



WTC RELIEF FUND REPORT

CAS REPORTS ON ITS WORLD TRADE CENTER RELIEF EFFORTS

FEBRUARY 2003

How The Children's Aid Society Continues to Help Primary Victims

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) began working on the day of the attacks to assist those who were particularly vulnerable—the surviving families of low-income, non-uniformed workers, the severely injured and service workers who lost their jobs. Our dedicated social workers have been working very closely with families to help assess their needs and respond appropriately. We have found a great need for financial assistance, especially with critical expenses such as rent, child care, tuition and food, as well as for mental health counseling and case management, where we link families to services such as after-school and job training programs. Thus far, we have committed almost \$6 million to this effort.

The CAS approach has been multi-dimensional; we have responded to these needs in a coordinated, sensitive and timely way. We have been instrumental in assessing the needs and concerns of our clients, determining their level of readiness and connecting them to appropriate services. For example, the emotional trauma experienced by the families whom we have been assisting was severely exacerbated by major financial concerns. While some were eager to seek bereavement and trauma counseling early on, many others simply could not address their emotional needs until their urgent financial situations had been resolved. We therefore have made a range of services continually available and we have developed a database to track the assistance we have provided to each family and anticipate future needs.

CAS has provided highly personalized care to these families, over 340, and are therefore better able to identify their needs and create individualized plans of service. We helped a mother find child care so she could attend a bereavement group and helped pay for a grieving son's weight loss program (in his depression he had gained over 50 pounds). We have referred many families on the verge of losing company-sponsored medical benefits to our facilitated public insurance enrollment program and we have found specialized tutoring and after-school programs for children who are now struggling academically.

Overriding Concerns: Child Care and Education. CAS has determined that child care and education are the most prominent concerns of our families. Before receiving assistance from CAS, many parents relied on the kindness of extended family members or neighbors, or simply did not leave their homes in order to care for their young children. In so doing however, they did not tend to their own healing and they did not pursue employment or the programs that will prepare them for their new roles as primary caretaker.

For virtually all of the families with whom we have worked, limited finances have posed a serious threat. Our caseworkers have processed thousands of requests for emergency cash assistance, used primarily for rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, education and food and clothing expenses. They have worked with over 104 families to develop long-term budgets. CAS has made multi-year financial commitments for expenses including school tuition, after-school programs, child care, summer camp and, in some cases, a stipend to assist with housing, clothing and food bills.

Entering a New Phase. We are now moving into the aftercare phase of our work. This involves reaching out to all 104 families to whom we have made long-term financial commitments and ensuring that they know whom, within The Children's Aid Society, they may contact with any emergencies or new issues they may encounter. And, of course, we will continue providing mental health services to all who need them.

New Curriculum Helps Kids Overcome Obstacles

All children need help building and honing skills that help them succeed in school and in the lives they choose to lead as adults. But some children have a better head start in learning and developing those skills than others. To address the many children who have not had that advantage, CAS has introduced *Overcoming Obstacles* in several of its community schools and programs.

We started using this curriculum prior to September 11, 2001 at our Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics community high school in East Harlem, as an after-school seminar for freshmen. Based on its success there, CAS adapted the program for younger students, and introduced it in September 2002 at Town Meetings in three of our community middle schools, I.S. 218, I.S. 90, both in Washington Heights, and at C.S. 98, our newest community school located in the south Bronx. The curriculum is also being used with the middle and high school students who participate in our New Heights student-athlete basketball program based at I.S. 90 and C.S. 98.

Overcoming Obstacles is a life skills curriculum that emphasizes communications, decision-making and goal setting, and aims to build resiliency, awareness, planning and organization.

"9/11 made using *Overcoming Obstacles* more urgent and relevant than ever before," states Richard Negrón, director of community schools for CAS. "It helps students look to the future. It develops leadership, and gives them a voice. We saw great results at Manhattan Center." The high school students developed game plans for college and for a work life after school, he said.

"We consider *Overcoming Obstacles* to be an effective curriculum that addresses the need of youth for planning and thinking about the future," said Philip Coltoff, CEO of Children's Aid. "We're hoping we hear from the kids through greater participation in programs at the schools, as well as directly through more feedback."

Letters from WTC Survivors and Clients Show Depth of Gratitude

Letters and notes of all descriptions have poured into The Children's Aid Society from many of the clients we have helped since the attacks of September 11th. The letters, especially those from the wives of victims, bear words of gratitude and hope.

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Evolving Groups Support Widows, Displaced Workers

The Children's Aid Society has been providing a range of mental health services to help people cope with the emotional toll of September 11th. One of the ways we have been helping widows and displaced workers is through support groups. Six groups were formed in total to address the various needs of our clients, including bereavement groups, groups for displaced workers and an advocacy group.

One bereavement group, conducted in Spanish via conference call with a mental health practitioner, Dr. Rashid Sherif, enabled clients located throughout the five boroughs and New Jersey to come together. This was especially helpful for these women who, due to their limited English, were reluctant to travel beyond their neighborhoods prior to September 11th, and after the attack were even more fearful of traveling.

Most members of this group were young mothers, one of whom gave birth after September 11th. Another had moved from a small village in Ecuador just prior to the tragedy. Through the weekly conference calls, they were able to express their grief as well as their frustrations associated with the struggles of daily life and the administrative obstacles to receiving benefits. A support network has been profoundly helpful for these women from other countries and cultures. They have found strength in each other, have developed meaningful friendships and no longer feel so isolated. And, as the following excerpt from Dr. Sherif, reflects, they have found the strength to move forward.

"A few days ago [December 2002], the Spanish speaking ladies... gathered together with their children for a party in the Bronx. They celebrated at the same time a housewarming, a teen birthday and their decision to [end the group and] move on with their new lives... Over the months, the group has grown and has developed greatly, going from the pain of their sudden and tragic losses to the joy of an emerging new life. With shared compassion, they have been taking care of each other at a distance through the phone during and between sessions, in person at Ground Zero and at funerals. Some of them became even close friends."

Displaced Workers Become Advocates. The displaced workers group has proven especially powerful; it evolved as the workers wished to take a more proactive role in conveying their needs and wishes to the city and other relief agencies. Therapeutically this group needed to speak out and regain some sense of control in their lives. CAS therefore formed an Advocacy Group that has focused on helping the members tell their stories and pursue ways in which their particular social and economic issues could be addressed. For example, group members wrote letters to officials expressing their frustrations about the lack of a coordinated government support program, and they attended Listening to the City, a citywide event that gave participants an opportunity to provide input into the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan and the creation of a permanent memorial.

Members of the Advocacy Group have been able to address their grievances and have also had a safe forum for expressing their fears and anxieties, feelings that many did not think their family members would necessarily understand. The fact that they frequently asked to extend the group session suggested to us that it provided great solace and support. CAS has found that with all of our groups, members are indeed finding strength in one another and a gradual will to move forward.

Hope Initiative in Full Swing

The CAS Hope Initiative—our effort to promote non-violence, leadership and conflict resolution skills among teens following 9/11—is in full swing. Since its launch last summer, the program has been reaching new audiences and generating considerable buzz within the communities served. Below is an update on the project's latest activities:

Teaching Parents About the Impact of Violence. The early childhood development component of the Hope project seeks to help parents understand the role victimization plays in their families. Parents are led through workshops on the stages of early childhood development, a perspective new to many of our families. We then use parenting skills workshops, training modules and targeted curricula to help parents see how violence and traumatic experiences impact their children, from infancy through young adulthood. This training is also provided to all of our Early Head Start and Head Start teachers so they can share this information with their clients. Once the parents have completed their training, they become group leaders and are encouraged to share their experiences. Our hope is that this training will provide parents with marketable skills that might lead to paying jobs.

Word Spreads About Hope. As more young people participate in our Hope initiatives, they are spreading the word to others. Currently, 70 teens are enrolled in the Hope Academy; our original class was 40. Students are excited to have a place to go after school and to learn leadership skills. Michael Roberts, Director of our Violence Prevention Services at Hope, reports that more and more young people and adults are coming to Hope headquarters at our Taft Center to find out how they can get involved. For instance, our first adult computer class had 10 students and now we have a waiting list of 20! Another encouraging sign of success is that Hope Academy students are now referring their parents to CAS for services as well as to talk about issues in their homes, whether it involves family violence, substance abuse or economic problems. Parents are seeing the positive effect on their children and feel good about coming in to seek our help.

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A few excerpts will show the depth of feeling expressed in these letters:

"I cannot thank you enough for what you have done to help me provide a better life for my family. I would also like to thank you for sending Karen Resnick into our lives. During the last (very stressful) 15 months Karen has always been a welcome voice in a sea of confusion."

"I and the children are very appreciative for all your help. I wanted to also call and thank you in person but things have been just a bit out of hand this week. But we go through stages so I'm hoping and praying that this stage ends very soon."

"We appreciate your wholeheartedness and genuine desire to assist us in our hardest and darkest time. We really appreciate you... We are grateful that you were put in our path. We appreciate that you've handled us with professionalism and how you've maintained an affable disposition!"

"There is no adequate way to thank you, from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done to help us... Your caring renews our faith in the goodness of people in a world of so much evil."