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**The City of New York  
Community Board 8 Manhattan  
Social Justice Committee  
Monday, January 29, 2024 – 6:30PM  
*This meeting was conducted via Zoom***

**MINUTES**

**CB8 Members Present:** Lori Bores, Sarah Chu, Saundra I. Coleman, Rita Popper, Abraham Salcedo, and Erica Bersin (Public Member).

**Approximate Number of Public Attendees:** 20

- 1) Presentation from Upper East Side Open Hearts
  - a. Sara Newman, Director of Organizing, Open Hearts Initiative UES
    - i. Organizing housed community residents to advocate for housing justice in their own backyards.
    - ii. Started in the Upper West Side where residents came together to welcome temporary residents at hotels from shelters. There were folks who responded with fear, anger, hatred. Group of neighbors who wanted to respond with welcome and compassion.
  - b. Homelessness in NYC

**Homelessness in NYC**

Adapted from the [Coalition for the Homeless](#)

- As of January 25, 2024, there were **89,090** homeless people, including 33,342 homeless children, sleeping in New York City's main municipal shelter system (DHS).
- In addition to the primary shelter system operated by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the City has implemented a patchwork of other systems to accommodate asylum seekers and new arrivals.
- As of the end of December 2023, the total number of people sheltered in these systems was approximately 123,000.

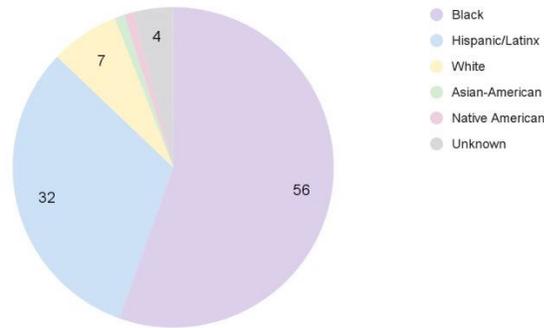
i.

**Homelessness in NYC**

Adapted from the [Coalition for the Homeless](#)

- Research shows that the primary cause of homelessness, particularly among families, is **lack of affordable housing**.
  - You would need to earn \$45/hour – three times the minimum wage – at a full-time job to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent in NYC.
  - Surveys of homeless families have identified the following major immediate, triggering causes of homelessness: eviction; doubled-up or severely overcrowded housing; domestic violence; job loss; and hazardous housing conditions.
- ii.
  - iii. The most recent data available as of 1/25/2024 suggests that 123k people are sheltered by NYC DHS. The primary cause is a lack of affordable housing.

Heads of household in NYC shelters



Data from Coalition for the Homeless

- iv. This figure doesn't apply to people on the streets and not in shelters.
- v. A lot of assumptions and fears that drive the response to homelessness in white communities are informed by who it is that is experiencing homelessness.

### We organize in...

- Upper West Side
- Douglaston
- Midtown
- Bronx
- Upper East Side
- Lower Manhattan
- Brooklyn
- NEW: Staten Island



- c. What do we do?
  - i. Mobilizing community resources - clothing, toiletries, holiday gifts
  - ii. Policy advocacy - voucher programs, reduce the number of people who enter shelters in the first place
    - 1. How do community leaders respond?
    - 2. What can we do as a community?
  - iii. Demonstrating community support, educating neighbors to help build empathy and understanding.
    - 1. Help people who might not think of themselves as someone who speaks up in public to show they are supportive of new neighbors.
    - 2. Sends a message to other neighbors

### Get Involved

- Join our UES chapter (or another chapter near you!): <https://openheartsinitiative.org/volunteer>
- Learn more about us: [www.openheartsinitiative.org](http://www.openheartsinitiative.org)
- Send us an email: [info@openheartsinitiative.org](mailto:info@openheartsinitiative.org)

iv.  
2) Q&A Discussion (Summarized for Brevity)

- a. What is the future of kids in the shelter system? Do children miss school a lot if they are in a shelter system?
  - i. Anecdotal, it's traumatic. Dislocation and stress can mean it's harder to stay on track in school, friendships, and community involvement.

- b. What can we do to work?
  - i. Homelessness is something we've seen in NYC for decades, and it's gotten worse. A big part of that is the lack of affordable housing. Shelters are an important temporary stopgap but not effective if people can't transition from them. The average length of stay is >400 days.
- c. How do you break bad narratives and build bridges?
  - i. We provide alternative narratives and complicate existing narratives with new information, build relationships among people across housing status, and personalize the issue.
  - ii. A lot of it comes down to building connections and providing people with opportunities to do that. There will always be people who are cynical or take advantage of other people's fear. Most people care about others and helping people understand that their community is not just their family - it's also the person who lives in a shelter down the block or on the street. Building connections between people counteracts these narratives, which are easy to take hold when you don't have real people to attach it to.
- d. How do we advocate for Safe Havens and keep the people in Safe Havens safe? SROs were a part of the city at one time, but NYC stopped using them. Is there any advocacy for them to come back?
  - i. Loss of Single Room Occupancy (SROs) in NYC - as bad as some of them may have been in terms of conditions - that safety net was lost. Past several years that loss is felt and changes in a city with COVID and more work from home. They are an important opportunity to explore ways to bring back that approach - affordable and up to standard apartments for single adults. Office conversions are very challenging to bring up to code, and there is definitely a need. There is a huge need for housing that is affordable to people with the lowest incomes - that's the type of housing we lost the most of - supportive housing that look like SROs.
- e. What happens when police and DHS break up encampments? Do they include social workers?
  - i. There are outreach workers who are sometimes involved, and police have gotten back involved. Even if the social worker is there, if they are with police, it still creates a sense of threat and coercion. The city's approach to encampments is concerning. We need more shelters and conventional housing - the solution isn't to take people's stuff away. There is nowhere for them to go, it's cruel, and it dissuades them from connecting with other services.

3. **Old Business** – None

4. **New Business** - None

**Motion to adjourn made by Rita Popper and seconded by Lori Bores. This meeting was adjourned at 7:18 pm**

*Saundrea I. Coleman and Sarah Chu, Co-Chairs*