

December 2009



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

2009 was a year of progress at the Department of Homeless Services. The City, like our nation, is facing tough economic times, and we ensured that the clients we serve continued to receive the highest level of service. And we did it with the partnership of the many providers, community organizations and supporters who firmly believe nobody should have to experience homelessness.

212-361-8000
www.nyc.gov/dhs

2009:
A Year of Progress

The services we provide to families bear little resemblance to the shelter system of just a few years ago. Families are moving out at a record pace – more than 8,800 families left shelter and returned to permanent housing in fiscal year 2009, the highest total ever recorded. The average family was in shelter for 265 days in fiscal year 2009, a 17 percent drop from the year before. The reforms we instituted have had positive effects throughout the system, during a national economic downturn that led to record demand in the shelter system and an unprecedented number of shelter applicants – we had an increase in applicants of a staggering 69 percent over two years ago, and we met that demand by successfully housing every family, every night. We helped manage this demand through a variety of innovative strategies. Most importantly, a record number of more than 5,800 households who applied for shelter were able to remain in the community with our assistance in fiscal year 2009. And we continued to help people to stay in their communities with Homebase, our community prevention program, which won three national awards this year.

We have made great advances in our efforts to end veteran homelessness in New York City, including a 62 percent reduction in the number of homeless veterans in the DHS shelter system from September 2006 to September 2009. Since the joint DHS-Veterans Affairs Task Force began in December 2006, more than 2,300 veterans have returned to permanent housing, and we keep adding resources to address the unique needs of homeless veterans. Earlier this year, the Doe Fund Veterans Program opened. Joined with the Borden Avenue Veterans Residence, in operation since 2007, this completes DHS' development of veterans-only short-term housing. We also opened a veterans-only Safe Haven this year. And at the Veterans Affairs Multi-Service Center in Brooklyn, where veterans access federal benefits and receive homeless services in one location, more than 4,800 homeless veterans have benefitted from this unique partnership since it opened in May 2008.

We continue to make great progress in lowering the number of unsheltered homeless individuals in New York City. Our annual HOPE survey, which counts the people living on the streets or in parks or the subway system, found a 47 percent decrease since 2005, and a 30 percent decrease since 2008. Since we revamped our street outreach services in September 2007, more than 1,800 chronically homeless individuals have left the streets, after experiencing an average of more than seven years of homelessness. We now have more than 500 Safe Haven beds, targeted to chronically street homeless individuals who traditionally have not embraced regular shelters, and more than 400 stabilization beds, which provide transitional housing until clients re-enter permanent housing. In addition, DHS re-launched its "Call 311" public awareness campaign, encouraging New Yorkers to call the City's information line if they see an unsheltered homeless individual in need of assistance. And don't forget to volunteer for HOPE 2010, being held in a few weeks on January 25; register at our Web site at www.nyc.gov/dhs.

For DHS, 2009 has been a year of many impressive strides. Since September 2004, we have reduced the number of chronically homeless clients in shelter by more than half, down to less than 640, including clients who had been in shelter for between eight and 20 years. We helped more than 10,000 single adults move into permanent housing in fiscal year 2009, nearly doubling the total from fiscal year 2004. And among Work Advantage clients who applied for a second year in our rental assistance program, 80 percent of them still were working. No matter what the population is – families or single adults, long-term stayers or people who are ready to exit the shelter system, applicants at intake or former shelter residents who need aftercare services – DHS is committed to helping clients return to and remain in permanent housing in the community.

This has been a tough year for the nation as a whole. It was particularly so for those who are the most vulnerable, and indeed our most important accomplishment this year was serving our clients well. We look forward to 2010 and bringing forth more innovative ideas to help keep people housed in the community, make their shelter stay as short as possible and assist them to return to permanent housing. Thank you for your help and cooperation throughout the year and going forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert V. Hess".

Robert V. Hess
Commissioner



DHS announced a partnership with St. John's University in 2009 to offer homeless individuals the opportunity to receive college degrees. The Advantage Academy provides scholarships from St. John's and housing and social services to more than 40 homeless and formerly homeless individuals. Pictured at the announcement are St. John's Associate Dean Dr. James O'Keefe, Advantage Academy participant Nicole Page, DHS Commissioner Robert V. Hess, Advantage Academy participant Tamekka Major and St. John's Executive Vice President and Chief Operation Officer Dr. James P. Pellow.

A volunteer administers a survey during DHS' Homeless Outreach Population Estimate, or HOPE 2009. Every year, more than 2,500 volunteers spend one night in January canvassing New York City's streets, parks, subways and other public spaces to help create an estimate on the number of unsheltered homeless individuals in all five boroughs. HOPE 2009 found there were an estimated 2,328 in this population. HOPE 2010 will be held on Monday, January 25.



A Look Ahead to 2010

Open a world-class intake center for families with children who have no other housing option

Introduce new street homeless technology to help save more lives

Launch a new database system to work smarter to better serve clients

Transform the families with children system, returning shelter to its roots by focusing exclusively on rapid re-housing that help families return to permanent housing sooner

Conduct a third-party evaluation of the Homebase community homeless prevention program to help inform the next steps for citywide prevention efforts