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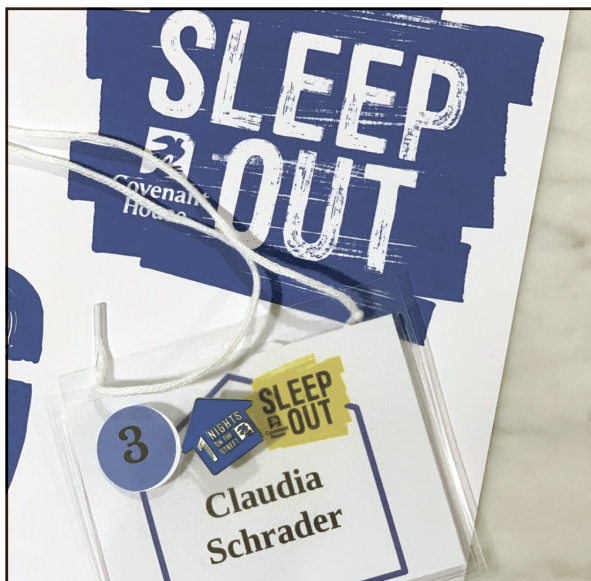
One Night in November

BY DR. CLAUDIA SCHRADER

When I see young people who have made the streets, underpasses, trains, and the like their homes, I often wonder of their backstories. After participating in my first Covenant House, "Sleep Out to End Youth Homelessness," this month, I understand their plight is more common than many people realized. Because of this experience, I will never look at a homeless youth the same way again.

At 11:00 p.m., I made my way outside the Javits Center along with 30 or so other volunteers who were part of teams from their jobs. I volunteered by myself, and as I identified a spot to sleep in while others were setting up their sleep bags in the company of others, it wasn't lost on me that this feeling of aloneness is what many homeless people experience.

Lights went out at midnight, and I settled into a fitful and uncomfortable night. We were advised to dress in layers, but on this particular night, the weather was unseasonably warm, so I removed a layer of clothing and used it as a pillow. I was safe because I was in a controlled environment. I also knew that what I was experiencing could never compare



Kingsborough Community College President Claudia Schrader participated in a Covenant House "Sleep Out to End Youth Homelessness" night outside the Jacob Javits Center in Manhattan.

to what others have to experience, not just for one night but for many nights, weeks, and years.

I woke up at 4:00 a.m. and lay in the dark; I took in the silence around me until it was time to rise.

As I packed my sleeping bag and got dressed, I thought that for a person who is homeless, one bag might contain all their belongings, and it may be all they have in the world. We headed indoors for a debriefing. I knew after which I would call a cab and head home to start my weekend with the realization that many people who are homeless have no idea what their day will bring. Many might roam the streets, yet others continue to function as best as they can by attending school and work. Even if they aren't sleeping on the streets, their sleeping arrangements could be a shelter, a car, or couch surfing, all stressful environments that make it difficult to focus on college studies and meeting deadlines on papers and exams. And, to compound matters, the stigma associated with being labeled homeless impacts their mental health and self-esteem.

The homeless student population is steadily growing for many reasons that include the state of our economy, civil and social issues and personal finances. At many colleges, and certainly at Kingsborough, we offer several resources to help students in need. Our Access Resource

Center (ARC) provides free services to the college community, including government benefit screens, a food pantry, and financial wellness and support services. ARC also distributes free vegetables grown on campus, clothing donations, and more. And our Wellness Services provides programming, services, support, and education relating to health, mental health, and general wellness.

By participating in the Sleep Out, I raised funds to support homeless youth and raised my own awareness of this critical issue facing many of our youth. Today, when I see a person who is homeless, instead of wondering what's their back story, I'll be thinking about what lies ahead. I'm grateful for what places like Covenant House do and grateful for the resources we have at Kingsborough that help students overcome barriers to success.

November is Youth Homelessness Awareness Month, a time to turn the world's attention toward this crisis. Dr. Claudia Schrader is the president of Kingsborough Community College (KCC). Located in the Manhattan Beach section of Brooklyn, KCC is the borough's only community college.

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