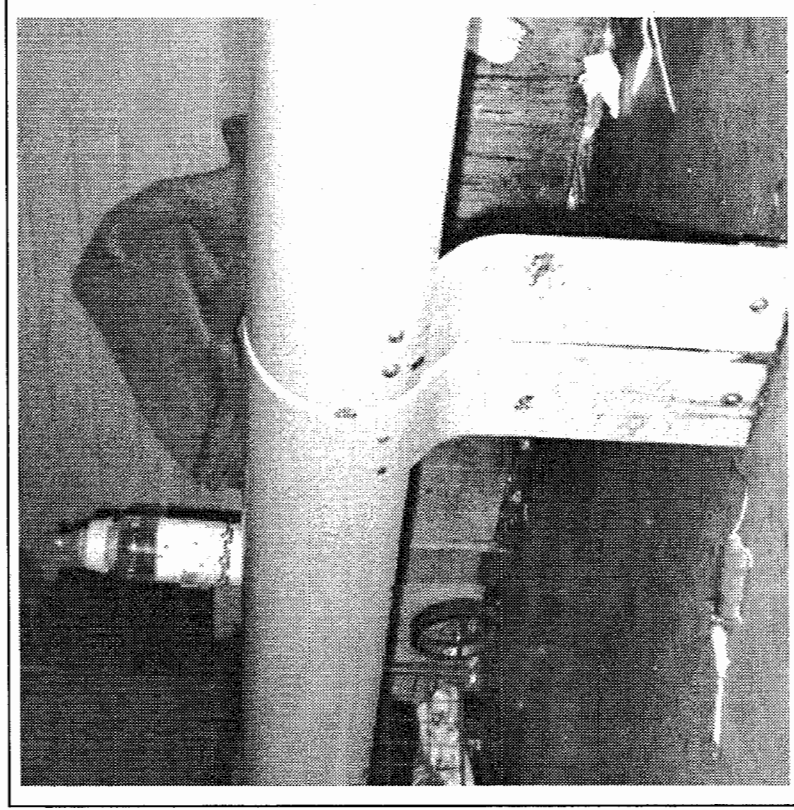


# **Abuse and Neglect:**



**How New York City**

**Violates the**

**Human and Civil Rights**  
**of**

**Homeless Families inside the EAU**

Picture the Homeless  
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The FAR Fund, Jewish Fund for Justice, New York Women's Foundation, North Star Fund, Public Welfare Foundation, The New York Foundation, Peace Development Fund, Threshold Foundation, the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program and the many individuals who have supported our work.

Thank you

## Acknowledgements

Picture the Homeless acknowledges each of the people who took the time to be interviewed for this project. Hundreds of homeless families responded to surveys, attended strategy meetings and stood out on the sidewalk in all kinds of weather to discuss their concerns about the EAU, and access to the emergency shelter system for homeless families. These interviews and strategy meetings took place under the most stressful conditions for families and we are grateful for their time and thoughtful responses.

Many homeless families have engaged with us to take the time to share their vision for constructive change and have joined Picture the Homeless to fight for common sense solutions such as an accountable emergency service and social service system, respect for homeless families' civil and human rights, and housing that is affordable for all New Yorkers. Their leadership inspires us and informs our work everyday.

We would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Homeless Women and Families Committee of Picture the Homeless, as well as Picture the Homeless leaders who have lent their support during outreach, actions, collecting survey data, working with the media and allies, and facilitating and translating meetings. Special thanks to Melissa Berdeguer, Luis Cubero, Keisha Harrell, Arnold Jeffreys, Jeanette Lopez, Herb Moore, Lenzitta Moore, Madelyn Perez, Dawn Quinones, Johnny Ramos, Yashira Rodriguez, Jose Salamanca, Gin joh Simms, Mylene Soto, Gloria Schwartz, Mike Slater, and Elias Vega.

We thank the New York Women's Foundation for supporting homeless women's work to identify issues critical to them, and to collectively develop an agenda for systemic change. Picture the Homeless also recognizes the contribution of the New York Foundation which supported Fidel Maltez as our summer organizing intern during the summer of 2003.

## Introduction

Messages of desperation from families in the EAU began to be left on the Picture the Homeless answering machine in January of 2002. We really didn't know a lot about the EAU and were amazed at some of the things that we were hearing. Phone messages from moms distraught and crying told us that staff and security guards were yelling and cursing at homeless families seeking assistance, that families were sleeping on the floor, pregnant women were having miscarriages, that the food was making them and their children so sick that they had to go to Lincoln Hospital, that they were found "ineligible for shelter" because they really had somewhere else to go, or that their kids hadn't been able to go to school for weeks because they were spending the night in the EAU. We learned that the EAU is not equipped to serve persons with any sort of disability in violation of the Americans With Disabilities Act and that when the money runs out for battered women in the domestic violence system they have to go the EAU and reapply for shelter which then has been known to call the abuser to see if they can go back home.

Challenges to organizing homeless people include usually not being able to reach people by phone to follow up. The initial calls moved us to begin intensive outreach at the EAU. The abusive and criminal conditions and procedures and the willingness of the families impacted to take a stand kept

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**Organizing for Justice and Respect: Don't Talk About Us, Talk With Us!**

us going back. Although we later reached out to allies and other organizations for more information we started with the families directly affected as our most critical source of information. Thanks to Kathy Goldman of Community Food Resource Center for sharing her knowledge about the EAU, her wisdom and support, to Anna de Havenon for sharing copies of her research findings with us, to Steve Banks of the Legal Aid Society for taking the time to come to our office to hear our concerns and share information with our members, leaders and staff. Finally, we thank Voices of Women, particularly Susan Lob and Vicki Gomez, for joining with us as allies and sisters in demanding justice for homeless women and their families.

## **Background and Need for Report: Is the EAU "Too Broken to be Fixed"?**

Because the EAU is intended as an intake office for families seeking emergency shelter we believe that there should be one in every borough and that the overnight placements should correspond to the families borough of origin. This simple solution will minimize disruption and displacement for homeless families by keeping families close to existing support systems as well as ensuring the continuity of education and medical care for homeless children.

This report is actually three reports in one, spanning the period from January 2002 through May 1, 2004. Because the findings are so consistent we have included each within this document, as well as testimonies from families throughout this period.

Most recently, the Bloomberg administration, through the Department of Homeless Services, has announced plans to focus on homeless prevention. They have been quoted as saying that the EAU is "too broken to be fixed." This defeatist approach admits that NYC has given up on homeless families and is not acceptable. We applaud the recognition that the most effective way to deal with the crisis of homelessness is to prevent people from losing their homes in the first place. With a living wage, realistic rents and comprehensive community development throughout all 5 boroughs this is achievable.

We know however, that the only thing lacking to fix the EAU right now is the political will. There is money to redevelop lower Manhattan, to provide tax breaks to corporations and bid for the Olympics. As long as there are families becoming homeless we will hold the city accountable for the provision of decent, effective emergency services and shelter. While there are a range of causes of homelessness among families, what is most needed of course is enough housing created so that folks who earn minimum wage or less, who constitute the lowest income New Yorkers, can afford to keep a roof over their heads.

The media, we have learned, is often weary hearing about the EAU. We have been told by some of this city's leading reporters that the EAU is an "old story" or that we need to find a "new angle". To Picture the Homeless, the real story, *the scandal*, is that four Mayoral Administrations have gotten away with abusing the most vulnerable families in this city in a facility that is rodent infested, dirty and overcrowded.

At Picture the Homeless we believe that homeless people must be at the table as equal partners in public policy making around issues impacting them. We appreciate the opportunity to have provided

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formal input to the Special Master Panel appointed by Judge Helen Friedman during this past year. Their work is critical and we look forward to their recommendations. *More critically, we await the implementation of common sense recommendations and accountability on behalf of public officials whose salary is derived in part by the very existence of homeless families.*

## Methodology

Picture the Homeless staff and volunteers conducted random surveys of 100 homeless families in the spring of 2002 outside of the EAU to identify issues and patterns of concern on the part of families directly affected by the EAU. We conducted separate surveys on issues around homeless families with disabilities in the EAU during the summer of 2003. An intensive training on outreach and interview techniques was provided to all survey team members. We identified the need to develop an introduction to immediately explain that the purpose of the interviews was document the reality of homeless families.

Surveys were completed by either Picture the Homeless staff or leaders, and Spanish language translation was available.

The data analysis was conducted by survey team members. The statistical analysis was conducted by counting the total number of responses to each question and then dividing the number of positive responses by the total number.

All of the photographs in this report were taken by members of the Homeless Women and Families Committee, and photo layout was done by Mike Slater.

## Recommendations

- Picture the Homeless calls upon the Special Master Panel to exercise it's power to immediately address these issues that are of an emergency nature to the families experiencing them.
- Open an EAU in every borough;
- Bring each EAU into compliance with the law by maintaining standards of cleanliness, minimize crowding, provide translation, move families to overnight placements by 7pm, and make accessible for persons with disabilities;
- Ensure that the location of overnight placements corresponds to where the youngest child attends school in accordance with the federal McKinney Vento Act;
- Provide legal representation for homeless families filing fair hearings when they have been determined ineligible;
- Post the Homeless Bill of Rights in every DHS and other publicly funded facility that serves homeless people and ensure that is is translated into all relevant languages.;
- Implement a grievance process to ensure accountability in the system for homeless families;
- Include homeless families in the training of professional staff to ensure sensitivity and professionalism.
- Include homeless families in the identification of issues and solutions system wide.

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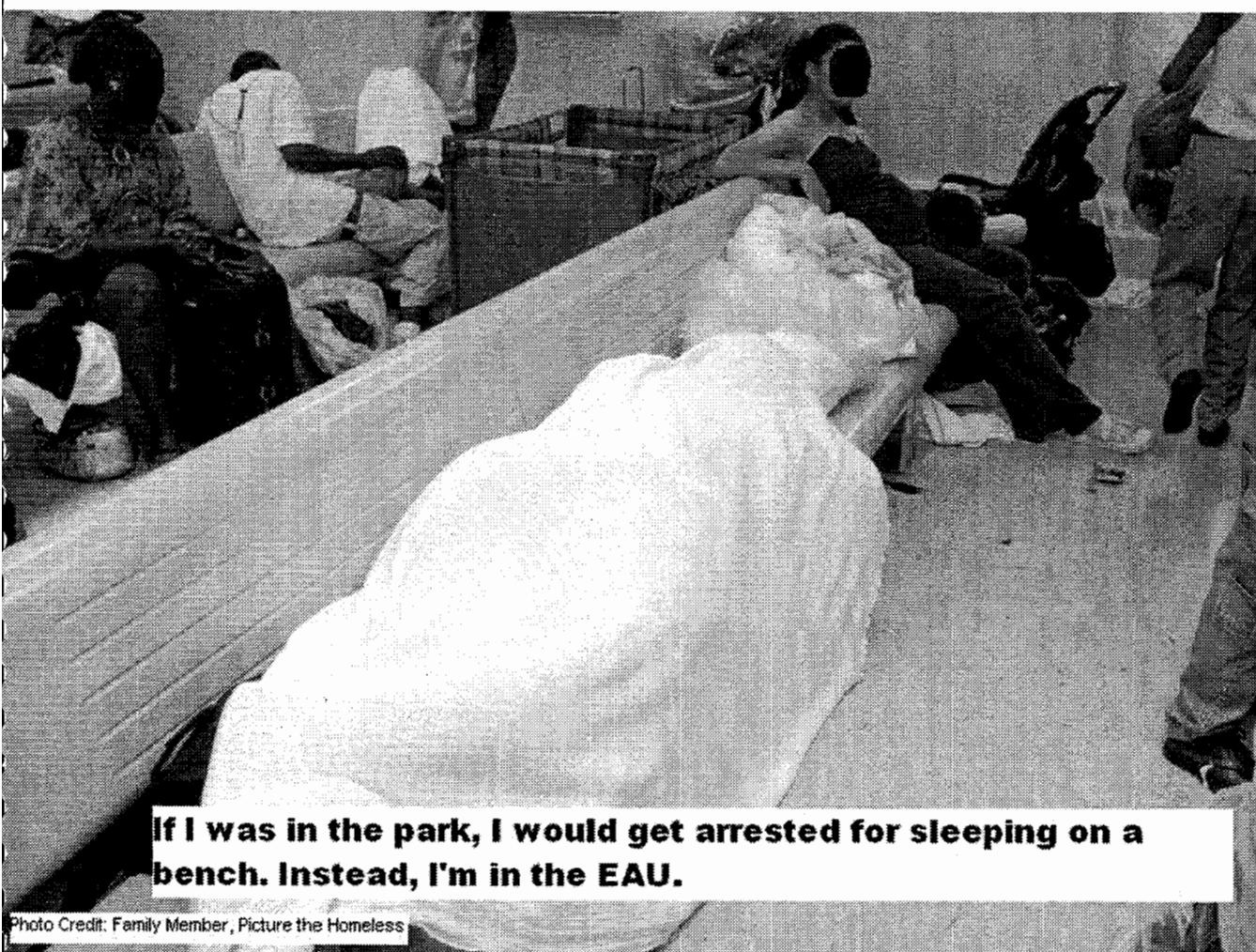
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**DHS feels that this is what we deserve in the EAU**

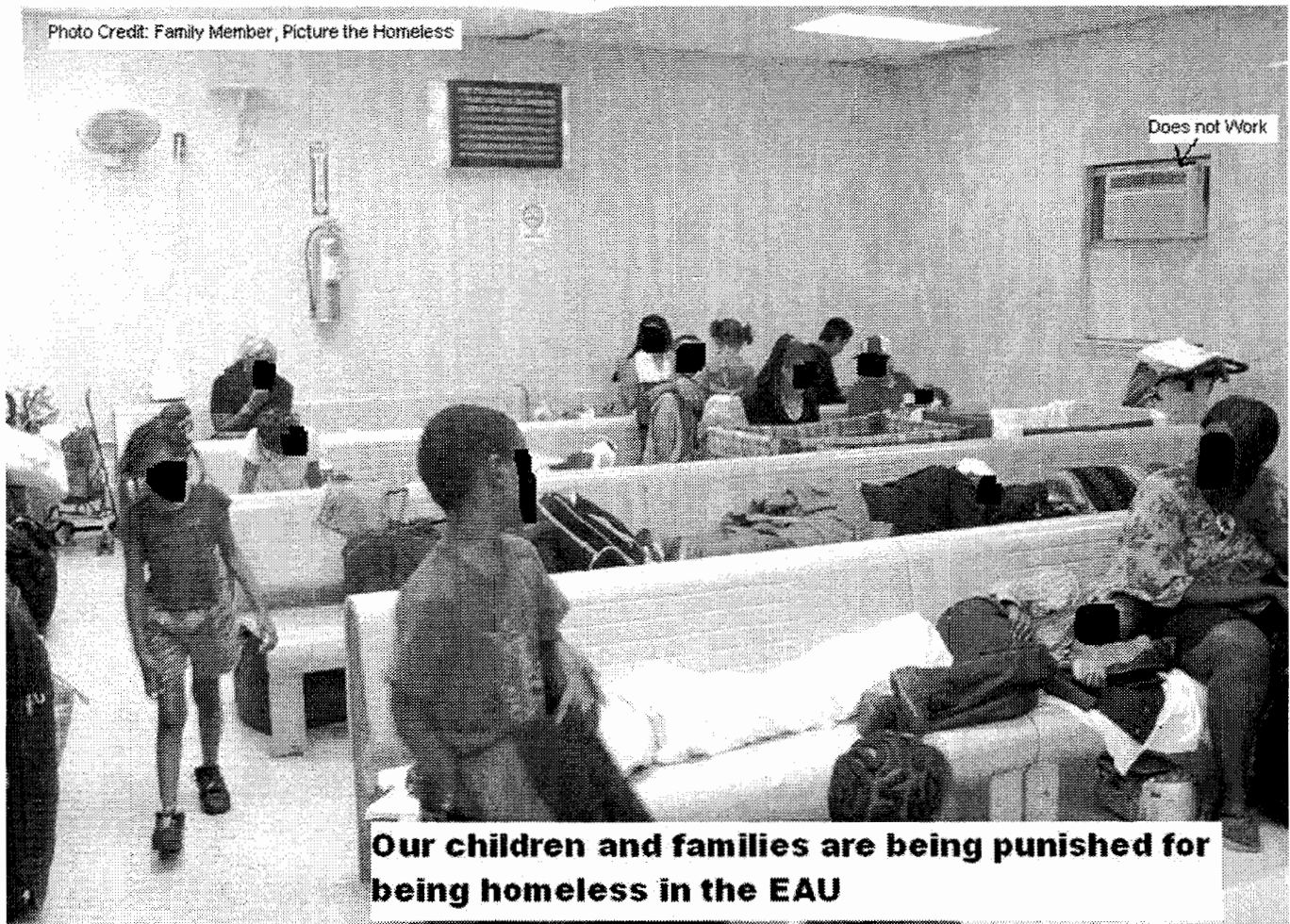
Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



**If I was in the park, I would get arrested for sleeping on a bench. Instead, I'm in the EAU.**

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



**Our children and families are being punished for being homeless in the EAU**



**Follow the Yellow Brick Road to nowhere in the EAU**

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



school, to the late placement of children in overnight shelter, to the overcrowded stressful conditions in the EAU that lead to illness and compounds the stress of homelessness for children.

Many parents have ACS cases filed for educational neglect by their children's schools for excessive absences or lateness, in many cases for families with no prior experience with the ACS system.

**Recommendations:** Open an EAU in every borough and place children in overnight shelters in their home borough (except in cases of DV where this may endanger the welfare of the mother).

Ensure that in each EAU, families with children are taken to their overnight placements no later than 7pm for children to have a chance to rest, eat and prepare for school the next day.

For parents who have not yet been found eligible, allow them to take children to school from the overnight placement and then go to the EAU to wait for their eligibility determination.

Provide the parent with written confirmation for their child's school that they are applying for shelter in the EAU so that the teachers and school administrators are aware and provide special assistance to the child.

EAU staff should establish a point person to work directly with the homeless children's liaison in the school system.

### **ABUSIVE PHYSICAL CONDITIONS:**

**Findings:** The EAU continues to be roach and rat infested. It is dirty, water fountains are routinely not working, the metal benches offer no contouring or support and are extremely uncomfortable, the temperature control is inadequate and the food is often expired, moldy or otherwise spoiled. If these conditions existed in someone's home, they would be found abusive by ACS, if they existed in a restaurant or cafeteria it would be cited by the health department. The overcrowded conditions are sufficient reason for the fire marshal to close the building.

**Recommendations:** Allow for twice weekly inspections by the health department of the entire building as well as the food preparation area until conditions are improved.

Allow for weekly inspections by the fire marshal.

Replace the metal benches with a more comfortable bench.

Maintain water fountains, temperature control and cleanliness. Establish a point person for each shift that can be held accountable for this.

Contract with a new food service provider.

### **Americans With Disability Act/Health Issues**

**Findings:** The EAU doesn't have a client bathroom that is wheelchair accessible. Administrative policies such as routinely denying passes to go to doctor appointments, mental health or substance abuse treatment



providers violate persons rights with disabilities. For mobility impaired clients they have to go outside the building to go into the basement/cafeteria and in the case of fire would be trapped in the basement with no escape. Families with special dietary requirements are not offered food choices putting them at risk. If more than one family has a contagious illness they are all placed in the same quarantine room where they run the risk of infecting one another (example, head lice with chicken pox with the flu)

**Recommendations:** Open an EAU in every borough and ensure that each is equipped for clients who are mobility impaired including persons in wheelchairs.

Change administrative procedures to remove barriers for clients with Doctor appointments or those who need to attend treatment.

Immediately place families with a family member who has a contagious illness in their overnight placement, not a quarantine room at the EAU.

For families with documented special dietary needs accommodate them through food vouchers or extra cash allowance.

### **Staff Professionalism/Accountability**

**Findings:** EAU staff are notorious for unprofessional conduct including cursing at clients, yelling, arbitrarily closing the window for people to request a pass, having hot food delivered while clients go hungry in the waiting area, threatening clients with being logged out as a means to establish control in the building, peace officers are used to intimidate clients for caseworkers and we have even heard of many instances of sexual harassment of clients in the EAU. *Clients, desperate to be found eligible are extremely vulnerable to abuse.*

**Recommendations:** Publicly post the Homeless Bill of Rights approved by the DHS Advisory Board in English and Spanish, which includes a grievance procedure.

Establish a client advocate inside the building and hold staff accountable. Include the DHS management in monthly DHS Advisory Board meetings for regular feedback from clients.

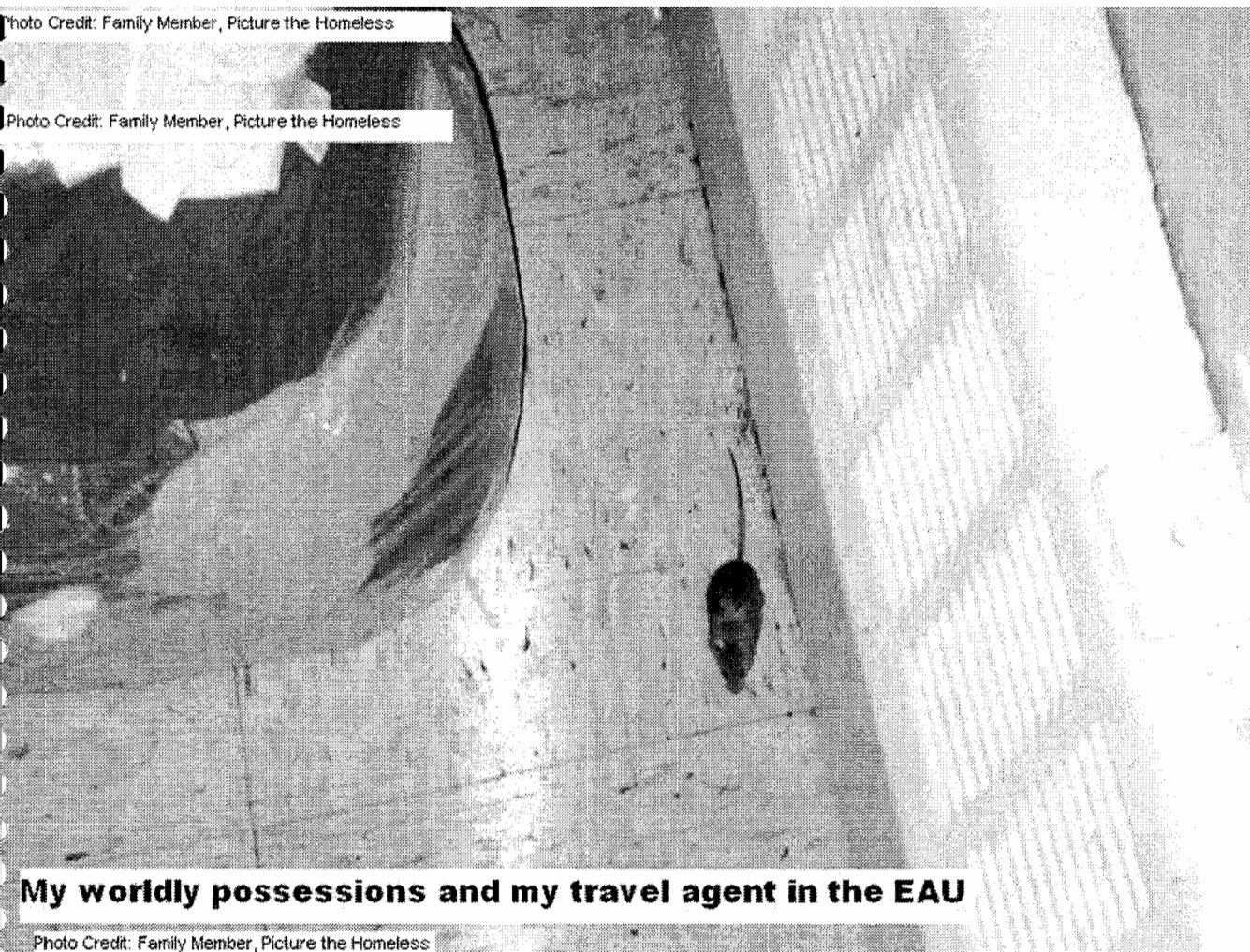
Include peace officers in monthly meetings to ensure compliance with the law.

### **SUMMARY**

Opening an EAU in every borough with a corresponding decentralized borough based overnight placement system will be the greatest single step towards alleviating the problems identified above. In addition, EAU staff must be integrated into the DHS advisory board process so that they can be held accountable, as well as made aware of systemic issues from the client perspective.

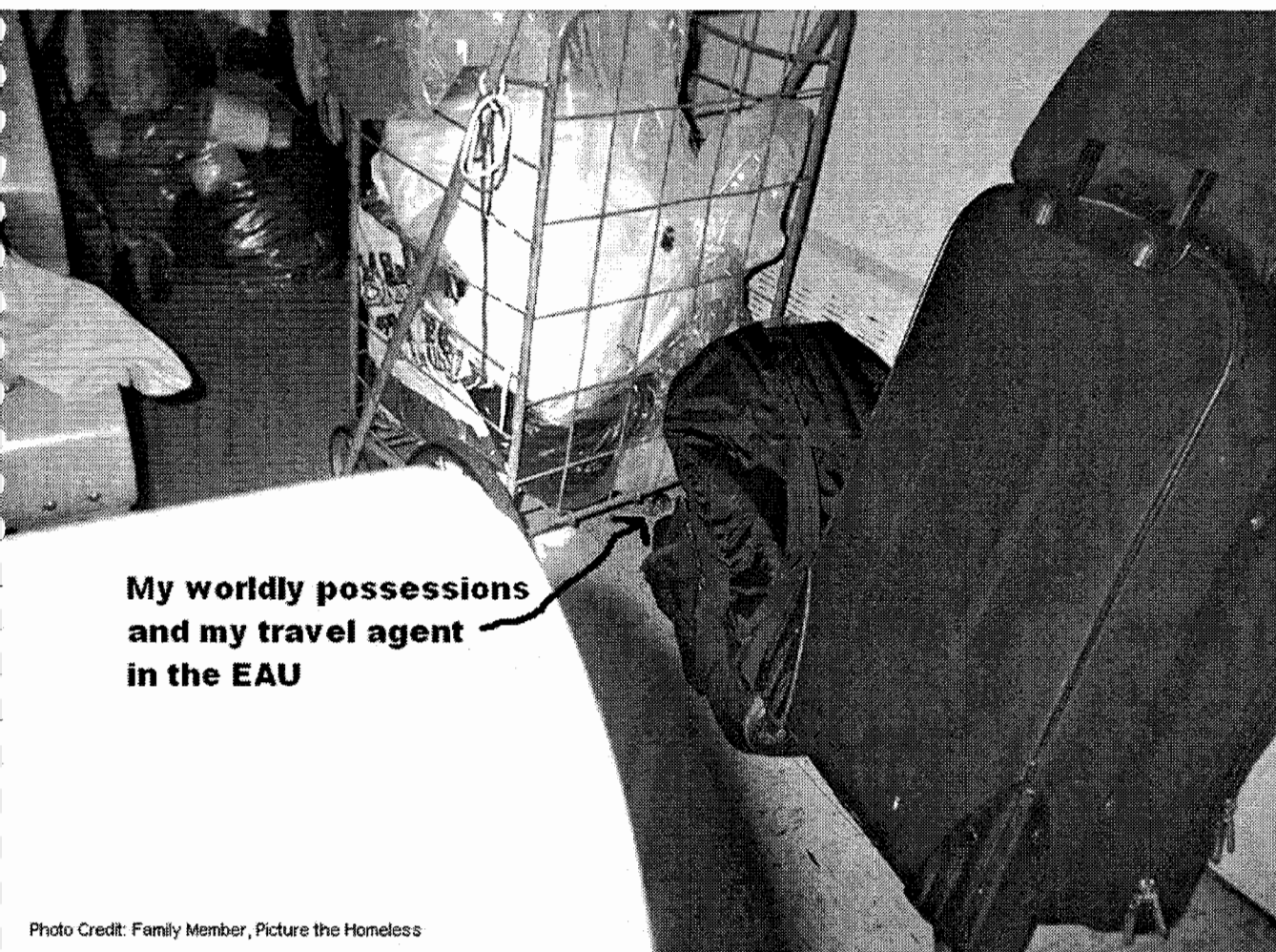
Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



## **My worldly possessions and my travel agent in the EAU**

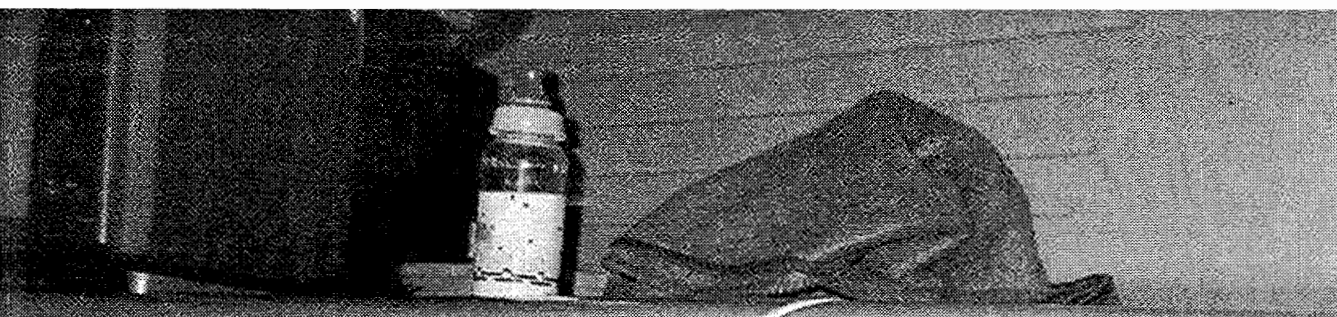
Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



## **My worldly possessions and my travel agent in the EAU**

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless





**My baby isn't crying over spilled milk, she got frightened by a rat in the EAU**

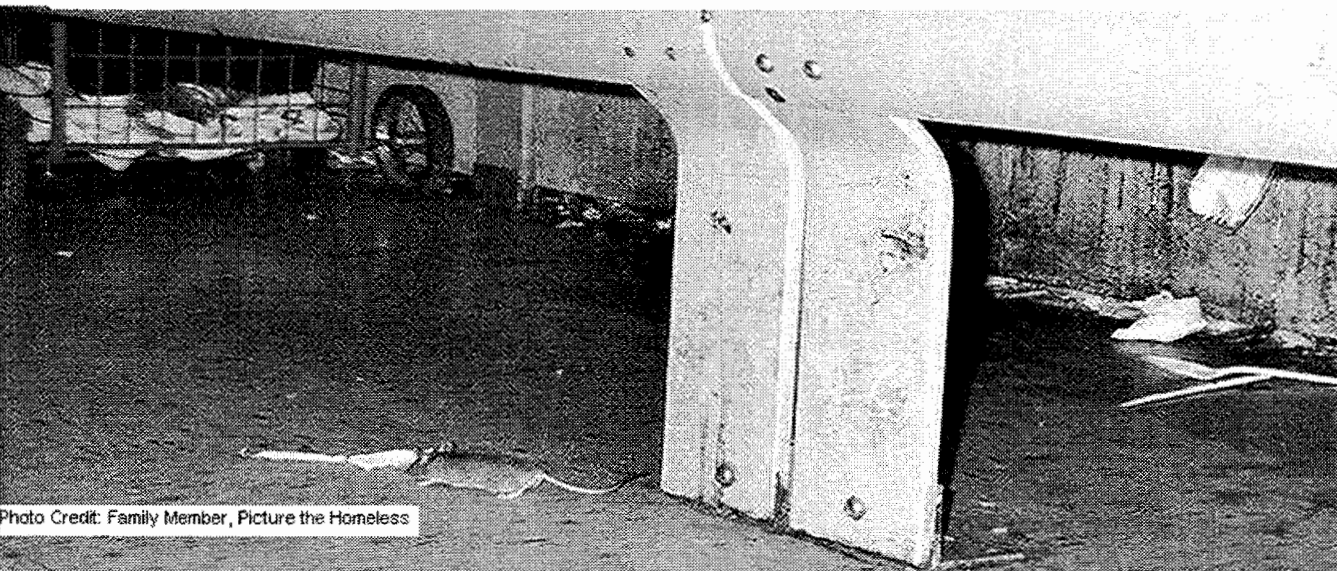


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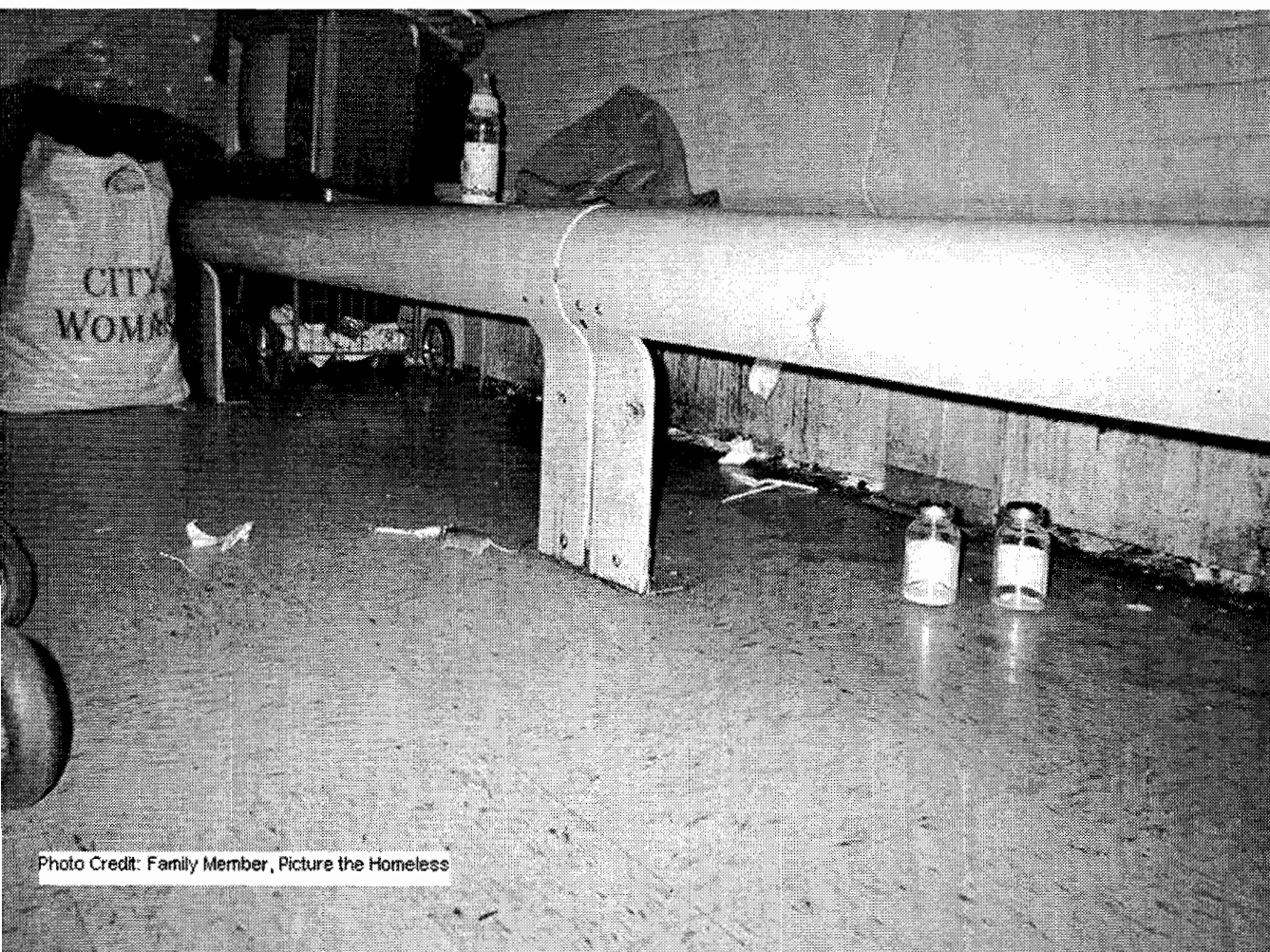


Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless

**EAU Preliminary Survey**  
**The Impact of the EAU on Homeless New Yorkers with Disabilities**  
**Picture the Homeless**  
**May 2003**

Staff and members of Picture the Homeless conducted surveys of homeless families randomly selected for interviews outside of the EAU during the week of May 13, 2003. Because access inside the EAU is restricted, we were not able to independently verify our findings but the survey results are consistent with testimonies taken from homeless families over the 18 months.

### **Wheelchair Accessibility**

- The EAU is not wheelchair accessible. From the outside of the building there is a ramp leading to one level of the building. Inside of the building there are no elevators and the bathrooms are not accessible. Because it is the only access point into the shelter system for homeless families with children, pregnant homeless women and couples without children there is not alternative place for homeless families in wheelchairs.
- The lack of wheelchair accessibility violates the Americans with Disabilities Act and present real and immediate danger to persons in wheelchairs in the EAU. The cafeteria is downstairs and persons in wheelchairs must go outside the building, down the sidewalk to the lower level entrance.
- The bathrooms are not wheelchair accessible. In order to use the bathroom, persons in wheelchairs must be physically lifted in many cases through the doorway and onto the toilet. They are unable to carry out necessary personal hygiene activities.
- Families report not being placed in over night shelters because there aren't available placements that are wheelchair accessible.

### **Mobility Impairment (use of walkers or canes)**

- Persons whose mobility is impaired to the point of using walkers or canes must either use stairs to go downstairs to eat or go outside the building and walk down the sidewalk to the lower level. There is only one interior staircase to the cafeteria and in the case of fire, persons with impaired mobility face tremendous risk of death or injury.
- Persons with mobility impairments with children report receiving no assistance with going up and down stairs carrying children and their belongings.

### **Disabilities due to other Medical issues**

- 75% of families surveyed that the food in the EAU does not meet the dietary guidelines required for their health issues which include but are not limited to high blood pressure, diabetes, or kidney problems. Families are not allowed to bring in food to meet their special dietary needs and report being "logged out" of the system if they leave to buy appropriate food which means they have to reapply all over again.
- 60% of families surveyed indicated that the conditions in the EAU is making their children's asthma worse. These conditions include rodents and pests, filth, dust, asthma machine stolen, stress, and poor medical care within the EAU.



- There is only one quarantine room for persons with infectious illnesses including TB, chicken pox, influenza, measles, head lice or scabies. If people have any of these conditions they are placed together in the quarantine room.

## **Disabilities due to Mental Health Issues**

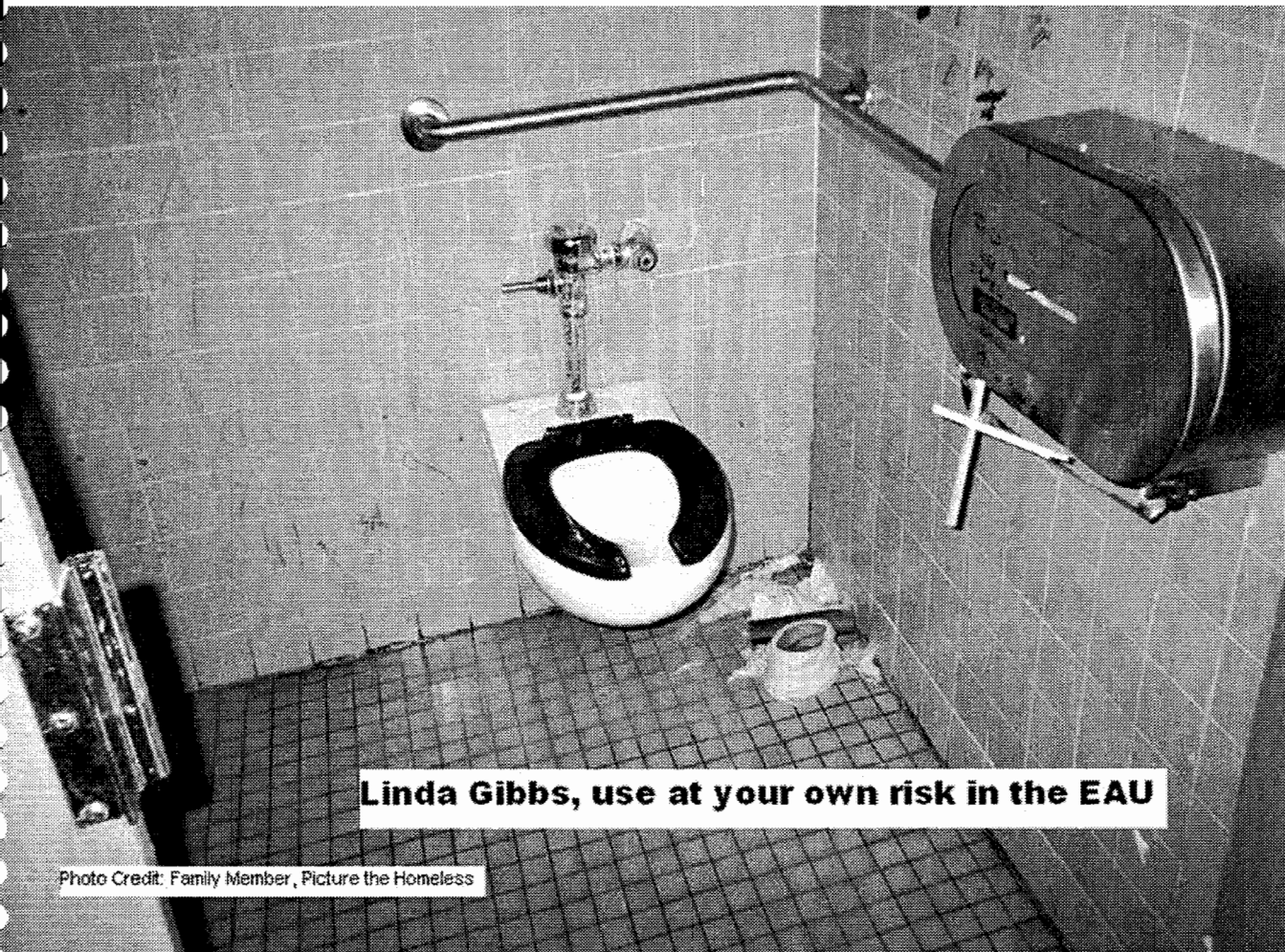
- 72% of families interviewed report an increase in mental health problems.
- Families report missing mental health appointments due to a lack of transportation money and EAU staff refuse to assist.
- Families report that staff make offensive comments because they are in treatment for mental health issues.
- Families report that they have encountered problems with ACS staff because of their mental health issues.
- Overcrowded conditions contribute to unbearable stress for persons with mental health issues.

## **Disabilities due to Substance Abuse Issues**

- Families report being unable to get passes to leave the EAU to attend substance abuse treatment.
- Families report being disrespected or treated differently by EAU staff for having substance abuse issues.

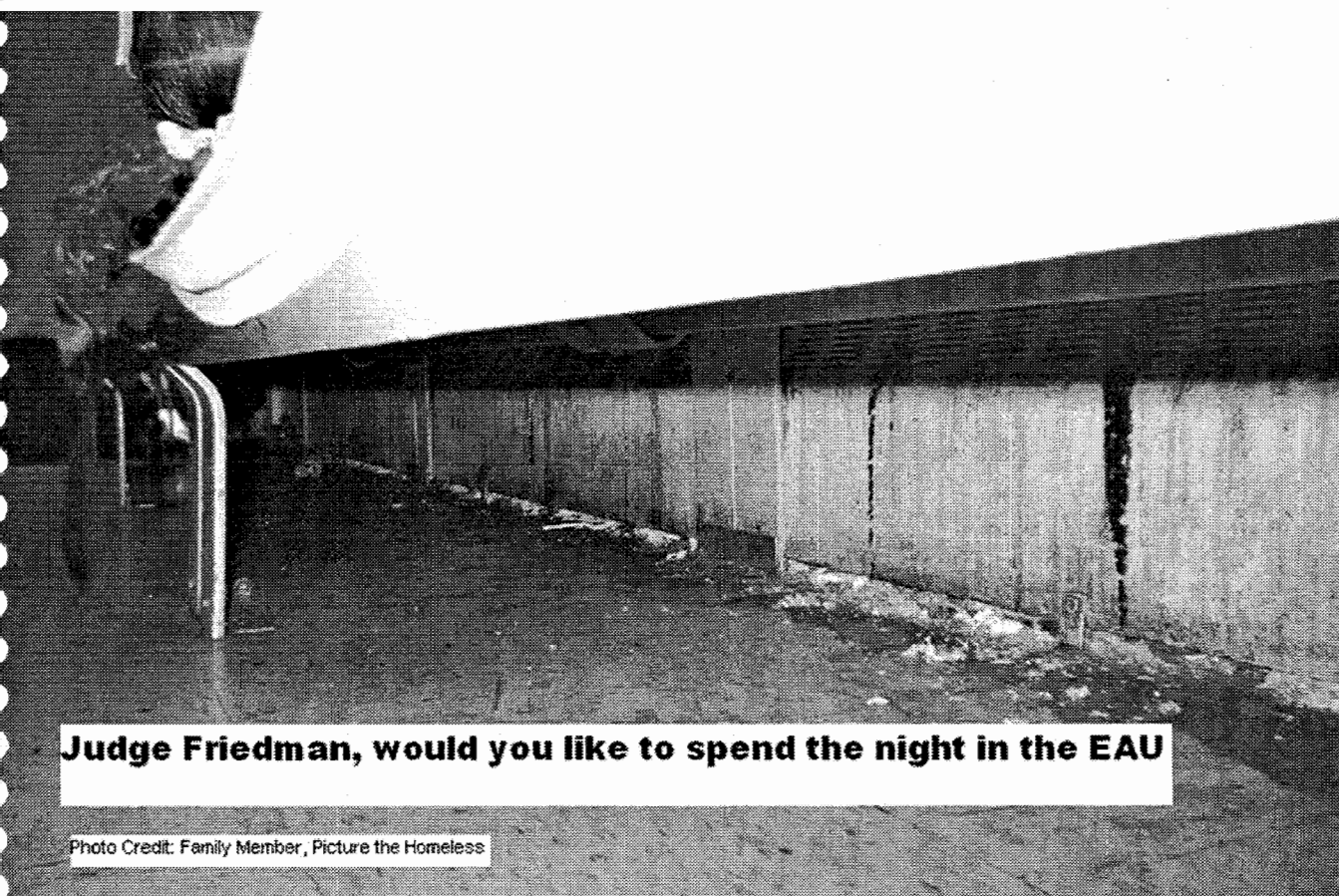
## **Solutions**

- Open an EAU in every borough that complies with all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- End the “fast track” practice of not allowing families to leave the building for any reason, including medical appointments, buying food, picking up medicine or taking kids to school.
- Ensure that the EAU meets all applicable fire codes and will allow for multiple escape routes in case of fire for everyone including persons with disabilities.
- Maintain *every* facility serving homeless children and families clean and free of dust due to high levels of asthma among homeless children.
- Develop and provide all DHS staff with training on meeting the needs of homeless people with disabilities, including physical impairments, mental health issues and substance abuse issues.
- Meet the dietary needs of homeless families whose disabilities and/or medical needs mandate special diets.
- Mandate that the newly created homeless panel take into account the needs of families with disabilities in their assessment and evaluation of the homeless service system.



**Linda Gibbs, use at your own risk in the EAU**

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless



**Judge Friedman, would you like to spend the night in the EAU**

Photo Credit: Family Member, Picture the Homeless

## PICTURE THE HOMELESS

### EAU Survey Results

June 4, 2002

Picture the Homeless conducted a survey during the month of May, 2002 to uncover the conditions experienced collectively by homeless families in the EAU. The survey questions reflect the most common concerns voiced by homeless families during outreach, phone conversations and concerns brought to our EAU Committee by homeless families directly impacted by EAU.

Survey questions were divided into the following categories:

- Eligibility
- Space/Food
- Staff Problems
- Placements
- Civil Rights

***This survey demonstrates that individual complaints by people who are homeless reflect an abusive system that is denying emergency shelter to homeless families through a process of intimidation, humiliation, and no accountability while the City of New York denies the crisis exists.***

May 2002 survey results reveal:

- 98% have been denied eligibility from 1 to 17 times and have been told they have somewhere else to go even with proof that they are homeless
- 47% don't know their rights to file a grievance
- 70% have spend from 1 to 50 nights sleeping in the EAU, including infants, pregnant women, school aged children and people with medical and mental health issues
- 89% report conditions in the EAU from dirty to filthy
- 85% report that the food is bad, including moldy food and sour milk
- 67% report that the food made them or their children sick
- 75% report unsafe numbers of people in the building
- 61% report that there is no ventilation
- 87% say that staff are disrespectful to people, including cursing, yelling, and physical assaults
- 73% report that it is unclear who is responsible for what
- 57% report that the overnight placements are dirty
- 45% report that the overnight placements are unsafe
- 35% report that the overnight placements are too far from their children's school resulting in missed days and children being held back
- 61% report that "they keep moving us around"
- 63% report that staff try to keep them from organizing and demanding their rights
- 55% report that they are threatened with losing their children to ACS if they don't comply

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**April 27, 2004**

My name is Angela Howell, I am a victim of the EAU. I along with my 10 year old daughter entered into the system as of February 21, 2004 and two months later here we remain. I am seven months pregnant and have had nothing but stress pressed upon me while being in the EAU. I carry heavy suitcases and bags of my daughter and my belongings back and fourth every night and day. I have been found ineligible 11 times. How many times and I going to be found ineligible, before I can be eligible for decent housing for my daughter and myself? Staff members do not speak properly to the clients. Asking them for help with anything is like talking to a hole in the ground. They speak words like "I'm in here, you struck out there waiting to be scanned to enter the building", or "at least I'm not getting on a yellow bus to take me somewhere, I have a place to live". That is no way to talk to someone who needs help, especially because those same people don't know whether they'll end up in the same situation somewhere down the line. My child has not been to school almost the whole time I have been in this horrible place. Her grades are dropping, and I feel like she will be left behind because of it. The school was going to call ACS on me, because of her attendance and lateness. All this is not my fault. I don't want or choose to be homeless. I have to try and have money to feed her from restaurants, because the food the EAU serve, I wouldn't feed to a dog. I need someone's help, because I need to get out of this situation. For the sake of my kids I need to be FREE!



**April 26, 2004**

My name is Mike Slater. My pregnant girlfriend, Dawn, and I entered the EAU on September 13, 2002. It took 5 days for us to get a 10-day placement, after which we were determined to be ineligible. We then had to go through the whole process again from the beginning. It took another 7 days for us to get a 10-day placement, and again we were found to be ineligible. We went back to the EAU again and started from the beginning. It took 4 days for us to get a 10-day placement, and this time they found us eligible for emergency shelter. We were placed in a hotel on 110<sup>th</sup> street in October. In November, Dawn was arrested because of an old warrant. I was told that I would have to leave because the shelter was for couples, or pregnant women, only. I was on the street again until February 2003 when Dawn was released from jail. At that time we once again went to the EAU. At this time, Dawn was 8 months pregnant. It took 5-days for us to get a 10-day placement. They found us eligible and placed us in another hotel. Dawn gave birth on March 15<sup>th</sup>. She was in the hospital until March 17<sup>th</sup>. A few days before she gave birth, we were given a notice telling us that we would be moved on March 19<sup>th</sup>. After she was released from the hospital with the baby we were told we had to go back to the EAU, with a 2-day old child, to get transferred to an appropriate shelter for families. We were placed in a shelter on 101<sup>st</sup> street. In May of 2003 we finally filed an application for Section 8 housing. In July, our son was removed by ACS. An ACS worker was allowed in our room while we were not home, and she determined that our room was in a neglected condition and therefore was dangerous to our son. We were moved to a different shelter. By this time, Dawn was pregnant again. This new shelter, The Gracie Inn, had no cooking facilities, the electricity would turn off a few times per day, and there was no air conditioning (or adequate airflow) which made our room unbearably hot. We were in this shelter until October. We were logged out of this shelter and had to return to the EAU. We were immediately found to still be eligible and given a 28-day placement. After the 28-day placement, we were placed in another hotel. Dawn gave birth on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The baby was immediately placed on an ACS hold, after which she was removed from the hospital by ACS. We are in the process of trying to get our kids back. We finally received an appointment for a housing interview on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

#### April 20, 2004

Hello, my name is Denise Reyes. I have been in the EAU for 3 weeks now. When I was there I was pregnant. I had to carry heavy bags, my daughter, and diaper bag up and down stairs. Sometimes I couldn't sit down due to people sleeping on the benches. That happened during the week of 3/30/04. On 4/08/04 I was in the hospital and I lost the baby. On that day, I was supposed to have my fair hearing, but I couldn't make it because I was in the hospital. When I had told the lady that I missed the appointment, she didn't even want to look at the doctor's note. I had to re-do everything so I took the one-shot deal. Diversion started to switch the story on us. First they said they pay for everything, and then they said we have to pay for half the first month's rent. Last they said we have to pay the whole first month's rent. We don't have any money on us or any money saved. All we want is help, that first push so we can get on our feet.

#### April 06, 2004

Hello, my name is Shatasha M Luker. I am hereby stating that the conditions in the EAU are horrible. My daughter, Kayla Monica Thomas, and I have been in the EAU for a month and we have been denied 7 times in that time period. My daughter has suffered through several asthma attacks because of how dirty and nasty that place is, and 2 weeks or more of overnight placement. They refuse to give me 8 hour passes so my daughter can have her asthma treatment on her machine. Instead, they only give me a 1 or 4 hour pass. They have logged me out on several occasions, twice because I had to take my daughter to the emergency room for her asthma, even though I showed them the papers from the ER. The EAU food is very nasty. My daughter got sick from drinking the milk there because it was spoiled and must have been sitting out for a long period of time. The bathrooms are nasty. There is no hot water, no paper towels, and the toilets are stopped up. The waiting area is so overcrowded, there is never anywhere to sit. It is also very, very dirty. Rats and roaches are all over the place. There is no fresh air coming in because the windows are broken and won't stay open. There is always a long line for passes and for the lunchroom because there is only a limited amount of seating. There are not enough outlets for me to plug in my daughter's asthma machine. My daughter never gets enough sleep because they don't place us in an overnight shelter until very late at night and they wake us up very early in the morning. We have both been sick for the last couple of weeks because our bodies never get enough sleep for us to recover. The EAU is trying to force me back into my mother's house, but we can no longer stay there. When they went to investigate my mother's house, they never entered the apartment to see for themselves that there is no place for us to sleep; instead they say we can sleep in the bed with my mother which is only a full-size bed.

**April 13, 2004**

Hello my name is Norman Cruz. I came to the EAU in January of this year with my son Lizando, I have been found ineligible 19 times. Since January I have been going back and fourth from overnight shelters to the EAU not knowing where I'm going to sleep. I feel my son is going to have a nervous break down. I haven't been able to send my son to school for two months now because of what we are going through with the EAU. He is in Special Ed. and he needs his schooling. I suffer with Sugar Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, and Asthma. When I came to the EAU I had to go through a metal detector and the security guards took my sugar diabetic testing machine. I was told that when I needed to test my sugar I could do so, but when I went to test my sugar no one was there with my machine. Now to this day the staff in the EAU says that they don't know what has become of my machine. I am not testing my sugar regularly like I'm suppose to, now I have to go to the hospital every time I want to test my sugar. The food in the EAU and the overnight shelters that they send us to is no good. My son and I both have gotten sick because of the food. We have witness other adults and children complaints about the food and how they have gotten sick also. The EAU is very nasty with DIRT, RATS and ROACHES! There is no ventilation, and they don't open windows. The staff is very disrespectful; when you ask them a question they answer you very nasty or not at all. The security guards are very abusive. I've seen them hit and curse at families in the EAU. All I want is a decent place to live with my son in New York. I've lived, worked, and paid taxes in New York for 28 years and my son was born here. The EAU wants to buy me a one way ticket to Puerto Rico. I have no one to stay with in Puerto Rico this is my home. I WANT TO WORK AND LIVE HERE!

**March 30, 2004**

My name is Teresa Santiago. The caseworkers in the EAU treat us like animals. They give us bad food that makes everybody sick, worst of all the children. They make us go from place to place going to sleep at all times of night and waking up too early in the mornings. My child gets no rest or sleep. The security guards from the EAU talk to us bad. The bathrooms are very nasty and stink, and they don't have windows that you can open so we can get fresh air. I would like to see things get better in the EAU for homeless families.

### **June 3, 2003**

I am Reina Hernandez and I have a 4 year old daughter. We have had to spend 2 nights sleeping in the EAU on metal benches. My child was rushed to the emergency room from the EAU due to our having to sleep on benches she spent one week with a neck brace. The situation that the EAU is putting children through is abusing them physically and mentally. They are unable to concentrate in school due to a loss of sleep and frustration. The EAU is sending us to overnight placements after midnight, sometimes as late as 4 am only to come back to the EAU early in the morning, so we are technically still sleeping in the EAU. Families with children need to be sent early enough to the overnight placement so that they can do their homework and get ready for school the next day.

### **June 3, 2002**

My name is April Johnson. The EAU tells you, you have a place to stay although you can't live there. I brought a letter from my mother stating that she didn't want me at her residence. It was notarized and the EAU said it wasn't good enough. The food that is served to you is spoil. My boyfriend ate a sandwich and bit into it and it had green spots on it. When you take out a pass to leave the EAU they call your name anyway, and when they don't see you they should look at their records and see that you are out. They don't do that, they threaten to log you out. They don't want to give passes, but what if you have to look for a job or take care of your business. They don't want you on welfare, and then they need to let you out to look for jobs even while you are dealing with this, so you can have some self-esteem. The bathrooms are nasty. People sleep here overnight on the benches. They give you placement for ten days after 2 days they find you ineligible. Then you have to come back.

### **May 30, 2002**

Our names are Rita Diaz, and Giovanni Roman. We have been here for 10 months, denied about 35 times because we gave them our mother's address in Puerto Rico. They tell us that we have a place in Puerto Rico – a room with my mother but we cannot live there. Overall, we have spent about 10 nights here. They said that all placements are full and that is why we have to sleep here. We slept here for 2 days recently, since then they are sending us around 2am to the overnight placement. Our daughter cries when we make her getup to go and then we turn around and have to wake her up at 6am to come back to the EAU. She is failing school this year. Our daughter is traumatized, every time she makes friends we are moved. They say that we have to place her in a new school near the new placement but we can't keep changing her schools. We end up taking her late to school from here (the EAU) because we have to come to the EAU first every day to apply for a pass. What happens is first, we get in a line for them to review our paperwork then we have to get in another line to get a pass to take her to school. Today for example, we got here at 7:30am and we didn't get out with our pass until 9am, by then it is too late to get her to school on time. Even though her school is in the Bronx near Yankee Stadium what we have to go through to get the pass makes her late for school. It would make more sense for them to give us a weekly pass so that we can get her to school on time. The food is bad, sometimes the milk is sour. I (Giovanni) have gotten sick from the food with vomiting and diarrhea. The bathrooms are filthy, the whole building is, and people are sleeping on the floor.



### April 10, 2003

Hi, my name is Luis Colon and my family (Natasha Almestica and son Alexis Colon) have been in the EAU since April 22, 2003. We have also been on the fast track program since May 2003. My family has been found ineligible since then because the EIU investigators keep telling us that we can go back to my wife's father's house to live. He tells them that we can't live there but they still feel we can. Because of being in the EAU my son has developed a medical condition due to being in the stroller for the past six months. EAU staff say that we couldn't take our son out of the stroller to teach him how to walk because the ACS people in there said that they would take him away from us because it was child abuse if he would be on the floor in there. About 2 months ago I was thrown out of the EAU at 2 o'clock in the morning with my wife and my child till 8 o'clock in the morning because I didn't have an overnight pass for my family. I have finally been put on legal hold due to my son's medical condition by the fair hearing judge and put into placement until I go back to court on Friday August 28, 2003 to see if we will be found eligible for emergency housing because my family have nowhere to live. Thank you for your attention I hope that you can help us.

### April 11, 2003

My name is Jose Salamanca. The Emergency Assistance Unit is supposed to be a place where families can go when they are evicted, had a fire or flood and if you are thrown out of your apartment with the proper documents. Although when you are in the EAU, the staff feels like they can say and do anything they want to you. When you ask them a question the first thing that comes out of their mouths is you are logged out. It's OK for them to treat you like dirt but when you do it back to them they are quick to kick you out. On Thursday July 31, 2003 my family and I were waiting for our names to be called for overnight, which is somewhere to sleep to then be return back in the morning. Our names were finally called for an overnight called Powers but when I went up to the window to try to explain to them that we can not go to Powers because a roach crawled in my son's ear and his mother had to take it out before it went in all the way, he told me "You go where we send you". I then told him that the overnight supervisor knows of this situation and he himself, changes the overnight if it says Powers and places us somewhere else for the night. When I said this to him he told me well the supervisor isn't here tonight so I asked to speak to his supervisor. He told me alright so I tried to explain to that supervisor the situation and his response was "Is not my fucking problem, you go where we send you otherwise be logged out". So I got very upset, maybe I could have handled the situation better but after three months of disrespect I lost my temper and punched the window that same night of July 31, 2003. I, Jose was arrested for creating a disturbance and trying to break the Plexiglas window which they say is State Property, even though I didn't break the window. The point of my story is that no matter what they say to you, they are still allowed to treat you like shit. I don't think it's right because most of us, did not want nor ask to be in the situation that we're in. Don't treat us like shit. The same thing that is happening to us can happen to anyone of those workers and investigators that work at the EAU/Overnight placements.

May 29, 2002

My name is Tashie Williams, my husband, two children and I have been denied eligibility at the EAU about 12 times. My daughters are 4 and 7 years old. My 7 year old daughter Mia hasn't been to school for about a month, or more, because by the time they bring us to the EAU in the morning and we get a pass to take her to school, it is too late to get her there on time because her school is in Brooklyn. They keep telling us that we are ineligible because they can't verify by phone that we are unable to stay at a previous address in North Carolina but that is not our fault. We have given them written proof that we can't stay at our previous addresses. We have been dealing with them since February, over and over. All I want is something stable that I can call mine. The last time that they placed us it was only for one night and then they moved us the next day. Last night we spent the whole night here because the worker logged us out. It seemed like she was in a hurry to go to lunch, she kept looking at her watch and asking us the same questions again and again. When she came back from lunch she logged us out even though we did everything she asked and didn't leave the building. Last night the whole box of milk that they brought out for dinner was spoiled. We complained and the man brought out more milk. I would like to ask the Judge why isn't she enforcing the law.

Agosto 2003

Testimonio de Victor J. Diaz: Llegamos de Puerto Rico hace 4 meses, y nos están pidiendo pruebas de nuestra residencia en PR y abogado. Les estamos trayendo los documentos que nos piden que prueban nuestra residencia, pero todavía se rehusan ayudarnos. Nos estan pidiendo cosas que son imposibles de conseguir. Quieren hablar con mi abuela, la persona con quien residiamos en PR, pero ella 85 años y no tiene telefono en su casa. Yo no se si el EAU quiere que instalemos telefono en la casa de ella para poder darnos casa. No se si EAU quiere hablar con la mascota para confirmar que nosotros viviamos en este lugar. El EAU esta jugando con los clientes y nos pone en peligro a diario. Mi mama tiene muchas condiciones como diabetes y una pierna lastimada, sin embargo la hospedaron en el quinto piso de un hotel sin elevador y llegando a su puerta se cayo por su condicion. Estamos pidiendo que paren estos abusos y que ayuden de verdad a nuestras familias que estan pasando por los peores dias de su vida. En ves de mejor la situación el EAU se vuelve en otra pesadia mas.

**May 21, 2002**

My name is Latisha Ramirez. I am four months pregnant. I have a set of twins that are two years old. Since there are so many problems, I can't handle both my kids. I only have one of my kids with me and the other with my best friend. Because of my difficult pregnancy I can't lift anymore than 10 - 15 lbs. Each of my kids are about 30 lbs each. Plus all the bags I got to carry are too much. I believe I am in danger of having a miscarriage. Please help me and the many others at the EAU. I have slept very uncomfortably or have had sleepless nights in the EAU without an overnight. They don't even pay people for sleeping on benches. I want to know where all the money is going for the homeless.

**May 10, 2002**

My name is Natasha Jackson. I have been denied eligibility 10 times and they say we can go stay with family but I have proof that we can't. We have stayed overnight on the floor with blankets. They gave out the blankets at 4:00am in the morning, that leaves you with 4 to 5 hours of sleep. The police security harasses people, chokes people, unnecessary action. The police at the EAU physically beat up on people just for raising their voices a little or a lot, or if the staff at the EAU tells them to get you out of here for raising your voice a little. My son is 4 years old and needs an operation on his nose to breath and he is a chronic asthmatic. He had a fever of 106, the nurse at the EAU took his temperature and said that he had none. I took him to the nurse at the overnight place and they called the hospital and rushed him by ambulance to the hospital. They sent us to a placement with live wires hanging out of the ceiling and no electricity. We had to buy candles at the store and roach spray because it was also infested with roaches.

**May 29, 2002**

My name is Shanequa Cuthbatson. I have been denied eligibility for 1 year. I just want them to find me eligible and get housing for me and my daughter so we can be happy.

**May 29, 2002**

Our names are Taina LaBorde, and Jorge Lopez. We have a 4 month old and a 1 year old baby. We all slept last night in the EAU. There were a lot of people sleeping in here on the floor. We had to reapply yesterday because they found us ineligible for the second time. They say we are ineligible because they lost a phone number we gave them. We have slept here 3 or 4 nights all together, other nights we don't leave until the middle of the night. They wake us up to go. My 4 year old son fell out of his stroller in front of the EAU around 12:30 or 1:00 am the other night because of this situation. They told us to come out and get on the bus to our overnight placement so we came out and I unstrapped him to get on the bus. There were a lot of people so then they said that the bus was too full and to wait for the next one. I put his stroller down and before I could strap him back in he fell out by accident and hit his head on the sidewalk. I immediately told the staff that he hit his head and needed to go to the hospital and that I needed an 8 hour pass to go. They said they couldn't do it because it was too late. I had already called the ambulance, my son was in the ambulance and I couldn't get a pass. I asked a police office to help me get a pass which he did. When we ask for passes sometimes we get them and sometimes we don't. The workers sometimes just say no, or ask where we are going and then they still might say no. Last night a cop wouldn't let me back in the EAU because he said that I had been in and out all day. I protested because I had just stepped out and I didn't want to get logged out and start all over. Another cop told the officer to let me back in which he did. All the milk this morning was spoil, and last night too. I want to tell the Judge to get this place clean and make the staff treat us right. Some staff won't even touch our paperwork unless she can wash her hands right away like we have diseases. Another staff person told me when I asked a question "Don't worry about it, you ain't nobody, you are just a number."

**May 29, 2002**

My name is Theresa Padgett. You need to come see this place whether it's morning, noon or night. They are rude, you can't bring food in here but they let you bring candy. You can rot your teeth but you can't eat good food, not even fruit. My point is come see what's going on, don't come as a city official, but come as a client, you will see. They never want to give their name when you ask, they are very nasty when you just ask a question. I have been denied eligibility 20 times. They say because I can live with my mother that is why I'm ineligible, but she's a crack head and my aunt also told them that. But they still try to send me back.



**May 29, 2002**

My name is Theresa Sanders-Dottin. They are abusing these children. I have two children, ages 13 and 14. My kids don't want to go to school since Tuesday. Here I am homeless and we can't get a place to live. They have no place for us to put our things or wash up. If you walk in there (the EAU) it's madness. Last night I just asked a question – actually my daughter did. She just wanted to know if we were going to be placed. The staff got very nasty and told her that I should have had a place for her in the first place. His name was Mr. Michelle Eversting. They feel that everyone here is poor and uneducated – I am educated, I've paid my taxes I know everything here is illegal. Every time they change shifts the next shift don't know anything. They need a coordinator for the kids, a place to play. This is no place for children. Staff are too busy fixing their nails and hair. When they announce things over the intercom we can't understand them, some of them have heavy accents. When we ask what they said, or if they called our names, they get an attitude and won't answer our questions. There is no way of knowing who is a supervisor here. They should have some kind of training for people here, there is no accountability for staff. I asked them what "diversion" is about. While I am trying to relocate out of state, why do I have to go back and forth, day after day. I feel like we are treated like a pig or a goat. Yesterday, a whole bunch of people came in after the long weekend complaining that they were ineligible.

**May 10, 2002**

My name is Jamina Rhyme. I have no where to go. Why would I come here if I had someplace to go. Why would I go through this my kids don't have proper care. They said that I could go to my mother's house, but it is already overcrowded. My kids don't eat in the EAU, we go to the placement at 2:00 am. It is overcrowded and smells, people sleeping on the floor. The kids get sick can't go out, can't get a pass. I asked three staff people a question, they don't want to tell me anything. One staff person in particular is very sarcastic don't want to tell you the name of supervisor. My son has lead poisoning. They have us placed in Powers in the Bronx, my child's school in Brooklyn.

**May 30, 2002**

My name is Mirta Maximo. They took my child the day before yesterday, based on "neglect of education". I have never had an ACS case before I came to the EAU, I have been here for about 1 year trying to get help. Because I haven't been able to take my daughter to school regularly, they reported me for "neglect of education". I explained to ACS why she didn't go to school – she had gone to 3 schools in 1 year, in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx because we have been placed all over the city. The ACS worker, Alexa Rodriguez, told me that I had to have a drug test the other morning, at 9am but I didn't get to the EAU from the overnight placement until 10:30 am and then I didn't have carfare to go the place to take the drug test. I tried to explain this to her but they took her away at 6:30 at night. My daughter has to repeat the first grade. Now she has been taken from me. We were better off in the street than here because they took my daughter in the EAU because I came here for help, not to lose my child.

**May 10, 2002**

My name is Samantha Rivera. Staff is very nasty. They yell at you. They say "I don't have to do your paperwork." They can just log us out if we say anything back to them. They laugh in our face when we come to talk to them about us being ineligible. They are very nasty when we try to get passes. They say I'm not going to take you now cause they didn't see us on line. And the people tell them yes, they was on line, so they don't take them neither. They make my child sleep on chairs, I mean cold chairs and she has bronchial asthma. Now she's on a machine because she got real sick there. If you have bags on chairs they take them down, and let people sit in your spot. They don't care about my child being sick. I stay in the EAU for 5 to 6 days, before I'm placed for the "10 day" placement. The placements are too far from the school. When we have to leave in ten days, when were are ineligible my babies cry and say they don't want to go back there (the EAU). Then the placements have roaches in them, and mice. The sink leaks, the tiles are coming up from the floors. They take the Picture the Homeless paper we get from the people on the street's and throw them in the trash. When I need help from them, they turn me away. We all need help!

**May 29, 2002**

My name is Ariela Aquino. EAU needs to stop forcing clients to go live with family members if the family members don't want the clients there. Especially when the clients family member has their rooms rented out to pay their bills since they have been laid off. EAU is telling my mother has to kick the tenant out to shelter me. But this is not a choice. Both of my parents have been laid off and they still have to pay bills and support the rest of the family with their needs.

**May 17, 2002**

My name is Benjamin Galarza. I came to the EAU for help with Emergency Housing but have been denied 12 times. They say we can live with family members even though I have proof that we can't. Me and my wife are both living with mental illness and like so many others who come to the EAU are made to sleep on benches sometimes 2 to 3 nights before going to an overnight shelter. They take us to the overnight shelter at 12 am, only to wake us up at 6:30am to bring us back to the EAU to wait. This situation has caused a great deal of stress on our mental health. I think that one of the solutions should be that people with documented disabilities, whether mental or physical should be given top priority and not made to wait so long for placements, we are human just like anyone else.

**May 18, 2002**

My name is Daisy Pressley. I am denied eligibility over and over even with an order of protection against my mothers' husband where they say I can go back to live. Every 2 days out of 16 tries I had to keep my kids out of schools. My daughter is being kept back because of missing school.

**May 29, 2002**

My name is Sharon Ellis and I am homeless. My husband kicked me out into the streets so I had to come and stay with my mother. She did not want me to stay with her so I had to come to the shelter and they keep giving me and my daughter the run around. They keep finding us ineligible because of my mothers' address until she lets the people come and talk to her about us staying there, but she will not allow them to come and talk to her that's why they say I am still ineligible

May 23, 2002

On Tuesday, May 21, 2002, my son and I went to the EAU to apply for temporary shelter. We arrived at 11:20pm but had to wait until after 12am because, according to the employee at the window, the shifts change at 11:30 and the next employee would take care of us. We were processed and found a place to sit. At 2:45am there was an announcement that we could go downstairs to the lunchroom to get something to eat and pick up our blankets. They had milk and bologna sandwiches with green mold on them. We threw them out and complained to the employee handing them out. He said that's all there is. When I asked for juice I was told that's only for breakfast; that I should drink milk. I don't like milk, and some people can't drink milk. His response was, "In the words of the Russians, 'Tev shivsky'" in tone that was clearly derogatory. I asked for plain bread, as did another client. I finally got two slices after being told that it was for breakfast; that the (kitchen) boss had instructed him not to give it out. When I saw the supervisor, I asked him if this meant we would be spending the night here (EAU). He said that was correct. There were too many families and so many children for such a small space. Some families were lined up against the walls sitting on the floor because there were no benches available. Some women slept inside the cribs with their children. I counted about 89 families present at EAU at about 4:00am. Everyone had to wake up at 6:00am to make room (!) for the families returning from overnight lodging! I had seen the triage nurse after midnight and the diversion unit Wednesday morning. Both gave me a copy of the forms they filled out for us. The medical form is blue and the diversion form is yellow. Later, there would be no copies in our file according to the co-supervisor of the EAU. We were now waiting to be seen by EIU. I got an eight hour pass with the issue time entered as 11:39am. I called and got a two hour extension. As I was passing by the front/security area to return the pass about 9:30pm, a DHS sergeant, who habitually harasses me (tried to have me arrested on false charges; make a child abuse complaint against me without even knowing whether or not I have minor children; etc.) saw me and mumbled, "...white b---- doing here..." and spoke to another security guard who was nearby. When I went to window #7 to find out our status, I saw the sergeant inside the EAU office speaking to a man who was later identified as a supervisor. He came around to me and demanded my intake papers. He said that if I didn't get my papers to him in five minutes he would personally escort us out. I asked him what this was all about. He said he would answer my question after he got my papers. I saw another worker and told him what happened. He told me I should give them the papers so they wouldn't log us out. I gave them to him and he headed over to see the supervisor. As I passed the #7 window, a staff person called me over and demanded my papers. I told her another worker had them. As he arrived inside the office where she was, she kept ordering him to walk back from the EAU office and around to me to return the papers to me so that I would hand them over to her through the window! Although the worker who had them was right next to her. Somehow, he managed to just pass the papers to me through the window. I then had to slide them back to her! She said my son and I had to leave because we didn't have any medical problems. Actually, we do. There were no medical papers in our file according to her. She would not give us a reason for throwing us out. I asked to speak to the supervisor, but the worker said he was out to lunch! Seems he did the dirty work and disappeared. Staff then came over with other security guards and proceeded to push and poke us as they "led" us to the sitting area so we could get our things and leave. They push my son very hard and became confrontational. He was daring my son to defend himself and continued pushing my son defiantly and into me. The other guard was also behind my son, on the right side. He was milder, but announced that, "We'll do it one way or another but (that they) were going to get (us) out of (there)." We got our things and left. Staff and others came outside enjoying what they had done to us. They made comments at, and mocked, us. Some clients were very sympathetic to us. We went to Lincoln Hospital and spoke to Thomas Kurien, CSW. He gave us a letter that we were there. He would also contact Mary Chapek, CSW, who was working there on April 20, 2002. We saw

her when we tried to attend our conference at EAU that night but we were not allowed in the building. She called them to find out why they weren't complying with their own rules (as per the form #4002 instructions) and they were rude to her. She was shocked that they would treat her like that. She said we could stay in the hospital waiting room. Mr. Kurien also said we could stay in the waiting last night. We did. We also made a police report at Lincoln Hospital. The police from the 40<sup>th</sup> precinct took the complaint and said it would be sent to the 44<sup>th</sup> precinct in about three days. P.O.'s Eckert #18713 and Halecki #5374 of 40<sup>th</sup> precinct took the report on Thursday, May 23, 2002, at about 10:40am.

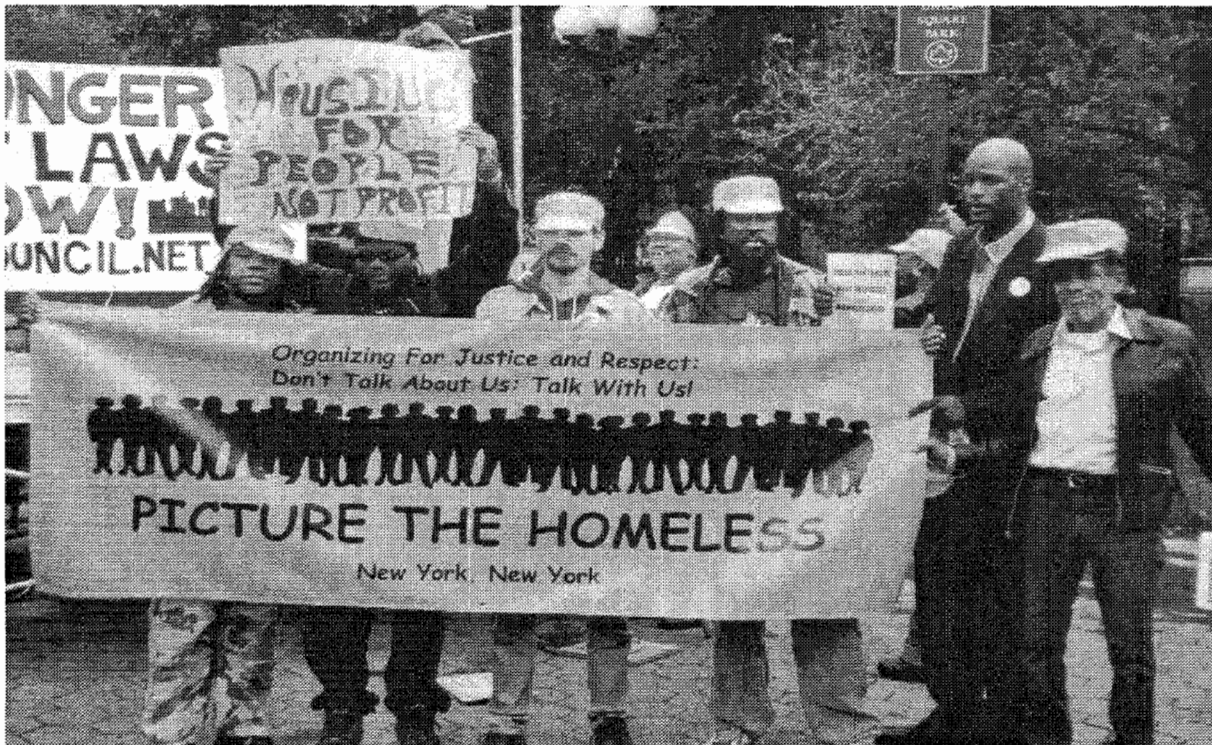


## **PICTURE THE HOMELESS MISSION STATEMENT**

Picture the Homeless was founded on the principle that homeless people have civil and human rights regardless of our race, creed, color or economic status. Picture the Homeless was founded and is led by homeless people. We refuse to accept being neglected and we demand that our voices and expertise are heard at all levels of decision making that impact us.

We oppose the quality of life laws that criminalize homeless people in any form by the city, state and national governments. We work to change these laws and policies as well as to challenge the root causes of homelessness. Our strategies include grass roots organizing, educating homeless people about their rights, public education, changing media stereotypes, and building relationships with allies.

**DON'T TALK ABOUT US, TALK WITH US!**



## **IMAGEN DE LOS DESAMPARADOS NUESTROS PRINCIPIOS FUNDAMENTALES**

Imagen de los Desamparados fue fundado en el principio que los que no tienen viviendas tienen los mismo derechos civiles y humanos que otros, sin excepción por sus raza, religion, color, o estatus economico. Imagen de los Desamparados fue fundado y es dirigido por gente desamparados. No aceptamos ser ignorados y demandamos que nuestros voces y entendimiento es tomado en cuenta a donde toman decisions que nos afectan.

No aceptamos los leyes y la politica que criminalizen gente sin vivienda por la ciudad, el estado o el gobierno nacional. Luchamos para cambiar los leyes y la politica y enfrentamos que es la causa de la falta de viviendas. Nuestra estrategias incluye organizando nuestro base, educando gente desamparados sobre sus derechos, educando el publico en general, cambiando el imagen de nosotros en la prensa, y desarrollando relaciones con otro organizaciones que nos conviene.

**NO HABLA DE NOSOTROS, HABLA CON NOSOTROS!**