

# **Advocating for Ourselves: Building Client Advocacy, Creating a Speakers' Bureau**



**CARE FOR THE HOMELESS, NEW YORK CITY  
PRESENTATION TO THE NATIONAL HEALTH CARE  
FOR THE HOMELESS COUNCIL CONFERENCE  
NEW ORLEANS      MAY 30, 2014**

# Three Topics (and a “how to” discussion):



- **Creating an Effective Client Program for Policy Advocacy**
- **Empowering Clients to Advocate for Themselves**
- **Creating a Client Speakers' Bureau**
  - Three short client “sample” presentations

# Introductions (4 client “presenters”):



- **David Broxton** – CFH CAB (President), *Certified Client Advocate*
- **William Bryant** – CFH HAC, *Certified Client Advocate*
- **Philip Malebranche** – CFH CAB, National CAB, *Certified Client Advocate*
- **Anthony Williams** – CFH HAC (President) & CAB, *Certified Client Advocate*

# Purpose of CFH Advocacy Program



- **Purpose of CFH Advocacy Program**
- In 2012: CFH Commissioned Study of Policy Operation, including consideration of:
  - Maintaining a narrow “expert” focus, *or*
  - Enlarging focus to mission “advocating to ameliorate, prevent and end homelessness”, *or*
  - Eliminating formal policy and advocacy operation

## 2012 CFH Study determined among other things:



1. Policy Operation didn't broadly involve our clients (or staff, or Board)
2. Clients had little understanding or appreciation of Public Policy
3. CFH's health services were client centered, but policy operation wasn't

*Frankly, our clients were not empowered in Policy and Advocacy*

# CFH Management and Board committed to:



- **Creating a Client Centered Policy and Advocacy Program**
- **Empowering Clients to Advocate for Themselves**

Presentation is brief review of our Effort to Empower our Clients on Policy and Advocacy, and How and Why We Created a Speakers' Bureau

# Building A Client Advocacy Program

(David Broxton)



- **Big change for us:** client involvement had been limited to occasional request to accompany Policy Director to Albany for rally and office visits
- Asked to advocate for ourselves in both policy development & advocacy
  - Some client/staff reluctance, concern about something going wrong
    - ✦ What if a client leader said something wrong, made a mistake?
    - ✦ “We’ve Never Done It This Way” Argument

# Clients Included In “Participatory” Agenda Setting Process



- Client leader boards voted to participate in meetings with staff & Board
- At clients’ request, held short training course on how to effectively participate in meetings – dealt with many client concerns
- We, the clients, helped set CFH’s Policy Agenda
- That process helped set the stage for empowering us to speak for ourselves



# Agenda Really Was Shaped by Client Involvement



- Because we were there, this part of agenda was added:  
**“Protect Homeless Peoples’ Rights and Dignity: We support protecting the rights and franchise of homeless people, affording them dignity and respect and recognizing their contributions and value; we oppose any reduction in their rights, criminalizing of poverty or stigmatizing of people experiencing homelessness.”**

# Empowering Client Leader Boards

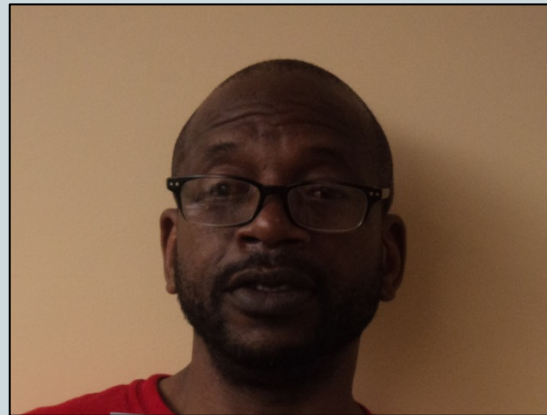


- Previously, staff facilitators had run CAB/HAC Board meetings, set events
- Now clients play all major roles: elect our own leaders, vote on all activities and make our own decisions with staff involvement
- We became partners with CFH's Policy operation in advocating

# Creating a Speakers' Bureau (Anthony Williams)



- Research Showed Major Factor in Successfully Advocating for Better Policy Was Whether Person Knew Anyone Who Was/Had Experienced Homelessness
- **Recognized This Was Our Best Advocacy Program**



# Recruiting and Training Clients to Be Speakers



- Interested Clients Represented Broad Cross Section of Experience & Ability
- All Had Our Own Stories , No One Had Training in Policy Issues
  - Worse Yet, Lots of What We “Knew” was Just Wrong
- Training Program Was Critical

# CFH Training Model



- Established Program Leading to Certified Client Advocate designation
  - Ten week training program, with requirement of 8 session minimum
- Half Speaker Training, Half Policy Training
- Followed by Graduation Ceremony where each Graduate told their story

# Speaker Training



- **Introduction & Basic Training in Public Speaking**
- **Things Like Eye Contact, Using Notes & Space, Responding to Questions**
- **Stressed Preparation and Plenty of Practice**

# Policy Training



- **Included History and Discussion of Causes of Modern Day Homelessness**
  - Poor Policies Creating Problems/Better Policies that Could End Them
- **Much of It Very Specific to New York City**
- Largely discussion, very interesting and eye opening for clients

# Our CFH Speakers' Bureau Format



- Established a format in advance: Presentations would be structured as Clients
  - 1.) Telling Our Stories
  2. Connecting Them to a Specific Policy Issue, and...
  - 3.) Advocating for Our Position on that Policy Matter



# Biggest Challenges



- Sticking to the Format
- Preparation and Staying on Message
- Discipline to Stay Within Time Limits

# SAMPLE PRESENTATIONS:



- **Bill Bryant: Don't Blame the Victims; Stigmatization**
- **David Broxton: Finding Health - Everyone Should Have The Chance**
- **Philip Malebranche: A Right to Affordable Housing**



# Everyone Deserves Affordable Housing in New York City



By Philip J. Malebranche  
CFH Certified Advocate



# What is “Affordable” Housing?

## Most Widely Accepted Answer (HUD formula)

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- $\leq 30\%$  of gross household income Spent on Housing (Rent) and Utilities



- For \$10,000 monthly housing cost:  
Affordability means at least \$400,000 income
- For full time minimum wage (\$8) worker  
making \$16,000 a year = less than \$400  
monthly cost



- HUD defines household paying over 30% gross income on housing as “cost burdened”- meaning they face deprivation of basic necessities
- 50%+ housing cost defined as “severely” cost burdened



Unaffordable housing burden  
means choices between basic  
necessities like shelter, food,  
clothing and transportation



Over 12 million American households spend over 30% of gross income on housing making them overburdened in unaffordable housing



# New York City Households:

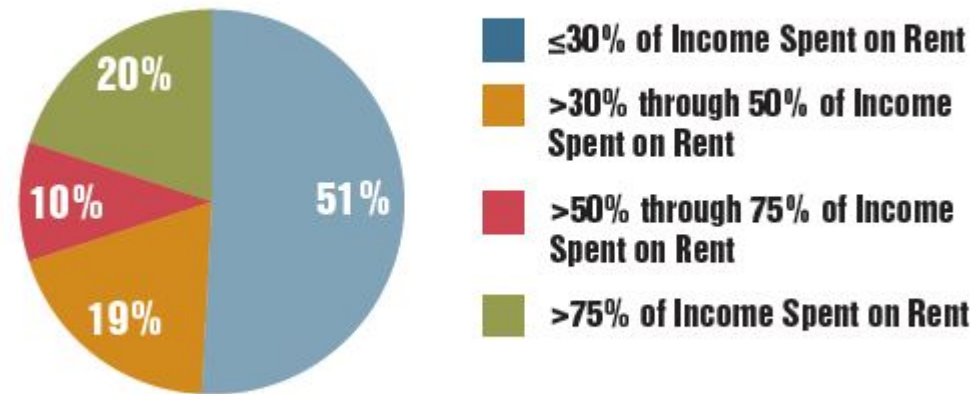


49% spend over 30%

30% spend over 50%

20% spend over 75%

**Chart 2: Percentage of Income Spent on Rent by New Yorkers**



*Source: 2010 U.S. Census Bureau*



- 84% NYC low income households pay over 30% cap
  - In Queens it's 91%
- 7% of high income pay over 30% cap

*-Comptroller Liu Study, "Rents Through the Roof", 2012*



- For low income households in New York City:
- 2002 – there were 995,000 affordable housing units
- 2011 – fell to 609,700 affordable housing units
- Demand 2002 – 2011 was always over 1 million

*-New Community Service Society of NYC Report, 2014*

# Promoting a Speakers' Bureau from a Standing Start



- **Challenging to Find Speaking Opportunities at the Start**
- **Requires Promotion and Prospecting**
- **Targets: Schools, Civic & Neighborhood Groups, Faith Communities, Service Clubs, Affinity Groups, Your Own Organizations**

# Questions, Answers & Discussion

