

JANET DURAN, LISA FERRANTE,  
NURA QURESHI, TOM STEWART

#### Design

CLARE MANIAS

# Volunteer Spotlight: Ellen Bogart

By Gabe Rodriguez

When Ellen Bogart first approached Coalition for the Homeless about volunteering, little did she know just how much someone with her background would be needed. Ellen, a graduate of Bishop McDonnell High School, Marymount Manhattan College and St. John's University, spent a long career teaching in the New York City public school system. "This is my third year of retirement, and I just felt the need to do something related to literacy," says Ellen. "I spent the latter part of my career working with other teachers to help improve their teaching skills and wanted to continue working with adults."

After meeting with the Coalition's Director of Programs, Pamela Grove, it was clear that Ellen's talents were a perfect match for First Step, our 14-week job training program that helps homeless, formerly homeless, and low income women gain the skills and confidence they need to reach economic independence through training in basic literacy, administrative and computer skills, job interview techniques, mentoring and self-esteem building. Pamela jumped at the chance to incorporate Ellen into the program. "The women we work with present well verbally but sometimes their other literacy skills can be lacking," she explained. "We have always worked with our students to bolster all of their literacy skills – reading, writing, organizing one's thoughts, and listening well to other people – and have even searched for funding for a literacy position."

Thankfully for First Step, Ellen was ready to help.

Since April 2007, Ellen's literacy expertise has been integrated into each First Step class. Beginning with a survey to assess each woman's needs



"I didn't know what to expect, but I have found that First Step participants really want to learn and improve their literacy skills. ...and I'm glad to be able to help."



Ellen Bogart (top) develops her curriculum based on the specific needs and goals of her students.

and goals, students participate in interactive activities such as reading aloud, creative writing, journal writing, and reading and discussing articles from *The New York Times*. First Steppers have also chosen different novels to read at home and discuss in class, including Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, which they have enjoyed tremendously. Both Ellen and program staff have been encouraged by initial feedback and have tailored and adapted classes to meet the needs of participants. The women have shared that the literacy activities help remind them of the importance of reading and writing skills, rediscover the joy of reading

and even encourage them to do more reading with their own children.

Ellen's work has been so successful that she has now been incorporated into the First Step curriculum for twice as much time – two-and-a-half hours per week. The expanded time will allow her to teach specific lessons requested by participants, such as business letter writing, vocabulary building and grammar. "I didn't know what to expect, but I have found that First Step participants really want to learn and improve their literacy skills. They get the importance of reading, writing, listening and speaking as part of their overall education in the program, and I'm glad to be able to help." With Ellen's help, First Step participants are becoming even more prepared to enter the workforce and find stability for themselves and their families.

Coalition for the Homeless deeply appreciates the support of volunteers like Ellen. For more information about ways you can get involved, please visit our web site at: [www.coalitionforthehomeless.org](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org).

# When School's Out, What Happens to Homeless Kids?

The last day of school. Is there a more joyous event in a young child's life? Even the most mature adult remembers the sweet sound of that final bell, its ring ending the interminable days of classroom lessons and ushering in an era of freedom simply known as "summer vacation." Unfortunately, for the 14,000 boys and girls who live in New York City homeless shelters, that bell has a sadder tone. School is the primary source of stability for these children and often provides the only structure in their lives. Seeing the same teacher every day, having a set lunch time, and regularly interacting with other kids makes the trauma of being without a home more manageable. But when the school year ends, what happens to these homeless children?

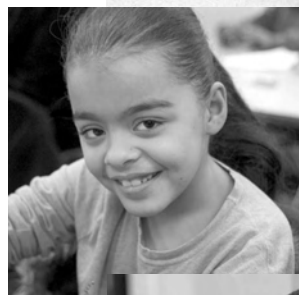
By Richard Gelber and Joshua Klinski

While homelessness is devastating for all who experience it, children feel the effects most profoundly.

Within a year of becoming homeless, 41 percent of children attend two different schools, while 28 percent attend three or more schools. Many fall behind academically and must repeat a grade, and nearly half of all homeless kids suffer from anxiety, depression or social withdrawal. Sadly, today there are more homeless families with children living in our city's emergency shelters than ever before.

Coalition for the Homeless meets these challenges head on through its Continuum of Care for Children, a series of direct services and youth development programs for homeless and desperately poor children. The keystone of this campaign is the Bound for Success after school program, a service which provides these children with educational and emotional support in shelters throughout the year. From September to June, after every school day, our staff gives homeless children the tools necessary to excel in both academic and everyday life settings. Through extensive tutoring and homework help, creative writing exercises, computer skills training, and social and cultural outings, Bound for Success seeks to fill the educational and social deficits caused by the chaos of homelessness.

Bound for Success also introduces



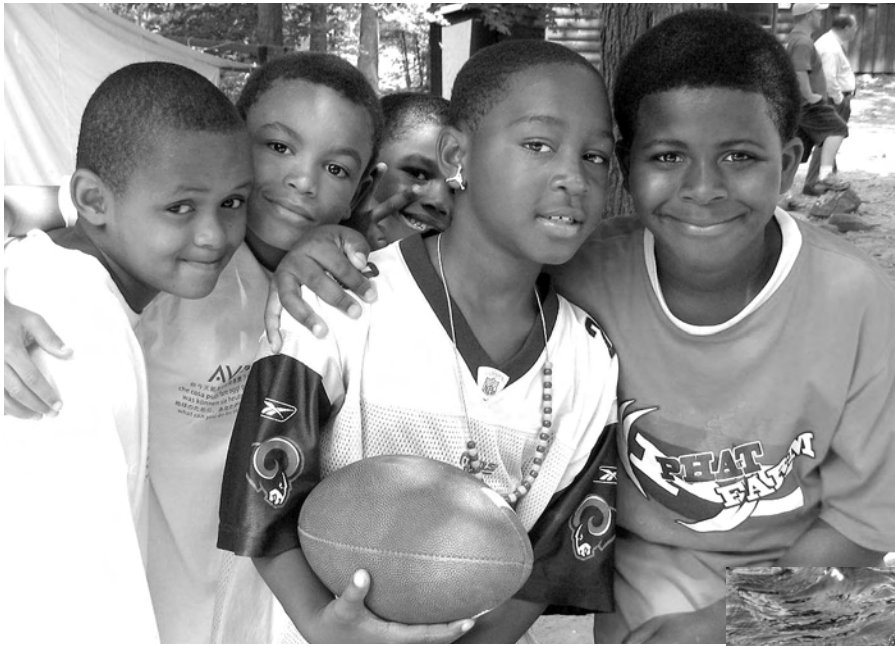
**BOUND FOR SUCCESS** seeks to fill the educational and social deficits caused by the chaos of homelessness.

homeless boys and girls to specialized subject matter. Because many homeless children suffer from poor diet and lack of access to quality foods, a nutritionist visits the Bound for Success program twice a week to instruct the children on healthy eating and lifestyle habits. "Healthy food doesn't always taste so

good, but I have to eat it so I can grow up big and strong," said eleven-year-old Jonathan during a presentation on the food groups this past spring. Twelve-year-old Christopher told his fellow classmates to, "Stay away from fried foods and be sure to exercise every day! And try a salad instead of french fries!"

The Coalition understands the importance of remaining a consistent, year-round presence in the lives of Jonathan, Christopher, and all the children in the Bound for Success after school program. That's why when the school year comes to a close the Coalition opens the Bound for Success summer day camp.

"Most parents are overwhelmed, working full days and searching for housing opportunities in their spare time," says Angie Caraballo, Director of



the Bound for Success programs. "When summer comes, who's making sure that the kids aren't sitting in a hot shelter just staring at the wall, or disappearing into the streets with no supervision?"

Like the after school program, the Bound for Success summer day camp helps homeless children fill the gaps in their education through fun learning activities, but also gives them more free time to play outside and enjoy the warm weather in a structured manner. Numerous field trips are planned this summer, including visits to the NYPD Museum, Splish Splash water park, Victorian Gardens at Central Park, Chelsea Piers and the Bronx Zoo.

The Coalition knows that the tumult of life on the streets and in shelters often denies homeless children the opportunity to simply "be a kid." To help remedy this problem, the Coalition created Camp Homeward Bound, the nation's first sleep away camp designed specifically for homeless children. Since the camp's inception more than two decades ago, thousands of vulnerable boys and girls have escaped the grueling heat of New York City streets and shelters and have enjoyed a 16-day reprieve in the pristine wilderness of Harriman State Park in upstate New York.

Giving homeless children a traditional summer camp experience is just one of the goals of Camp Homeward Bound. Like Bound for Success, Camp

**CAMP HOMEWARD BOUND** provides a safe haven for both academic and social growth through special educational and recreational programs.



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Facilities at Camp include a computer center as well as a learning center where campers brush up on their reading, writing, and math skills. This year, a new music program supplements our traditional arts and crafts and drama activities, giving the children an exciting new way to express themselves creatively.

As this issue of *Safety Net* goes to print, many homeless children are getting ready to attend one of the three 16-day sessions at Camp Homeward Bound this summer. Some are even leaving the city for the first time in their lives.

"I can't wait to get to Camp," says Shawna, a nine-year-old girl who has been participating in the Bound for Success after school program for the past year. "I won't have homework there, will I? I'm going to be too busy swimming to do any homework."

While the educational curriculum at Camp does not include formal homework assignments, campers are certainly learning a great deal this summer through both hands-on and more traditional academic activities. For example, experiential science lessons consist of building model volcanoes and planting trees. To aid in the development of liter-

acy skills, children are encouraged not only to check out books from the onsite library but also to take them home at the end of Camp. Still, there are plenty of recreational activities in store for campers like Shawna. Swimming, canoeing, hiking, basket-

ball, and soccer are just a handful of the fun sports and games offered at Camp.

Some children are just excited to explore nature. "I get so hot here I can't stand it," laments 10-year-old Steven, a boy who has spent every summer in the urban sprawl of New York City. "When my mom cooks it makes it boiling hot in the kitchen. I get sweaty and don't want to eat inside with her," he says. "When I get to camp, I'm going to cook all my food outside over the fire so the wind will keep me cool."

Whether after school or during the summer, the Bound for Success and Camp Homeward Bound programs give homeless children a safe, structured environment in which to realize their potential, gain a new perspective on life, and most importantly understand that homelessness is not a sealed fate, and that for them, the sky is the limit.

The Coalition's Continuum of Care for Children provides emergency help for families in crisis, transitional services for homeless children and parents, and permanent housing that gives homeless children with what they need most – a home of their own.

# No Advantage: Mayor Bloomberg's Approach to Family Homelessness

By Patrick Markee

**A**midst record family homelessness and a worsening housing affordability crisis in New York City, Mayor Bloomberg has missed an historic opportunity to address the growing affordable housing needs of thousands of New York City's most vulnerable families. Instead, in the face of reports that the number of homeless families in New York City had reached all-time record levels this year, the Bloomberg administration dropped the ball and replaced one flawed rent subsidy program – the widely criticized “Housing Stability Plus” program, which had contributed to rising family homelessness – with another, equally flawed program – the new “Work Advantage” program.

On April 25, 2007, the City announced the replacement of the “Housing Stability Plus” program with a new rent subsidy package labeled “Advantage New York.” The centerpiece of the package is the “Work Advantage” program, which limits housing assistance to only one or two years. Like its flawed predecessor, the “Work Advantage” program was developed behind closed doors, without the input of homeless families, advocates, academic researchers, or frontline aservice providers.

Moreover, the new program ignores the findings of numerous research studies about what really works to help homeless families secure housing: long-term, flexible housing assistance like the Federal Section 8 Housing Voucher Program. Thus, “Work Advantage” essentially replaces one flawed rent subsidy program with another.

The following are the major flaws of the new “Work Advantage” program:

- **The program ignores the reality of New York City's worsening housing affordability crisis:** According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2002

and 2005 the number of New York City apartments available at monthly rents of less than \$1,000 fell by nearly 157,000, while the number of apartments with monthly rents of less than \$600 – that is, apartments that would be affordable to low-income families – fell by more than 56,000. Indeed, during the same period the number of subsidized housing units in New York City shrank by 11 percent.

- **Unrealistic, “one-size-fits-all” time limits:** The other major flaw of the “Work Advantage” program is its “one-size-fits-all” time limits, which cut off housing assistance after only one or two years, regardless of a family's circumstances. The program's rules state that a family will receive one year of rental assistance with the second year conditioned on compliance with a host of savings and other requirements. Most alarmingly, after the time limit the “Work Advantage” program does not provide any guarantee of a Federal housing voucher or any other ongoing housing assistance. In a housing market with asking rents on two-bedroom apartments exceeding \$1,000/month (that is, \$12,000 per year), even in the poorest neighborhoods, it is simply a mathematical impossibility that low-wage workers earning \$15-16,000 per year can obtain and keep housing without some form of long-term subsidy.

- **Most homeless families will receive no housing assistance at all:** The “Work Advantage” program deliberately excludes the majority of homeless families who are unemployed and who are receiving public assistance benefits. Homeless shelter providers report that more than 80 percent of homeless families are not employed and that most are receiving welfare benefits. Moreover, many homeless families have significant barriers to employment, either due to domestic violence issues, lack of education, or lack of access to child care

and other work supports. Thus, it is clear that the “Work Advantage” program, as well as the other “Advantage New York” programs, will assist only a fraction of homeless families.

- **Unanswered questions for “Housing Stability Plus” families:** To date, the Department of Homeless Services has failed to specify what assistance, if any, will be offered to the 10,000 formerly-homeless families moved from shelters with the HSP program. Finally, thousands of HSP families remain in housing with serious health and safety hazards, including lead paint and other hazardous conditions. Despite repeated appeals by elected officials and advocates, Bloomberg administration officials have refused to ensure that HSP families with hazardous housing conditions are relocated to safe, decent apartments.

Mayor Bloomberg and his administration remain mired in the mistaken notion that family homelessness is a welfare and jobs problem, not what it so clearly is, a housing affordability problem. Indeed, the “Work Advantage” program compounds some of the most glaring mistakes of the “Housing Stability Plus” program, most alarmingly the “one-size-fits-all” time limits and cut-off of vital housing assistance for poor children and families who have ongoing housing needs.

Mayor Bloomberg should go back to the drawing board and abandon his flawed approach to family homelessness. Coalition for the Homeless urges Mayor Bloomberg and City officials to work with homeless families, advocates, academic researchers, and service providers to craft policies that build on the wealth of research and experience showing that stable, long-term housing assistance similar to the Federal Section 8 voucher program successfully reduces family homelessness and ensures that formerly-homeless families don't return to shelter.

# Carnival Night Raises \$200,000 for Homeless Kids!

By Nick Chapman

**O**n the evening of June 6th, the Victorian Gardens amusement park at Wollman Rink in Central Park came to life for the eleventh annual Carnival Night for Kids. This year's event helped raise nearly \$200,000 for the Coalition's Camp Homeward Bound and Continuum of Care for Children. Guests were treated to classic carnival rides and foods including cotton candy, ice cream and old-fashioned snow cones. Magicians, stilt walkers, clowns and characters, such as Dora the Explorer and Elmo, roamed the grounds entertaining boys and girls of all ages.

Adults and kids alike enjoyed the spe-



cial opportunity to meet Nancy Krulik, author of the Katie Kazoo Switcheroo children's book series. Nancy graciously autographed copies of her newest book *Camp Rules!*

The always popular balloon pop raffle provided extra excitement for the evening, and featured gift items from L'Artisan Parfumeur, a weekend stay at W Hotels, jewelry by Melissa Joy Manning and gift certificates to popular New York restaurants such as Blue Smoke and Tocqueville. One lucky guest also won Carnival Night's first ever door prize – a set of four men's and women's watches from Fossil, Burberry and Armani.

Coalition for the Homeless gives special thanks to our wonderful event Co-Chairs, Andy and Julie Kramer and Mara and Baron Silverstein, and also to the amazing benefit committee and generous sponsors for making Carnival Night a fun and successful event. Also, many thanks are due to our dedicated team of volunteers who make this event possible every year.



Children and parents enjoyed a night of games, food, and fun at this year's Carnival Night For Kids.

# President for a Day... Homeless kids answer the question, "What would you do if you were President for a day?"



## If I Were President...

By Kenny

I would stop people from bringing violence and start peace. And end war. And stop people from going to a shelter and I would build them a bunch of homes and houses to live in if they had no where else to go, if they have no family in New York.



## For a Day

By Michael

If I was president for a day I would have a party in the White house and build a house for homeless people.



## Untitled

By Shanay

If I were elected President for a day I would sign papers giving one million dollars to the shelters and homeless communities there would be no taxes on shoes, clothes, and food, raise minimum wage to \$30.00 an hour. One day of school through the weeks, than four days off school will be a break. Help the people and their problems. Clubs, restaurants, and housing. Let people in the army see their families before going to war and give everybody a lot of technology and things in the future. If I were President for a day I would make A cure for every disease. I would be the best!

13TH ANNUAL

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at (212) 776-2056 or email at [nchapman@cftohomeless.org](mailto:nchapman@cftohomeless.org).