

Annual Report 2008

**Community  
Service  
Society** | Fighting Poverty  
Strengthening  
New York

# Rising to the Challenge

**Addressing Poverty  
in New York**



# Community Service Society

Fighting Poverty  
Strengthening  
New York

**The Community Service Society of New York** draws on a 160-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. Through applied research, advocacy, litigation, and innovative program models, we respond to urgent, contemporary challenges by pioneering programs for a more prosperous city. As millions of low-income New Yorkers struggle to keep pace with declining wages, insufficient benefits, and dwindling prospects for career advancement, the Community Service Society focuses greater attention on helping hard-working people rise above.

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**ADDRESSING POVERTY  
FROM EVERY ANGLE**

# 2008 HIGHLIGHTS

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As part of our strategy to promote **Economic Security for Low-income Families**, we launched the **Center for Benefits and Services** to provide integrated services and technical assistance in housing, financial assistance, and access to public benefits.

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Because **Expanding Access to Health Care** is critical to our constituents, we developed **Cornerstone for Coverage**, our own proposal for health care reform in New York State, and played a lead role in establishing the Health Care For All New York campaign, a statewide advocacy coalition.

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**Eliminating Barriers for the Formerly Incarcerated** means helping them understand their criminal histories and overcome objections by potential employers. That's why we created the **Record Advisor Project**, which trains volunteer mentors to be reentry advocates.

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We created the **Workforce Advocacy and Support Initiative** to address the complicated issues faced by young people as they complete workforce training and transition to employment—part of our strategy of ensuring **A Second Chance for Disconnected Youth**.

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A comprehensive evaluation of our **Experience Corps literacy program** demonstrated its powerful impact on reading achievement for struggling first- and second-graders. This is just one of the ways we are **Measuring Our Impact** to ensure that our work is effective.

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# A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP





## Two in five New Yorkers live on the razor’s edge of poverty.

Nearly 40 percent of our city’s residents—3.4 million people—are barely getting by on less than \$33,000 for a family of three.

Who are these New Yorkers? They are people you encounter every day—riding on the subway, taking care of your kids, greeting you from behind the security desk as you walk into work.

These are the modern poor, hard at work in low-income service occupations that are critical to making the city function. In fact, more than 80 percent of New York City’s low-income households with children include someone in the workforce. Many work in low-paying jobs that lack employer-sponsored benefits such as paid sick time or health insurance. They experience frequent hardships, often forgoing medical care or prescriptions, or falling behind on their rent or utility bills. These are CSS’s constituents, the people we represent as we advocate for change and a better quality of life.

Many other New Yorkers struggle at the margins of the working world, trying to get a foothold so that they can rebuild their lives. These, too, are our constituents: the “disconnected youth,” who are neither in school nor work; and the formerly incarcerated, who face daunting challenges as they seek to return to their communities and find gainful employment.

You’ll meet a few of these hard-working New Yorkers on the following pages. **Vanessa**, a mother and lifelong advocate for people in need, who works full time but struggles to keep the public health insurance that covers her necessary—yet costly—prescription medications. **Jessica**, a driven 19 year-old who recently aced the GED on her third attempt, and is looking forward to going on to college and building a career. **Richard**, who is pursuing every opportunity and taking advantage of every available resource in the hope of rebuilding his life after 14 years in prison. And **Virginia**, who, after a lifetime of working hard for her family, was evicted from her home at the age of 62.

Their stories are at the heart of what we do. Their struggles are the reason we take such an aggressive, comprehensive approach to helping people overcome the problems of poverty. Like Richard, we pursue every promising strategy—including research, advocacy, litigation, policy development, collaborative partnerships, and innovative service models—to help our constituents get on a path to upward mobility.

We have honed in on a set of issues that we believe are particularly important to ensuring New York’s future prosperity: bringing economic stability to low-income families; helping every New Yorker gain access to health care; and eliminating barriers to work that keep disconnected youth and the formerly incarcerated from becoming productive members of their communities. We believe these issues are especially important today, as our nation sinks deeper into financial crisis. As past experience teaches us, when recession hits, the city’s most vulnerable citizens—the working poor, young people, people with a criminal record—fall even farther behind, and they are the last to see the benefits of economic recovery and growth.

**CSS is an informed, independent, unwavering voice for positive action on behalf of New Yorkers living on the front line of poverty.** Our 360° approach means working from every angle to find solutions that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers. We’re proud to share with you some of our accomplishments from the 2007–08 fiscal year.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Sincerely,

**David R. Jones**  
President & CEO

**Mark M. Edmiston**  
Chair

# **ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR LOW- INCOME FAMILIES**





**In the financial capital of the world, too many New Yorkers keep coming up short:** struggling to pay rent, going without health insurance, and finding it impossible to access credit or save for the future. CSS works on behalf of countless individuals like Virginia Hindus who, despite holding a full-time job, find their lives overturned by financial emergencies.

We believe that, as a society, helping workers build a secure economic future should be our highest priority. Our approach is comprehensive, encompassing research, advocacy, policy development, and innovative wrap-around services. Our tools include expert staff members who understand the complexities of public benefits and financial management; researchers who identify problems and propose policy solutions; influential stakeholders who share our agenda; an extensive partnership of community-based service providers; and 7,500 passionate older-adult volunteers who are committed to improving their communities.

### Research

#### **Giving Voice to *The Unheard Third***

CSS continued to field and disseminate its annual survey, *The Unheard Third*, as a critical resource for understanding the hardships and concerns of low-income New Yorkers. *The Unheard Third 2007* revealed that poor and low-income New Yorkers—even those who work full time—face significant hardships such as falling behind in the rent, not being able to pay utilities, or going without health care or prescription medications. Among working poor respondents, 43 percent faced three or more such hardships.

In addition to sharing our findings with advocates, policy makers, and service providers, we use the survey to help define our service programs. For example, the fact that more than half of poor New Yorkers reported using non-banking financial services such as check cashing and pay-day loans informed the focus of our Financial Coaching Corps (see page 7),

**Sixty-two year-old Virginia Hindus worked as a pattern cutter for many years before becoming a stay-at-home mom in 1988.** Eager to return to work once her children were grown, she found little demand for her specialized skills in the changed garment industry. So, taking a school loan, she studied to become a nurse's aide. But despite finding a job in her new field, Virginia fell into a crisis.

With a monthly salary of \$1,600, she couldn't repay her \$3,000 loan on time. Interest quickly made the debt soar to \$6,000. The lender took her to court and her wages were garnished, causing her to fall behind in her rent. Soon she was illegally locked out of her apartment. Shocked to find herself in a shelter, Virginia says, "It is true. We really are a pay check away from being homeless."

Determined to work her way out, Virginia attended a CSS credit and debt workshop at the shelter. Thankfully, this decision set in motion the vital steps by which CSS helped her to take back her home and her life:

- Virginia first met with the CSS Financial Coaching Corps, and learned how to clear her credit history.
- They in turn referred her to CSS's Center for Benefits and Services (CBS), which helped her obtain an emergency hardship grant to cover the balance due on her rental arrears. This meant Virginia could go back to her home.
- She then met with a CSS tax specialist, who prepared her returns for years 2004–07. He discovered that she was actually entitled to federal refunds.

Today, Virginia works as an Admitting Clerk at a local hospital. It's not easy, but Virginia is committed to making it on her own. Her loan is paid off—putting an end to those monthly salary deductions—her rent is covered, she keeps to a tight budget and, with her new financial education, she feels more secure.

## Dispatches from *The Unheard Third*: Half of all low-income New Yorkers report having less than \$500 in savings.

### Preserving Affordable Housing

CSS engaged in extensive research and advocacy to preserve and expand affordable housing and provide relief to struggling renters. Here are some of our recent successes:

- Lobbied for passage of the Shelter Allowance Equity Act, which will result in a \$47 million annual addition to New York City Housing Authority revenues to alleviate its operating deficit.
- Lobbied the New York City Council to secure \$14 million to rehabilitate distressed project-based Section 8 housing after owner transfer.
- Recommended a state preservation fund, which was created to provide \$54 million for Mitchell-Lama preservation through favorable refinancing of Mitchell-Lama buildings.
- Helped secure an amendment to the New York City administrative code that protects Section 8 voucher holders from housing discrimination.
- Released *Making the Rent: Who's at Risk? Rent-Income Stresses and Housing Hardship Among Low-Income New Yorkers*—a look at which households are most at risk of extreme rent-income pressures and hardships.

which helps low-income New Yorkers build financial stability—starting with opening a bank account. The survey also supports our advocacy work. Our finding that there was significant support among New Yorkers of every income level for the expansion of state health insurance programs was an important tool for our partners in the Health Care For All New York coalition and other groups seeking universal health care (see page 10).

### Service

#### Comprehensive Resources Under One Roof

In 2007–08, CSS launched a new Center for Benefits and Services to house a broad array of services for low-income New Yorkers and community-based organizations. Through its technical assistance component, the Center offers in-depth information about public benefits and housing programs for social service providers. Through its client services component, the Center provides one-on-one benefits counseling as well as financial assistance for those families facing a crisis and for which government assistance is not available.

First-year accomplishments include trainings and consultations with 1,021 service providers; comprehensive updates on more than 70 public benefits programs provided to 1000+ subscribers to the Center's *Benefits Resource Manual*; and one-on-one assistance to 322 clients, resulting in the prevention of 167 evictions. The Center also developed a database system to track client outcomes and identify trends, with the ultimate goal of improving services and developing policy solutions.

### Volunteerism

#### A Wrap-Around Approach to Financial Stability

Through its long-running and renowned Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), CSS conducts three coordinated programs to promote economic security for low-income New Yorkers:



**Advocacy, Counseling, and Entitlement Services (ACES)** helps clients determine eligibility and apply for Medicaid, Food Stamps, SSI, Public Assistance, housing, and many other government benefit programs. Volunteers receive extensive training—56 hours over 14 sessions. In 2007–08, ACES volunteers helped 7,699 clients at 45 community-based organizations.

**The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)** program provided tax preparation assistance to more than 5,000 clients in 2007–08 and filed more than 7,500 returns. As an example of their impact, volunteers conducted a series of tax days at the Hour Children Food Pantry in the Bronx, helping to bring more than \$18,000 in tax credits and refunds to a single community.

**The Financial Coaching Corps** was launched in 2008 to build the financial capabilities of our constituents. Volunteers are trained to serve as financial coaches who help clients to create budgets and set financial goals; obtain and review credit reports; access public benefits and tax credits; and open a bank account.

**“Clients who come to CSS enjoy ‘one-stop shopping’ services. They have access to experts in finances, entitlements and benefits, and taxes. One client summarized her experience with CSS by telling me, ‘I have my personal Dream Team here.’”**

—RSVP Financial Coaching Corps volunteer Reyes Irizarry

### Advocacy

#### Convening Experts to Build Momentum for Change

CSS convenes leaders and decision makers to develop strategies for improving the economic security of low-income New Yorkers, working with partners at the city, state, and federal level to promote our agenda.

- In June 2007, we launched *Working For Change: Advancing an Economic Mobility Agenda for Low-Wage Workers in Urban America*, a series of monthly forums held in Washington, D.C. *Working For Change* brings together legislative staff, advocates, and others to identify and promote policy solutions that increase workers’ wages

and improve workplace benefits. The series is sponsored by CSS in collaboration with the Coalition on Human Needs and is coordinated by Dr. William Spriggs, CSS Senior Fellow and Chair of the Department of Economics at Howard University.

- In March 2008, CSS sponsored a day-long **Working Poverty Summit** jointly with SEIU Local 32BJ, the National Employment Law Project, and NYU’s Wagner School of Public Service. More than 150 parties participated, including union leaders, city and state elected officials, advocacy organizations, community-based service providers, and academic researchers.

### Solutions

#### New State Program Creates a Path to Security and Opportunity

CSS seeks policy solutions that provide opportunities for low-income New Yorkers to gain economic security by advancing to better jobs. In 2007–08, CSS led a coalition of leading advocacy organizations that successfully pushed for the creation of a \$5 million state Career Pathway program. The program is funded through an innovative collaboration between the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and the state Department of Labor. The program will provide funding for education and job training services linked to careers in high-growth sectors of the economy. The program will also fund integrated support services, enabling participants to advance to higher levels of education and training and, ultimately, to living-wage jobs.

# EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE





### **Vanessa Perkins knows the value of having an advocate.**

As a life-long New Yorker and activist, she speaks out for causes close to her heart, such as children with special needs. With Vanessa, you know you're in the presence of someone who gets things done.

But when Vanessa was facing her own challenges in accessing health care, she turned to CSS. "People think it's degrading to ask for the help they're entitled to, and that has to change. It's empowering. CSS gave me the strength to tackle this situation."

Like many hard-working New Yorkers, Vanessa doesn't receive health insurance from her employer. Her salary makes it very hard to pay \$150 in monthly prescription costs to treat the high blood pressure that led to a mild stroke four years ago. "It's a heavy burden, worrying about your life-saving medication," she says. "I can't miss a day." Vanessa's medications are covered by Medicaid, but she recently lost coverage following a move, when her re-enrollment packet got lost in the mail.

Vanessa took action, contacting the State Department of Health to get her Medicaid application approved. But seven months later, she was still waiting to hear back from them.

Then she called CSS's NYC Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program (NYC MCCAP). When NYC MCCAP Helpline staff found that Vanessa's information was not in the Medicaid system, they located proof she had applied, followed up, and kept Vanessa constantly updated on the status of their efforts. Nine months after Vanessa's initial application, her Medicaid benefits were reinstated retroactively, meaning her out of pocket prescription expenses would be reimbursed.

Of New York City's 1.2 million uninsured residents under age 65, half are eligible for public health benefits, but don't receive them\*. Says NYC MCCAP Contract Manager Elizabeth Jean-Jacques, "Our goal is to get everyone who's eligible for insurance enrolled, and to make sure people like Vanessa don't get lost in the system."

\*Source: NYC Mayor's Office of Health Insurance Access, "Public Health Insurance Participation in the Community Districts of NYC", September 2004

## **2.5 million people in New York State lack health**

**insurance.** An even higher number are underinsured, with limited benefits, or premiums, deductibles, and co-pays that make health care unaffordable. According to a recent CSS statewide poll, more than one in five New Yorkers have gone without needed medical care because of a lack of money or insurance.

Access to affordable, quality health care is of critical importance to our constituents—low-income New Yorkers who are just one health crisis away from hunger, bankruptcy, or eviction. That's why we've made health care a centerpiece of our agenda. Our activities in 2007–08 have included extensive research on health care affordability and access; developing our own proposal for achieving universal access to health care in New York State; leading a statewide campaign aimed at achieving comprehensive health care reform; and helping tens of thousands of New Yorkers gain access to public health insurance programs.

### **Research**

#### **Understanding the Uninsured**

In the last year, CSS completed several studies aimed at proposing solutions to the health care crisis and securing public support:

- **Polling.** We expanded *The Unheard Third*, our annual survey of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers, to include questions on health care affordability and support for reform. We also documented a steady decline in employer-sponsored health insurance among low-income workers in the six years since we introduced the survey.

In 2007–08, CSS conducted its first-ever statewide poll on health care reform. The poll revealed a deep level of support for health care reform among New York residents, who ranked it as the number one issue they want elected officials to act on.



- **Affordability Analysis.** CSS conducted qualitative and quantitative studies to better understand how health care costs affect the family budget. We interviewed hundreds of individuals and families from across the state, reviewed their financial information, and tracked their demographic information. We also prepared an analysis of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), a national dataset tracking how much Americans spend on health care. We estimated that 73 percent of the population in our region spend less than 7 percent of their gross family income on medical expenses, and that 61 percent spend less than 5 percent. We also reviewed the academic literature on health care affordability. This analysis helped CSS to determine a minimum floor for health care affordability: any health reform proposal should require New Yorkers to spend no more than 2–7 percent of their gross income on health care, depending on their means.
- **Immigrant Analysis and Racial Disparities.** Expanding coverage to all residents regardless of immigration status would allow New York to cover immigrant families, not just their children (who are already covered under New York State’s Child Health Plus program). CSS has estimated the number of undocumented immigrant adults that might participate in a universal health care program in New York State. CSS is also developing a proposal to reduce racial and ethnic health care disparities in public health insurance programs.

## **Solutions**

### **Cornerstone for Coverage**

CSS has unveiled a detailed proposal for achieving affordable, high-quality health care coverage in New York State within five years. The plan, called Cornerstone for Coverage, is centered on expanding New York State’s successful Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus programs. The plan will expand access to insurance to everyone through an affordable, progressive sliding fee-scale that is based on detailed actuarial analyses and extensive research on what New York families can afford. The plan offers comprehensive benefits, includes coverage for immigrants, and is open to participation by unions and employers. CSS’s plan is influencing the health reform debate and is being actively discussed by New York State policy makers.

By proposing our own plan for health care reform and orchestrating a campaign that unites and engages groups from a variety of sectors, our intent is to ensure that affordability is central to the conversation on health care reform, and to build sufficient support to enable the government to implement health reform that meets the needs of all New Yorkers.

## **Advocacy**

### **Health Care For All New York**

CSS was a leading partner in organizing the Health Care For All New York (HCFANY) campaign, a broad statewide coalition of more than 60 organizations. The campaign has united around 10 Standards for Affordable, Quality Health Care, which will serve as a benchmark for evaluating any reform proposal considered by the state. CSS maintains a web

## Dispatches from *The Unheard Third*: Only 33% of working poor New Yorkers report receiving health insurance from their employer.

site, [www.hcfany.org](http://www.hcfany.org), which allows members and supporters to stay up to date on the health reform conversation.

On May 28, 2008, HCFANY organized a People's Public Hearing in Albany, New York. More than 200 advocates, elected officials, and concerned citizens turned out to hear testimony from 27 individuals who had been personally affected by the failure of our health care system. Their stories were put forward to ensure that any reform proposal considered by the state reflects the needs and experiences of real individuals.

### Service

#### Accessing Public Health Insurance

Two ongoing CSS programs provide services to tens of thousands individuals every year, helping them to access public health insurance plans and make better use of their benefits:

**The Medicaid Choice Education Project (MCEP)** works with a network of 50 community-based organizations that educate and assist Medicaid beneficiaries who are required to join managed care plans. Our partners provide one-on-one client assistance with enrollment and problems using Medicaid managed care plans. In 2007–08, MCEP conducted over 1,300 trainings and presentations in five languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Haitian/Creole, Chinese), attended by over 15,000 individuals. In addition, we provided direct assistance to 180 individuals.

**The Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program (NYC MCCAP)** served more than 13,000 clients through one-on-one counseling sessions and educational workshops. To date, the program has assisted over 150,000 individuals, helping to educate consumers about their benefits, enroll them in managed care plans, and assist them in navigating the complexities of the system. NYC MCCAP works with a network of 26 community organizations to bring consumer assistance to underserved neighborhoods throughout the city. NYC MCCAP recently expanded its services to the South Asian and Middle Eastern communities, adding Arabic, Bengali, and Punjabi to its list of 12 languages served.

### Protecting Child Health Plus

In 2007, New York State proposed an expansion of its Child Health Plus program to cover low- and middle-income families earning up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Higher-income families would also be eligible to purchase insurance, making health care accessible to all New York children. When federal funding for the proposal was blocked, the CSS legal team took action:

- In December 2007, on behalf of Make the Road New York, CSS filed an administrative appeal of the federal government's denial of New York's State Plan Amendment to expand eligibility for Child Health Plus in a proceeding before the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services.
- In January 2008, CSS joined a team of lawyers to file *Miles v. Leavitt*, a federal court challenge to the federal administration's rejection of New York State's proposal to make its Child Health Plus health insurance coverage accessible to all children in New York.

The Child Health Plus expansion went into effect in September 2008—without federal support. CSS continues to advocate for a reinstatement of federal funds to protect this important benefit for New York families.

# ELIMINATING BARRIERS FOR THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED





**In New York City, the formerly incarcerated are overwhelmingly concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods.**

CSS believes that entrenched poverty cannot be eliminated without removing barriers and creating pipelines to help those excluded from the labor market enter employment—particularly those returning from prison. This population faces multiple obstacles to successfully rebuilding their lives; chief among them is finding a job.

In 2007–08, CSS established a Mass Imprisonment and Reentry Team comprising staff members working on reentry issues in advocacy, policy, litigation, mentoring and volunteerism, and direct service. The team is engaged in short- and long-term planning to develop collaborative solutions that address the multiple ways that poverty and mass incarceration intersect in the City of New York.

**Advocacy**

**Reentry Roundtable Unites Advocates**

CSS continued to convene the successful New York Reentry Roundtable, a monthly series of discussions, information sharing, and agenda setting for advocates and providers working to help the formerly incarcerated overcome barriers to successful reentry. Notable presenters in 2007–08 included Eddie Ellis (Medgar Evers College); Safiya Bandele (Center for Women’s Development); Juan Cartagena (CSS); Larry White (formerly incarcerated now with The Fortune Society); Glenn Martin (The Fortune Society); Hon. Robert Doar (Commissioner, New York City Human Resources Administration); and Robert Gangi (Correctional Association).

In May 2008, the Roundtable held its second Albany Advocacy Day—a day long engagement with legislators and legislative staff in Albany led by members of the Roundtable and organized and sponsored by CSS. Nearly 100 formerly incarcerated individuals participated in the event, along with other advocates and supporters. Roundtable

**Richard Bonner is a man on a mission.** Released from prison in 2008 after 14 years of incarceration, the Harlem native is focused on providing for his family: succeeding at his job, stabilizing his finances, and, ultimately, starting his own business selling hand-sewn crafts and greeting cards—a skill he taught himself while in prison. “In the months that I have been home,” says Richard, “some people have told me I have accomplished more than some who have been home a year.”

Richard knows he needs to work extra hard to get where he wants to be, so he draws on the multiple resources of the Community Service Society—and partner organizations in the reentry community—to overcome barriers along the way. “You have to be willing to push yourself,” he says. “I want to do all that I need to for my family.”

Richard got involved with CSS when he was teamed up with a volunteer from CSS’s Financial Coaching Corps, who then referred him to CSS’s Planned Reentry for Incarcerated Adolescents and Adults program (PRIAA), a site-based coach/mentor program emphasizing career placement and education. Through PRIAA, Richard completed a record repair program, which helped to prepare him for his job search.

Now he has a job as a kitchen worker and is on the path to a full-time union position with benefits. Meanwhile, Richard’s PRIAA business coach, an older adult volunteer with extensive retail experience, is helping Richard create a marketing plan for his crocheted toys and greeting cards.

Richard knows the tough barriers facing those who are formerly incarcerated, but feels optimistic, thanks in part to the support he’s gotten from CSS. “I see now there are people who really do care and who really want to help.”

“I’ve got so many goals! Establishing myself financially, getting a secure job, an apartment, and then creating my own business. I want to get myself together, to get back on top.”

# Did you know? 27,000 people are released from prison each year in New York State.

## Legal Challenges Impact Policy

CSS continued efforts to confront barriers faced by the formerly incarcerated in employment, housing, and voting rights through legal challenges to discriminatory state, local, and federal policies:

- **Hampton v. Hogan**, a suit challenging New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) policies that impede persons with prior felony convictions from working in the mental health field.
- **Rice v. OASAS**, which overturned the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services' decision to deny Mr. Rice his license to be a substance abuse counselor because of his criminal record.
- **In re Medina**, an administrative proceeding on behalf of an applicant who was denied Section 8 housing because of a four-year-old misdemeanor-level drug conviction.
- **Hayden v. Pataki**, a constitutional and Voting Rights Act challenge to New York laws that disenfranchise persons with felony convictions while they are incarcerated and while they are serving parole.
- **Walton v. NYS DOCS**, a challenge to excessive telephone surcharges for collect calls from prisoners to their families.

members promoted a comprehensive legislative agenda to address pressing issues in the areas of reentry and mass imprisonment—including a proposed \$10,000 tax credit that would provide an incentive for employers to hire people released from state prison.

### Volunteerism

#### Mentors Help Plan for Successful Reentry

Through the Planned Reentry for Incarcerated Adolescents and Adults Program (PRIAA) of the CSS Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), CSS pairs trained older-adult volunteers with incarcerated individuals and those recently released from prison to prepare them for successful reentry. PRIAA coach/mentors work closely with their clients to provide comprehensive assistance in addressing barriers to employment, housing, education, and other areas. In 2007–08, 17 volunteers coached 75 clients from the following organizations: Getting Out & Staying Out, the Horizon Academy on Rikers Island, the Osborne Association, the NYC Department of Corrections, Goodwill Industries, the DOE Fund, Arbor Education & Training Program, and the Women's Prison Association.

### Service

#### Clearing the Hurdles to Employment

Building off of the successful RSVP/PRIAA model of using trained older-adult mentors to help the formerly incarcerated overcome barriers to successful reentry, CSS created the Record Advisor Project to help people with criminal records understand and manage their criminal histories. CSS legal staff trains PRIAA coach/mentors in the following areas:

1. Helping individuals to request, read, and repair their rap sheets and eliminate inaccuracies on their record. Prepared with an accurate rap sheet, along with the knowledge to handle questions from a potential employer concerning their record, these individuals are in a much better position to seek and keep employment.



**“Just as a credit report can contain errors, so can a rap sheet. CSS helps clean up those errors.”**

—RSVP/PRIAA Project Director Hazel Beckles-Young Lao

2. Assisting the formerly incarcerated in applying for Certificates of Relief from Disabilities that allow them to access public housing and bypass licensing laws that bar people with criminal records from employment in more than 100 occupations in New York State.
3. Providing ongoing representation of people in judicial and administrative forums who are illegally denied employment and licensure because of their record.

CSS legal staff also provided over a dozen “Know Your Rights” trainings to service providers—many of whom are members of the New York Reentry Roundtable housed at CSS. The trainings outline legal protections against employment discrimination, how to handle a criminal record in a job interview, and tools for educating employers about the benefits available to them when they hire the formerly incarcerated.

### **Solutions**

#### **Workforce Development Proposals Pave the Road to Work**

In 2007–08, CSS began the process of crafting and promoting effective workforce development strategies to better serve the formerly incarcerated and other groups that face barriers to participating in the labor market. We are encouraging these

important investments to help the hardest-to-employ move from poverty to opportunity.

CSS developed a comprehensive transitional jobs proposal for New York State, in collaboration with Community Voices Heard, to provide 4,000 paid transitional job slots in high growth industry sectors—such as child care, health care, social and human service, clerical/administrative assistance, transportation, and construction/outdoor maintenance. These industries represent sectors with opportunities to earn a good living for individuals without a college degree. The proposal targets two populations excluded from the labor market in large numbers: public assistance recipients, and the formerly incarcerated. The proposal covers six essential components that are vital to the program participants’ success: temporary paid subsidized work, education and training, case management, support services, permanent job placement and retention, and accountability measures to track progress. Working with the Fiscal Policy Institute, CSS developed a return-on-investment analysis that shows significant state and local cost savings from the proposal: for public assistance recipients, an initial \$17 million investment would result in \$60 million in savings. For the formerly incarcerated, an initial \$32 million investment would result in \$96 million in savings. We have begun to share our proposal with state leaders and policy makers to build momentum and lay the groundwork for this initiative.

# A SECOND CHANCE FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH





**More than 163,000 young people in New York City between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither in school nor in the labor force.**

When we add the number of young adults who are actively seeking work but unable to find it, the number grows to 220,000—nearly one in five of the total age group. These young people—largely youth of color from poor communities—are at high risk of becoming permanently disengaged from the labor market, threatening their ability to break out of the cycle of poverty. CSS has focused on a range of efforts to catalyze significant public and private investment in reconnecting young people to career development alternatives that would ultimately lead to economic advancement and civic engagement.

**Research**

**What’s Available for Disconnected Youth?**

Released in June 2008, *Out of Focus: A Snapshot of Public Funding to Reconnect Youth to Education and Employment* documented all existing city funding or “recuperation” services available to re-engage disconnected youth in work or education. The report found that existing public education and workforce funding for programs targeting young people serves no more than 7 percent (12,000) of the 163,000 disconnected young people through targeted programs. With so few targeted slots, more than 25,000 young people seek services in adult programs, which are not designed to support their needs.

CSS recommendations, outlined in the report, include: increasing the level of investment in services; coordinating support across funding streams toward the creation of a single, unified system; and developing accountability measures for reintegrating the members of this population back into the economic and civic fabric of New York City. CSS sponsored a public forum, made targeted presentations to elected officials and others, and garnered media coverage to help promote the findings and raise support for policy solutions.

**It wasn’t too long ago that Jessica Liriano fell into the category of “disconnected youth.”**

As she tells it: “I was living on my own; I was depressed; not in school, and without my GED.” Having dropped out of high school in the 11th grade, she had already taken and failed the GED test twice, and was unable to find a job to support herself.

At the age of 19, Jessica enrolled in a GED prep class at New Heights Neighborhood Center, a community-based agency that helps transition disconnected youth to education and employment. There, she received an intake assessment by CSS Case Manager Shaista Qazi, who was assigned to New Heights through the Workforce Advocacy and Support Initiative (WASI).

But three months later, Jessica left New Heights—before taking the GED. She had gotten a job at a pharmacy and was working long hours. Her immediate financial challenges took precedence over studying.

Shaista remained undaunted. Over the next several months, she kept the door open, calling Jessica with information and encouragement. When Jessica hit a financial crisis, Shaista helped her apply for food stamps and regain her footing.

Nearly one year after first encountering the support and resources of WASI and New Heights, Jessica found the courage to again take the GED test. Not only did she pass, but her scores were high enough to qualify for acceptance at a four-year college.

Jessica is now working with New Heights staff on financial aid and college applications, along with a new job search. She feels confident about her future, which is now about connection: to work and to school. And Shaista will stay connected to Jessica, just in case any other obstacles arise. “At WASI,” she says, “no case is ever ‘inactive’ before a client’s goals are met.”



### Service

#### Easing the Transition to Work

CSS created the Workforce Advocacy and Support Initiative (WASI) in 2007–08 as a three-year pilot model to address the range of support service needs that workforce development participants commonly face—personal and family problems; child care, health care and mental health needs; access to government benefits that can supplement low-wage work—as they transition to employment. While most workforce programs attempt to provide assistance with these needs, many have neither the expertise nor the capacity to offer long-term case management, and government contracts do not sufficiently support these types of activities. The consequences include high levels of attrition, low job retention, and little wage advancement. WASI targets this service gap, providing comprehensive wrap-around supports to employment program participants, adding value and capacity to existing services. We believe that this approach has the potential to significantly improve program completion, job placement, and employment retention outcomes—and to do so in a cost-effective way.

The program targets disconnected youth, who face significant challenges as they transition into the workforce. CSS partners with three agencies that serve this population: New Heights Neighborhood Center, Inc.; Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation/Youth LEAD Program; and Year Up. CSS case managers are trained to complement and support the work of these organizations by providing clients with extended and comprehensive services, including:

- Help securing work supports, such as food stamps, child care subsidies, and health insurance;
- Referrals for health and mental health issues;
- Financial education (including opening up first bank accounts), tax preparation, and cash grants; and
- Overall motivation and encouragement toward program completion and job retention.

The WASI program was launched in January 2008, and served 113 clients in its first six months, with all outcomes and interventions being carefully tracked by CSS. By the end of the pilot implementation, we will determine the effectiveness, by cost as well as outcome, of a single agency training and providing case management services to a range of providers.

### Volunteerism

#### Mentoring Youth in Need

CSS directs its most significant resource—the services of older adults who participate in the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)—to support disconnected youth. Two volunteer-driven programs serve the needs of this population:

- **The Mentoring At-Risk Youth Program** focuses on adolescents in the foster care system and alternatives to incarceration programs. Twenty volunteer mentors provide services at four community-based organizations: Uth Turn, Concord Family Services, Red Hook Community Justice Center, and the Center for Community Affairs.
- **Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents** is staffed by 30 volunteers who provide mentoring with an academic and asset-building focus. Services take place at partner organizations including Hour Children, the Osborne Association, and Women’s Advocate Ministry.

# Did you know? Research shows that attachment to the workforce at a young age is the best predictor of long-term success in the labor market.

## Advocacy

### The Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce

In 2007–08, CSS continued its work with United Neighborhood Houses and Neighborhood Family Services Coalition in leading the Campaign for Tomorrow's Workforce (CTW) coalition, which comprises more than 50 youth-serving and advocacy organizations. The CTW developed a multi-year advocacy strategy to increase and focus investments in youth reconnection programs and policies, specifically advocating for: a targeted workforce development program for disconnected youth in New York City (the *Tomorrow's Workforce Initiative*); a young adult literacy funding stream for disconnected youth who read at very low levels; and programs that connect GED graduates to college and careers.

## Solutions

### CSS in Washington: Federal Proposals Put Young People to Work

More than half of the *Working For Change* forums (see page 7) in 2007–08 focused on disconnected youth, with the goal of sustaining a steady public focus by engaging a range of stakeholders to develop policy solutions. Through this and other efforts, two policy proposals were developed:

- Congressman Charles B. Rangel and staff from the Committee on Ways & Means worked on the creation of a federal tax credit to encourage employers to hire disconnected youth. CSS collaborated with the New York City Partnership and Corporate Voices for Working Families to bring this effort forward.
- CSS led efforts to work with Congressman Jerrold Nadler and his staff to draft legislation to create a federal Transportation Corps, which would use federal transportation funds to re-engage disconnected youth and young adults in programs that developed their skills while engaging them in activities that rebuild and maintain our national infrastructure. CSS developed the concept paper in collaboration with The Corps Network.



## What's Ahead for Disconnected Youth

In July 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama addressed issues of urban poverty at the Working Cities series, co-hosted by CSS and Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union. CSS President David Jones asked the senator about his vision for addressing the issue of disconnected youth. Here's how he responded:

"The amount we could be spending is inexhaustible. But if I can get \$6 to \$8 billion a year starting off to demonstrate in some key urban areas that these programs are working and that we're seeing a lower recidivism rate, we're seeing these young people—these young men in particular—start taking part in their families and being involved in their communities, then I think that we can expand it. We can build on significant success."

# MEASURING OUR IMPACT



## Highlights of the Experience Corps Evaluation

As compared to a control group, first- and second-grade students tutored by Experience Corps members showed impressive gains in several areas:

- Significantly greater improvement in reading comprehension skills.
- Significantly greater gains on the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System, the New York City school system's standardized reading assessment.
- Greater school-year gains on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), which measures literacy acquisition skills. Tutored students increased their PALS scores by an average of 69.2 points, while students in the control group averaged an increase of 49.9 points.

CSS employs a number of measures to ensure that our work is effective and representative of our constituents' needs.

**Polling:** Through *The Unheard Third* (see page 5), our annual survey of low-income New Yorkers, we are able to track poverty with comparative data on hardships suffered year-to-year—critical information for policy makers and other stakeholders, which allows us to see what's working, and what's not. The survey also enables us to be a better voice for our constituents, helping us to craft solutions that respond to the needs and priorities of the very people we seek to serve.

**Data Collection:** Our Center for Benefits and Services (see page 6) documents client strategies and outcomes. In 2007–08, we designed a new database system that will build on our partnerships with other service providers, tracking our results across multiple client interventions. We are excited by the potential of this tool to determine trends facing low-income New Yorkers, inform effective policy responses, and ensure that our services help clients to improve their lives over the long term.

**Independent Evaluation:** One of our most successful service projects is the Experience Corps literacy program, a model that CSS launched in 1996, which has since become the flagship of a national movement. The program brings together a cadre of ethnically and racially diverse older-adult retired volunteers, a network of public school sites, and a meticulous, research-based approach to help children who are at risk for academic failure improve their reading skills.

In 2007–08, we received the results of a rigorous independent evaluation conducted by Washington University in St. Louis and Mathematica Policy Research. The research findings show that Experience Corps has a statistically significant and substantively important positive effect on the reading abilities of first- and second-graders (see sidebar). With proof of the program's efficacy now in place through an impartial third-party evaluation, we intend to bring Experience Corps to scale with public support.

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# Financial Statement

## Condensed Consolidated Statement of Activities Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2008

CHANGES IN NET ASSETS:	Unrestricted Net Assets	Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	Permanently Restricted Net Assets	Total
<b>Public support:</b>				
Contributions	\$427,229	\$288,185	–	\$715,414
Foundations	471,721	1,414,810	–	1,886,531
Trust income	487,403	906,207	–	1,393,610
Bequests	1,053,334	–	–	1,053,334
Greater New York Fund/United Way	3,992	103,157	–	107,149
New York Times Neediest Cases Fund	–	1,087,739	–	1,087,739
Government grants	–	6,098,708	–	6,098,708
Contracts	675,000	–	–	675,000
<b>Total public support</b>	<b>3,118,679</b>	<b>9,898,806</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>13,017,485</b>
<b>Revenue:</b>				
Investment income	(9,734,745)	(2,144,631)	–	(11,879,376)
Change in fair value of beneficial interest in perpetual trusts	–	–	(1,579,176)	(1,579,176)
Loan interest income	1,096	–	–	1,096
Program service fees	149,802	–	–	149,802
Change in investment in The United Charities	(26,564)	–	–	(26,564)
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>(9,610,411)</b>	<b>(2,144,631)</b>	<b>(1,579,176)</b>	<b>(13,334,218)</b>
Net assets released from restrictions	12,467,828	(12,467,828)	–	–
<b>Total public support and revenue</b>	<b>5,976,096</b>	<b>(4,713,653)</b>	<b>(1,579,176)</b>	<b>(316,733)</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>				
<b>Program services:</b>				
Direct service program	12,718,372	–	–	12,718,372
Policy research and advocacy	2,816,602	–	–	2,816,602
Public interest	546,715	–	–	546,715
<b>Total program services</b>	<b>16,081,689</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>16,081,689</b>
<b>Supporting services:</b>				
Management and general	3,372,620	–	–	3,372,620
Fundraising	656,970	–	–	656,970
<b>Total supporting services</b>	<b>4,029,590</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>4,029,590</b>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>20,111,279</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>20,111,279</b>
Change in net assets before other charges	(14,135,183)	(4,713,653)	(1,579,176)	(20,428,012)
Pension and postretirement benefit adjustment	(1,442,107)	–	–	(1,442,107)
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(15,577,290)	(4,713,653)	(1,579,176)	(21,870,119)
<b>NET ASSET—Beginning of year</b>	<b>108,300,184</b>	<b>29,814,816</b>	<b>62,800,920</b>	<b>200,915,920</b>
<b>NET ASSET—End of year</b>	<b>\$ 92,722,894</b>	<b>\$25,101,163</b>	<b>\$61,221,744</b>	<b>\$179,045,801</b>

**Condensed Consolidated Statement of Financial Position  
Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2008**

<b>ASSETS</b>	
CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS	\$3,530,378
MARKETABLE SECURITIES	139,236,379
<b>Accounts receivable:</b>	
Government agencies	4,814,335
Other	187,656
For securities sold	115,028
<b>Loans receivable:</b>	
Program Loan Fund	7,141
BENEFICIAL INTEREST IN PERPETUAL TRUSTS	32,127,209
ACCRUED INTEREST AND DIVIDENDS RECEIVABLE	285,616
PREPAID PENSION COSTS	1,030,284
PREPAID EXPENSES AND OTHER ASSETS	100,346
INVESTMENT IN The United Charities	922,494
EQUIPMENT AND IMPROVEMENTS—Net	2,565,795
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$184,922,661</b>

<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	
<b>Liabilities:</b>	
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 2,053,381
Accrued vacation pay	742,897
Loan payable	1,940,945
Liability for securities purchased	398,890
Liability for postemployment and postretirement benefits	740,747
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>5,876,860</b>
<b>Net Assets:</b>	
Unrestricted	92,722,894
Temporarily restricted	25,101,163
Permanently restricted	61,221,744
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>179,045,801</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$184,922,661</b>

**NOTES**

1. These consolidated statements include all funds of the Community Service Society of New York and its affiliates, The Institute for Community Empowerment, and Friends of RSVP, Inc. The statements are condensed from the financial statements for the year ending June 30, 2008, which have been audited by Loeb & Troper LLP.
2. A copy of the latest CSS financial report filed with the New York Department of State in Albany is available upon request from the Department or CSS.
3. The Society's board follows a policy of appropriating Endowment monies according to a formula. The current formula allows up to 6% of the five-year average of the Endowment's market value to be spent. For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2008, the Society appropriated \$7,645,000, according to this formula.



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