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**The City of New York  
Community Board 8 Manhattan  
Women & Families Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 6:30 pm  
This meeting was conducted via Zoom**

**MINUTES:**

**CB8 Members Present:** Vanessa Aronson, Gayle Baron, Alida Camp, Rebecca Dangoor, Gregory Morris, Rita Popper, Peggy Price, Elaine Walsh, and public member Susan Evans.

**1. The Needs of NYC’s Freelancers and Independent Contractors**

Given New York’s abundance of freelance workers, the committee addressed what, if anything, could help these solo workers who lack access to benefits available to employees.

According to 2019 data, fully 1.3 million New Yorkers undertake freelance work. Of that total, one third are independent contractors, working on a project-to-project basis. The self-employed work in a wide range of occupations from the arts, to health care, law, technology, food delivery and beyond.

Despite their large numbers, freelancers face distinct disadvantages: Unlike employed workers, freelancers typically can’t get such benefits as: employer-subsidized health insurance and other insurance, workers’ compensation, paid family leave and access to an employer’s retirement plan.

Two speakers, New York attorney Richard Reibstein, an expert on independent contractor laws, and full-time freelancer Mercedes Cardona, addressed these issues.

The initial speaker, Richard Reibstein expressed doubt that any new laws helping freelancers would be forthcoming—or would help. Traditionally, he said laws have been designed for employees; lawmakers “are not going to extend benefits to independent contractors.” He also believes any such additional laws could be detrimental, since they could discourage employers from using independent contractors.

Recent exceptions to the trend: NYC’s 2017 enactment of the Freelancers Isn’t Free Act, and the 2021 passage of protections for food delivery workers. The Freelance Isn’t Free law—which has not been replicated elsewhere—states that workers have the right to a written contract, timely and full payment, and protection from retaliation. But it has limits: it applies only to an individual in a one-person business. As for food deliverers: in 2021, the New York City Council passed legislation that would provide assistance to them including: minimum pay per trip; protections for tips; and the right to use restaurant bathrooms.

Second speaker, Mercedes Cardona, described her lot as a full-time freelancer. She said she's finding ample work, especially during the Covid pandemic. But even so, problems range from the need to buy her own health and disability insurance to wading through today's proliferation of bogus job assignments that promise lucrative pay.

In addition, she finds little help from the "toothless" Freelance Isn't Free Act. As she illustrated, "I filed a complaint under the Freelance Isn't Free Act and all they could do was to email me the name of a person to contact and a list of lawyers I could hire." But she believes even a lawsuit may not help a freelancer get paid. "Even if you win in court, can you collect the money you are owed?" Since work contracts generally favor the employer, she said, freelancers "need to have their own boiler-plate contract that protects their interests."

A Q&A session followed the speakers' presentations. Among the questions posed: Would a provision in the proposed NY Health Act relating to the self-employed impose a harder financial burden on them? As proposed, the New York Health Act would be funded through progressively graduated taxes (a payroll tax and an income tax.) Unlike employees, self-employed New Yorkers will pay the full tax. However, it was pointed out that the first \$25,00 of workers' income, and the first \$50,000 of Medicare recipients' income, would be tax-exempt.

## **2. The Need to Expand Publicity about Food Sources for the Needy**

In March 2020, the Women and Families Committee researched and distributed a white paper on how to secure funds during the Covid pandemic. The white paper, updated later that year, explained how to secure SNAP assistance as well as a listing of the various food pantries and soup kitchens which remained open. The March 2021 W & F Committee meeting focused on food insecurity a year after the pandemic began. We remain concerned as to whether those in need in our community are receiving enough food. The NY Health Foundation found 12% of adult New Yorkers sometime did not have enough to eat and 20% of households with children experienced food insecurity.

The evening's speakers included Greg Morris, president and executive director of the Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, Aaron Rooney, Isaacs' point person on Aging Services and Food Banks and David Liston, past president of the Holy Trinity Neighborhood Center. They outlined their organization's programs and offered suggestions as to next steps to ensure food resources are available, especially to seniors.

Mr. Morris explained that food insecurity in our district has worsened, especially among our senior population. Aaron Rooney explained the Isaacs Center is open daily at 11:30 am for Grab & Go hot meals. Social interaction is limited since only 10 to 15 clients can eat inside and remain socially distanced. Meals on Wheels deliveries remain available for seniors on fixed incomes. Common Pantry meals are available to those who earn less than \$1,300 a month. Recovery Meals sponsored by NYC in the past did not emphasize good nutrition and might include hamburgers and candy bars. Even with better food choices many clients received only one meal a day.

Last year Isaacs partnered with The Food Bank of NY to work on the revised program, called Gift Food, which now delivers 9 meals weekly. Also working with the Food Bank for NY, now anyone under age 60 can come to the center from 11-1 on Wednesdays to register. Mr. Morris also noted that the Urban Outreach Center, located across the street from Isaacs, provides food on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9-1.

David Liston of the Holy Trinity Neighborhood Center explained his center is a non -religious entity despite its name and counts on donations and volunteers to run its programs. The Center, which receives no City funding, serves the hungry, homeless and less fortunate neighbors. There is a shelter for men, a neighborhood Saturday supper, and a senior lunch as well as a Thanksgiving giveaway program. Due to Covid, food distribution now occurs on a grab and go basis. Unfortunately, this prevents human interaction, which had been a vital element of the program.

The speakers addressed next steps and cited the need both to better promote existing programs, such as the Coalition for Shelters' Street Sheets, and to leverage funding, especially from the City. With more funding, more food can reach those in need.

Meeting attendees stressed the need to further promote information on local food resources for the needy. Even more broadly, the City needs to step up its commitment to our community. Too often, the Upper East Side fails to get its fair share of social services, despite having the largest share of elderly residents of any district in NYC. It was agreed that a comprehensive letter should be sent to the City's elected officials and agency heads. It would seek more funding for food services for area residents, especially the elderly. And it would document the need as part of a multi-pronged outreach to government leaders.

**P. Gayle Baron and Peggy Price, Co-Chairs**