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UWS OPEN HEARTS INITIATIVE WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD
FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

NEW YORK, NEW YORK – UWS Open Hearts Initiative, an organization supporting the homeless residents of the hotels being used as temporary shelters during the Covid crisis, has been awarded the "Compassionate Communities Award" for 2020 by Coalition for the Homeless (CFH), the country's oldest and largest organization providing advocacy and direct service to homeless communities.

UWS Open Hearts Initiative was formed to provide a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for the temporary hotel residents in their area. They have organized art events, donation drives, rallies, marches and press conferences since they launched the initiative in mid-August. They have also created programs, including a resume-writing workshop, and a faith-based program that provides spiritual support to the residents. The group also started a website, UWSStrong.org, with an open letter to City officials, and facts about the services in the hotel shelters and the systemic causes of homelessness.

According to CFH, "The Open Hearts' multifaceted efforts are particularly impressive given that the city is still in the midst of a public health crisis. Their tremendous energy and organizing in support of people experiencing homelessness in the midst of that public health crisis – and in the face of vociferous hostility from some of their neighbors – is an example of compassion for all communities." And according to Larry Thomas, a homeless resident of the Lucerne, "In a time of darkness, despair, and uncertainty, UWS Open Hearts have become a beacon of light for hope."

In expressing the group's gratitude for the Award, UWS Open Hearts Initiative co-founder, Heather Gunn-Rivera, said: "We are humbled by and grateful for the recognition that Coalition for the Homeless offered us today, particularly because it casts a spotlight on the grave moral crisis facing our city right now. Will New York City be a community that honors the humanity of every individual living here, regardless of the color of their skin, their means, and the amount of trauma they've experienced? Or will we fall into moral chaos and bankruptcy in these stressful and unprecedented times? It is very easy to make someone's life just a little bit easier, a little bit less painful, a little less lonely, and when we all agree to move in that direction, to make sure that everyone is cared for, our city will flourish, even in a pandemic, and certainly beyond."

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