



Care
For the
Homeless



2026 Summer Solstice Success Celebration: Voices of Our Neighbors

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Each year, Care For the Homeless uplifts the stories of individuals experiencing homelessness and shines a light on the realities they navigate every day. **The Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, has long been associated with light, growth, and renewal.** We use this moment to celebrate the many forms that progress can take, from acts of perseverance and community to personal milestones and new opportunities, while recognizing the systemic barriers that make these journeys far more difficult. By sharing these stories, we honor the dignity, strength, and humanity of every individual, wherever they may be on their path.

Through the Summer Solstice Celebration, we uplift moments of progress across healthcare, housing, education, and advocacy, reminding us that success is not a single destination, but something that can be found at every stage of the journey. These stories emerge from the relationships built across our community, shared by staff, peers, and individuals themselves. They speak not only to personal milestones, but to the systems, supports, and barriers that shape each path.

A Focus on Storytelling

Summer Solstice Success Celebration: Voices of Our Neighbors features a collection of narrative-driven stories. This booklet brings together lived experiences that recognize the immense barriers, trauma, and complexity that accompany homelessness while also highlighting the growth, perseverance, and achievements of individuals on their journey to stability.

Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, these stories center:

- progress as a path to stability
- the realities of navigating systems that are often difficult to access
- The role of care, community, and support in creating pathways forward

Why These Stories Matter

People experiencing homelessness face persistent barriers shaped by stigma, discrimination, and systemic inequities. Too often, their experiences are reduced, overlooked, or told without their voices at the center.

This collection intentionally does something different.

By elevating these narratives, we aim to:

- affirm the dignity and humanity of every individual
- challenge harmful assumptions about homelessness
- and illustrate how access to care and support makes progress possible.

These are not just stories of success. They are stories of what becomes possible when people are met with the resources, respect, and the care they deserve.

A Resource for the Year Ahead

This booklet is designed to be more than a moment of recognition. It is a resource we will carry forward, informing our advocacy, shaping our storytelling, and reinforcing the importance of building systems that work for everyone.

Each voice included here reflects both an individual journey and a broader truth: stability should not be extraordinary - it should be both the standard and accessible.

With Gratitude

We are deeply grateful to the individuals who shared their time, their experiences, and their voices to make this collection possible. Your willingness to sit down and tell your story, on your own terms, has helped create a resource that does more than celebrate individual achievements.

These stories help others see the full humanity of people experiencing homelessness, and to push for resources and systems that make stability possible for every person who is experiencing housing instability.





Wilson Briggs

Housing Success

Wilson Briggs believes family is like the roots of a tree. Branches may break, leaves may fall, but the roots remain, keeping you grounded through whatever storms life brings. During his lifetime, Wilson learned that roots can appear in unexpected places.

He believes that there are moments in every life that quietly ask us to keep going and they have the power to change the course of a life.

Born and raised in the Bronx, Wilson has faced more than his share of hardship. After being struck by a car, lingering injuries eventually led to hip surgery. During his recovery, an accident while under medical care left him with a broken neck and permanent nerve damage. He spent nearly two years moving between hospitals and rehabilitation facilities, trying to regain his ability to walk and get answers to what happened to him when he underwent surgery.

For a long time, he carried anger. The people entrusted with helping him had forever changed the course of his life, and he struggled to understand why. But instead of turning away from medical care, Wilson kept showing up. He pushed for answers, continued his appointments, and worked relentlessly through rehabilitation until he finally understood what happened to him. Once he had that understanding, he made a choice that would define the next chapter of his life: he would not let anger become the thing that held him still.

One Christmas season, while living in rehabilitation and fighting to walk again, Wilson describes meeting an angel.

Children had come to visit the residents, making cards and spreading holiday cheer. Across the room, he noticed a little

girl with two prosthetic legs, no older than six, making her way across the room with the very walker he was utilizing at the time. She wore a bright smile and emanated a light to every person in that room. Wilson thought about all the things children should get to do: ride bikes, run with friends, play freely. **Tears filled his eyes as he realized that this little girl, his “angel”, carrying burdens of her own had no idea she was giving someone else the strength to keep going.**

When people look at him, Wilson says he hopes they see “*a light*.” Not because his journey has been easy, but because he wants them to know that there will always be moments that ask us to keep going.

Today, Wilson is preparing to move into a home of his own after finding community and support at one of Care For the Homeless' men's shelter. After leaving assisted living, he was determined to reclaim his independence. What he found at CFH further solidified what he had come to know over the past 3 years: **healing is never a solitary act.** A case manager stepped in to make sure his housing voucher would not expire. Staff members answered questions, even when they were not assigned to his case. Housing specialists stayed on top of paperwork and celebrated each step forward alongside him. Wilson thinks of each of these team members as first responders. **They may not arrive in an ambulance or fire truck, but they show up every day to help others rebuild their lives.** He believes they deserve to be recognized for the quiet, often unseen work they do.

Wilson was quick to point out that they cannot do it alone. "They don't have a magic wand," he says. They can open doors, but he had to walk through them. Every morning, despite chronic pain and the challenge of simply getting dressed, he chooses to get up, make his appointments, and do his part.

Now after everything he has endured, Wilson is on the verge of something he worked long and hard for: a home of his own.

When people look at him, Wilson says he hopes they see "a light." Not because his journey has been easy, but because he wants them to know that there will always be moments that ask us to keep going. Sometimes they arrive as a person. Sometimes a feeling. Sometimes a small act of kindness.

And sometimes, without ever knowing it, we become that moment for someone else.

"With persistence and dedication, Mr. Briggs remained diligent in searching for apartments that would accept his CityFHEPS voucher. He successfully completed all the necessary steps required to secure housing opportunities. Today, Mr. Briggs is in the final stage of the housing process and is hopeful to transition into permanent housing within the next two months. His journey reflects resilience, personal growth, and a strong commitment to creating a better future for himself."

Lesia Bradley, Case Manager





Denayha Cotton

Advocacy Success

“Bubbly. Friendly. Easily Excitable.”

That’s how Denayha Cotton describes herself. But what defines her is the way she shows up for others. For Denayha, community is not just something she’s a part of, it’s something she actively builds. It’s the way she shares food, checks in on people, and prioritizes connection with intention, making sure others feel seen and

supported. **That sense of connection has become the foundation of how she navigates the world.**

“It’s a way that I could show love for my community,” she said. “We’re here for the highs and the lows...that sisterhood is strong.”

Before coming to New York, Denayha had built a different kind of life. She worked as a massage therapist for seven years and ran her own business, creating stability and independence on her own terms. But that stability didn’t last. “One month I had everything...and the next month I didn’t.”

Advocacy, for her, is about making sure those voices are not overlooked. “You miss a lot of good people by judging them prematurely.”

After losing both her business and her apartment, she made the decision to move. The transition was immediate and disorienting. What she found, however, was not what she expected.

Within the shelter system, Denayha discovered a kind of community she hadn’t experienced before. One rooted in shared understanding, mutual care, and a collective sense of responsibility for one another. **In a space where resources are limited, people show up for each other in ways that often go unseen. That experience reshaped how she understands people and how she understands herself.**

“I actually have a better heart now than I did.”

Grounded in her faith and shaped by her experience, Denayha has come to see this chapter of her life not only as a challenge, but as a turning point. It deepened her sense of empathy, strengthened her relationships, and shifted what she values most.

Today, Denayha is channeling that perspective into advocacy. Through her involvement in the Consumer Advisory Board, **she has stepped into spaces where she can speak directly to the realities of homelessness; bringing lived experience into conversations that often happen without that level of expertise.**

Her approach is rooted in both curiosity and care. She wants to understand how systems work, but more importantly, how they can work better for people navigating them every day. Advocacy, for her, is about making sure those voices are not overlooked. **"You miss a lot of good people by judging them prematurely."**

Looking back, Denayha doesn't define her journey by what she lost. Instead, she focuses on what she's gained: a deeper sense of connection, a stronger understanding of herself, and a community that continues to shape who she is becoming.

She is focused on building forward: finding work, continuing to grow, and living a life that reflects her values.



"In just a few short months, Denayha has grown into a confident and impactful advocate, bringing both authenticity and insight to every conversation. During an advocacy day we held in Albany, she navigated meetings with ease, thoughtfully sharing her story and adapting her message to connect with each office and discussion. We are excited to celebrate her success and look forward to seeing the continued impact of her advocacy, leadership, and commitment to building meaningful connections within our community."

Nathalie Interiano, VP of Policy and Advocacy



Mitchell McCann

Housing Success

“Open. Honest. Kind. Respectful.”

That’s how Mitchell McCann describes himself. Those are simple words, but they reveal something important about him: Mitchell is someone who thinks deeply about who he is and how he moves through the world. Long before he knew the language for it, he was trying to understand people. Their motives, their behaviors, and the experiences that shape them.

That curiosity began early. After losing his mother at a young age, Mitchell entered into the foster care system, where instability became constant. As he moved through different placements and eventually aged out of care, he spent years navigating adulthood largely on his own. Housing instability carried him across states, but so did a quiet determination to keep searching for a place where he could finally feel at home. Part of that search meant learning to understand himself.

For years, Mitchell struggled with his mental health. His years in foster care, losing his mother, and being hurt by people who were meant to protect him, Mitchell was constantly fighting an internal battle to manage his emotions and understand things on his own without guidance. Despite this, he eventually found a therapist whom he credits as becoming one of the most important turning points in his life. **It wasn’t an overnight transformation, but it gave him something he had been looking for: language for his experiences and the tools to navigate them.**

Eventually, that journey led into the shelter system in which he was in yet another experience that forced him to live in a constant state of alertness. For Mitchell, the hardest part wasn’t simply lacking a place to live. It was never being able to let his guard down.

The support that helped him better understand himself sparked a desire to help others do the same. Mitchell is building a future rooted in helping others navigate the same questions he once had to answer alone.

After nearly a year in shelter, Mitchell received a CityFHEPS voucher and moved into his own apartment. The transition was gradual. Even after the move, his body held onto old patterns of survival. But little by little, the vigilance faded. “It’s a lot more peaceful...a lot less stress.”

For Mitchell, housing means more than having four walls. It means safety. It means having the quiet necessary to think about what comes next. Today, he is living independently, working with The DOE Fund, and preparing to complete his GED. His long-term goal is to become a therapist and eventually to open his own practice.

That dream isn't accidental. The support that helped him better understand himself sparked a desire to help others do the same. **Mitchell is building a future rooted in helping others navigate the same questions he once had to answer alone.**

When asked what he is most proud of, Mitchell doesn't mention housing or work or school. He responded simply with, **"how far I came without quitting."** It's a simple answer, but one that reflects the person he has always been: someone who keeps searching, learning, and keeps moving forward. His story is not defined by the hardships he endured. It's defined by what he chose to do with them.

He spent years trying to understand the world around him. Today, he finally has the space to help others navigate the difficulties he experienced.



"Mitchell approaches the world with genuine curiosity and a desire to understand the people around him. His thoughtful nature and genuine interest in understanding others are evident in every conversation, and his contributions to the Consumer Advisory Board reflect the care and intention he brings to everything he does."

Chelsea Rose, Policy & Advocacy Manager



Edwin Guzman

Housing Success

The first thing Edwin Guzman wants people to know about him is that when he sets his mind to something, he gets it done.

A former middle linebacker and fullback, Edwin still carries himself with the discipline and determination he learned on the football field decades ago. He approaches life head-on, focused, practical, and unwilling to back down from a challenge.

That mindset would ultimately shape the way he navigated one of the most difficult periods in his life: **experiencing homelessness for the first time at 68 years old after the homeowners he had been renting from informed him that they would be selling their home.**

Beneath Edwin's tough exterior is a deep warmth that becomes impossible to miss when he talks about his family. As he flips through photos of his seven grandchildren, his entire demeanor softens.

Family has always been central to Edwin's life, and in many ways, it shaped the kind of grandfather, and person he wanted to become. Growing

up affection was not something openly expressed in his household. Edwin remembers wanting something different for the next generation. Today, he takes enormous pride in being present for his children and grandchildren in ways he did not always experience himself. **Rather than dwelling, Edwin speaks about life with a quiet acceptance: challenges come, and you keep moving forward.**

He proudly shares stories about each of them and the NY Giants jersey they got him for Christmas with "World's Best Grandpa" on the back. *"My grandkids are my babies,"* he said with a smile.

That same mindset carried him through his housing journey. **After entering shelter, Edwin remained focused on one goal: finding a home of his own.**

Every day, even during the coldest winter days, he traveled across the city searching for apartments and following up on new housing leads. While he recognized many of the broader systemic barriers within the shelter system, especially for older adults and those living with mental health challenges, he also spoke passionately about the staff members

who made a difference. **Edwin credits his case manager, Ms. Bradley, and several other Care For the Homeless staff members for helping him stay motivated and treating him with dignity throughout the process.** Their encouragement, combined with Edwin's relentless determination, helped him secure permanent housing.

"They show that they care. When you see people who show you they care, you feel better."

Now settled into his new apartment in the Bronx, Edwin is focused on enjoying life, visiting family, and building new memories with the people he loves most. **Looking back on his journey, he remains proud of what**

he accomplished, and hopeful that others can do the same. "If I can do it, anybody can do it."

"Edwin Guzman's journey is a strong example of how focus, consistency, and follow-through can lead to meaningful change in a short period of time. From the very first meeting, with his case manager Ms. Bradley. Edwin made it clear that he was committed to moving forward. He approached every step of the process with determination, ensuring that all required documentation was submitted promptly and that he attended every scheduled meeting on time. His commitment helped keep his progress steady and on track."

Lesia Bradley, Case Manager





Hattie Fernandez

Housing Success

“Caring. Loving. Family-oriented.”

That’s how Hattie Fernandez describes herself, and it’s the thread that runs through every part of her story.

For Hattie, everything begins with her children. A mother of three and a grandmother of two, she speaks about her family with a deep sense of pride and purpose. Even during some of the most uncertain moments in her life, that connection never wavered. **“My children mean the world to me. I am alive because of them.”**

Before experiencing homelessness, Hattie had spent years building a life for her family in the Bronx, where she raised her children as a single mom. But in 2025, after becoming ill and losing her ability to work, she fell behind on rent. **For over a year, she tried to access rental assistance programs that could help her stay in her home but found herself ineligible. It wasn’t until she lost her apartment that she became eligible for the very support that could have prevented homelessness.**

What followed was a period of instability where she hopped between couches and entered the shelter system. It was an experience she approached with fear, unsure of what to expect. But within that system, she found something she hadn’t anticipated: support.

“I became eligible as soon as I lost my apartment, which made no sense because the voucher was way more than what I would have needed to keep my apartment and not have to go through those struggles”

Surrounded by women who were also navigating their own challenges, Hattie found strength in shared experience. There was structure, encouragement, and a sense of accountability that helped her stay focused on moving forward. **She leaned into that support, taking each step as it came and prioritizing her health and stability along the way.**

Today, Hattie is living in her own apartment. **A space that represents both safety and a new beginning. After months of uncertainty, having a place of her own has brought a sense of stability that once felt out of reach.** “I feel safe,” she said. That sense of safety shows up in the small moments like being able to cook in her own kitchen, sleep through the night, and move through her day without constant uncertainty.

Despite this momentous step, the transition hasn’t been without its challenges. After spending months surrounded by a community with shared experience, living alone again has been an adjustment for Hattie. She misses the familiar faces, the shared routines, and the quiet ways people showed up for each other. Still, those relationships haven’t disappeared. **Hattie stays in touch, welcoming friends into her new home and continuing to nurture the bonds that helped her carry through.**

Her experience has shaped how she sees the world and her place in it. Through participating in advocacy spaces, she has begun to use her voice to reflect not only her own journey, but the broader gaps she encountered along the way.

Looking back on Hattie’s journey, what stands out most is not the hardship, but the strength she showed along the way. Hattie takes pride in the fact that, even amid instability, she held on to what matters most: **her family, her sense of purpose, and her belief that something better was possible.**

“Hattie has a quiet kind of power. She never demands attention, but when she speaks, people listen. From the first story she shared with the Consumer Advisory Board, it was clear that she had a gift for turning lived experience into something meaningful, helping others understand not just what happened, but what it felt like to live through it.”

Chelsea Rose, Policy & Advocacy Manager





Danny Gonzalez

Housing Success

Enduring the Harder Path Forward

Danny Gonzalez describes himself as outgoing and adventurous. It's clear within minutes of meeting him that connection comes naturally. **He finds joy in conversation, in people, and in the small moments that make up a day.**

"I was a happy kid," Danny says. Life shifted early.

Losing important parental figures early in life and a near fatal car accident at sixteen that left him with a traumatic brain injury that had a lasting impact on his impulse control. As Danny got older; he found himself navigating grief and instability largely on his own. Over time, he turned to substances as a way to cope, something he reflects now with honesty and clarity. **"It was hard for me to let go of something that was making me sad when at one point it was the only thing making me happy."**

For years, Danny moved in and out of cycles that were difficult to break. What stands out in his story isn't just what he went through. It's the moment he decided something needed to change. That moment came quietly, at home, with his cat, Prince. "I remember just holding him and thinking, what's going to happen when my addiction overpowers my love for this? That's when I knew I had to do something different."

From that moment, Danny made a decision that would shape everything that followed: he chose recovery. Not the easiest option, but the one he believed would lead somewhere different. He could have entered another rehabilitation facility. But instead, he chose to enter a Ready, Willing & Able shelter that he describes as providing structure, forcing him to build from the ground up, and shifting his approach to life.

In the shelter system, Danny threw himself into rebuilding. He committed fully to working, engaging in programs, and stayed focused on the future. He joined the Care For the Homeless Consumer Advisory Board, where his natural confidence and openness quickly stood out. He took on new responsibilities and even enrolled in barber school. **He stayed busy with intention.**

"I didn't want to get comfortable," he says. "I wanted to keep moving forward."

That momentum paid off. After more than a year in shelter, Danny recently moved into his own apartment on the Upper West Side. It's small, but it's his.

"There's something about having your own space," he says. "I can go to sleep when I want. I don't have to worry about anyone else. It's mine." That sense of ownership represents more than housing. It reflects the commitment he made to rebuilding his life.

Today, Danny has been sober since December 2024 and is looking ahead. He is exploring several opportunities for his next chapter, including a role supporting others in the same shelter system that helped him get back on his feet. He's also continuing to develop his craft as a barber, keeping his options open as he considers what comes next.

"My story is still being written," he says. "But I know I'm better than I was a year ago."

For Danny, progress isn't about perfection. It's about consistency.

"You can't rewrite your past, but you can get a clean sheet of paper and write your future."



"Danny is an amazing person whose determination and growth have been inspiring to witness. He has overcome tremendous challenges, not only rebuilding his own life but choosing to use his experiences to support and encourage others along the way. His dynamic energy, willingness to connect with people, and dedication to giving back make him a valued member of our CAB community. We are fortunate to have his voice, perspective, and his unwavering commitment to helping others see what is possible."

Cynthia English, Chair of the Consumer Advisory Board



Richard Owens

Housing Success

Richard Owens knows what it means to rebuild a life piece by piece.

Thoughtful, self-reflective, and deeply compassionate, Richard speaks with the kind of honesty that comes from surviving hardship without losing sight of other people along the way. Even during some of the most difficult moments of his life, he remained focused on dignity, respect, and finding a path forward.

Before becoming unhoused, Richard spent years building a life with his partner, Tracy. Together, they created a home centered around family, laughter, and the everyday routines that make a life feel stable. **Richard speaks about Tracy with deep warmth, remembering her adventurous spirit and the life they shared together.**

That stability was shattered in 2024 when Tracy suffered a series of strokes and eventually passed away. **At the same time, a web of systemic failures began to unravel around Richard.** The apartment voucher connected to their housing remained under Tracy's name, and despite her prolonged hospitalization, Richard never received communication about missed certifications or mounting rental arrears. By the time he learned how serious the situation had become, the debt had grown beyond what he could realistically manage.

Grieving the loss of his partner while simultaneously trying to navigate housing systems, paperwork, hospitals, and uncertainty pushed Richard into homelessness. For a period of time, he lived on the street, moving between hospitals, drop-in centers, subway stations, and temporary places to rest. The traditional shelter system often felt overwhelming, especially while he was coping with grief, chronic pain, and declining health. Large congregate settings and endless administrative hurdles made it difficult to feel stable or safe.

Richard reflected on the importance of understanding how someone arrived where they are, and how healing sometimes requires retracing your steps.

Everything began to shift when Richard was connected to the Care For the Homeless' Safe Haven in the Bronx. Unlike other environments he had encountered, **Richard described the program as a place where staff treated people "like human beings."** He credits the Safe Haven team for helping him regain a sense of direction.

Richard quickly became someone who encouraged others around him. **He understood that everyone in the shelter system was navigating different struggles, but he also knew how easy it could be to lose hope while experiencing homelessness.** As he worked to secure identification documents, attend appointments, and stabilize his health, he often encouraged fellow residents to do the same, reminding them to keep moving toward their goals.

For Richard, that determination came from finally being met with compassion and support at a moment when he needed it most.

"I'm at peace right now," he said.
"All universal guards are working with me right now."

Today, Richard is celebrating a major milestone: permanent housing. But for him, success is about more than simply having an apartment. It is about peace.

Richard continues to focus on his health, his stability, and the future he wants to build for himself. **He expressed interest in becoming a peer advocate so he can support others experiencing homelessness in the same way others supported him.**

Looking back on his journey, Richard reflected on the importance of understanding how someone arrived where they are, and how healing sometimes requires retracing your steps.

"You know the road you traveled to get where you are," he said. "Sometimes you have to go back and pick another road."



Richard's story is a reminder that homelessness can happen for many different reasons. Grief, bureaucracy, health crises, loss, and systems that fail people when they are most vulnerable. But it is also a reminder that compassion, persistence, and the right support can help people find a path to stability.



Evora Frances Johnson

Healthcare Success

"I'm still here. I'm still standing."

Those simple words capture the spirit of Evora Frances Johnson's journey.

Raised in Asbury Park, New Jersey, Evora remembers a childhood filled with family, home-cooked meals, and parents who worked hard to create a loving home for their children. She speaks

warmly about her mother, a talented cook who could prepare entire holiday feasts from memory and taught Evora that if food tastes good to you, it will taste good to everyone else.

For much of her life, Evora carried battles that few people could see. Depression and anxiety followed her for years, and addiction gradually took hold, pulling her further away from the life she wanted for herself. The turning point came when years of substance use began to take a serious toll on her health. Following a medical emergency, Evora learned that her heart had stopped briefly at the hospital. This pushed her to take the first step and enter a rehabilitation program. Upon learning this, her son shared words she has never forgotten.

"When I called him and told him I was in a program, he said, 'I can get my mom back.'"

For Evora, those moments were impossible to ignore. Three years ago, she made the decision to heal and start fighting for her future. **Today, Evora is celebrating three years of sobriety, but for her, recovery is about much more than staying clean. It is about choosing herself every day.**

She dreams of attending culinary school, inspired by the love of cooking she inherited from her mother, or pursuing a degree in psychology so she can help others who have walked a similar path.

When she first arrived at the Care For the Homeless women's shelter in the Bronx two years ago, Evora was hesitant to trust people. She kept her struggles to herself and was slow to open up, even when people were trying to help. This kept her isolated and allowed her mental health struggles to consume her. **Everything began to change when she finally sat down and had an honest conversation with her case manager.**

"Once I started talking to her, she started helping me out a lot," Evora said. "I wasn't used to people being nice like that, trying to do their best to help me." When Evora talked about leaving New York and returning to New Jersey whenever things became difficult, her case manager challenged her to confront why she was making that decision.

That question forced Evora to decide that for her journey, recovery meant doing something different. **That willingness to ask for help became a turning point. Instead of facing every challenge alone, Evora began working alongside the people around her.** She started to focus on her mental and physical health, attending her appointments, working through ongoing financial challenges, and decided every day to show up for herself.

None of it has been easy and some days are still difficult. But where she once felt stuck, Evora now focuses on what she can do today to move forward.

That is the mindset that continues to guide her. At 60 years old, Evora is already thinking about what's next. She dreams of attending culinary school, inspired by the love of cooking she inherited from her mother, or pursuing a degree in psychology so she can help others who have walked a similar path.

For Evora, recovery is not a finish line. It is a daily commitment to living fully, caring for herself, and believing that the new possibilities are always within reach. After everything she has overcome, she keeps moving forward with the same determination that brought her this far.

She's still here. And she's still standing.

"I first met Evora at a smoking cessation workshop at Susan's Place. During the workshop, she shared her struggles with addiction. Fast-forward I see Evora at another community health event, and the physical change in her was amazing. She shared that she was continuing her recovery journey, reconnected with God, and felt much more at peace."

Ilkia Solano, Senior Population Health Specialist





Cynthia English

Mentoring Advocates

"Effervescent. Bubbly. Smart. Friendly. Loud. Resilient."

That's how Cynthia English describes herself, and it tracks. Spend a few minutes in her presence, and you understand quickly: **she is someone who fills a room, shares her truth, and refuses to be invisible.** But Cynthia's story is not defined by where she started. It's defined by what she has continued to build.

She was born in New York, but her life took her across the country where she endured hardship that demanded strength and the ability to adapt at a very young age. She survived childhood abuse and domestic violence. She also experienced street homelessness for nearly a decade, cycling through shelters, hospitals, and the criminal legal system, navigating severe mental health challenges while trying to hold onto pieces of herself.

At one point, while seeking treatment to stabilize her health, her daughter was taken from her through the court system. The loss sent her into a spiral so deep that, in her words, "she didn't care whether she survived". But for Cynthia, survival was never passive.

There wasn't one moment that changed everything. There were many small moments where support systems aligned to finally meet Cynthia where she was. She credits a women's shelter with on site mental health support for facilitating a pathway to stability, a community of peers that taught her how to survive when systems failed, and eventually something even more powerful: reconnection. Years after being separated, she was reunited with her daughter. There was a period when her mobility was impaired and her daughter gave her the strength to relearn how to walk, step by step.

Those moments didn't erase what came before. Instead, they shifted what was possible for Cynthia.

Today, Cynthia speaks about her life with a clarity that is both disarming and deeply intentional. She does not run from her past; she reframes it. She calls it a gift.

Not because her life was easy or fair. But because it gave her something she now uses every day: the ability to reach people, to connect, to make others feel seen.

Cynthia has been permanently housed since 2010. **She has built a life rooted in service, advocacy, and continuous learning.** She is a national speaker, an advocate, the Chair of the Consumer Advisory Board, and member of the Board of Directors at Care For the Homeless.

Cynthia is someone who always shows up for others. Her advocacy knows no bounds, and in every space, she brings the same urgency to the understanding that people experiencing homelessness deserve to be at every table. **One of the most meaningful ways her work has evolved is not just in how she uses her own voice, but how she lifts others to use theirs.**

As the Chair of the Consumer Advisory Board, Cynthia has become a mentor to the next generation of advocates. She meets people where they are, helping them identify their strengths and build confidence in spaces that feel intimidating. **Where some see hesitation, she sees potential.**

She deeply believes that people experiencing homelessness are not defined by their circumstances. They are, in her words, an “under-invested resource.” And she is determined to make sure the world sees that.

At Care For the Homeless, Cynthia has found a space that aligns with her values, one where lived experience is not just acknowledged, but integrated into leadership and decision-making. But she is clear: the work is bigger than any one organization.

Her focus is on what comes next. Mentoring the next generation of advocates, so the work continues long after she steps back.

“I want people to know,” she says, “that we are just like everybody else. We just had a different journey.”

Helping people understand that there is life after homelessness, and that their story does not end where others expect it to.

And for Cynthia, that journey is still unfolding. Getting louder, brighter, and more powerful than ever.



About Care For the Homeless

Care For the Homeless has over 40 years of experience providing medical and behavioral health services exclusively to people experiencing homelessness in New York City. We are a nationally recognized nonprofit that unites health care, shelter, and social services in one coordinated, innovative model of care. Through this integrated approach, we deliver comprehensive, compassionate services that improve health outcomes and create pathways to stability. In addition to our direct service work, we advocate for policies that expand access to housing, health care, and supportive services, ensuring that individual care and public policy work together to create lasting change for our city's most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you to the Care For the Homeless team for their immense effort in helping bring attention to these stories.

- Interviews conducted and stories written by Chelsea Rose, Policy and Advocacy Manager
- Photography by Argenis Taveras, Marketing and Communications Associate

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