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UWS Residents Hold a Sleep Out in Solidarity with Homeless New Yorkers
The UWS Open Hearts Initiative organize art protest and sleep out to welcome new homeless residents to the UWS neighborhood

WHAT: In an effort to show solidarity with the homeless New Yorkers who have been relocated to the Upper West Side as part of the Department of Homeless Services initiative to depopulate crowded single adult shelters to prevent the spread of COVID-19, , The UWS Open Hearts Initiative will hold a sleepout and art protest on Saturday, August 29th starting at 6PM. The event follows the release of an open letter to Mayor de Blasio demanding that decisions about the shelters be made on public health, not political grounds. The letter can be found at uwsstrong.org.

WHO: The UWS Open Hearts Initiative formed last month to provide direct support for residents of temporary hotel shelters, while also building awareness in the community for the critical public health need for the shelters. The initiative has mobilized thousands of dollars in donations from Amazon wishlists. They have implemented a “housewarming committee” to help gather household items for shelter residents transitioning to permanent housing, resume writing workshops, and events to bring the community and shelter residents together.

WHERE: The Lucerne Hotel, 201 West 79th Street
(*Masks are required for all attendees; separate households are required to sleep 6 feet apart)

WHEN: Saturday, August 29,2020: 6pm-9pm (Art Protest) 9pm-6am (Sleepout)

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES:

Interviews:

- Members of the UWS Open Hearts Initiative
- Representatives of the open letter to deBlasio from UWS Strong
- All Street Journal protest art volunteers
- Sara Lind, City Council Candidate/UWS Resident
- Volunteers/Sleep Out participants
- **Shelter residents will be present and may be willing to participate in interviews, but we ask that you respect their privacy

Visuals:

- UWS residents/volunteers and shelter residents talking, chalking, and drawing and painting together
- Families setting up sleeping bags (6 feet apart) in front of the Lucerne and surrounding streets and avenues

CONTACT:

Please contact Heather Gunn-Rivera, (646) 468-8669, info@uwsopenhearts.org, for more information and to schedule interviews.

Learn more at twitter.com/uwsopenhearts, [instagram.com/uwsopenhearts](https://www.instagram.com/uwsopenhearts), and uwsstrong.org.



“We organized this event to demonstrate in a very public way our commitment to equity and justice. Housing and equitable housing policies are basic human rights and all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We welcome our new neighbors with open hearts,” said **Heather Gunn-Rivera, of the Open Hearts Initiative.**

“We want to say visibly and loudly that the voices decrying the homeless residents of our area and demanding the shelters move do not speak for the entire Upper West Side. I have never felt unsafe in the area of the shelters--what has made me feel unsafe is doxing and harassment from those opposed to the shelters. I’m so glad my community can play a role in helping to reduce the COVID risk of shelter residents. There’s been so much discussion about ‘safety’ in response to these shelters, but this decision to move residents here was made *for* the purpose of safety--safety from COVID,” said **Corinne Low, of the Open Hearts Initiative.**

“As a formerly street homeless New Yorker, I have first hand experience of how stigma can hurt our homeless neighbors. The UWS Open Hearts Initiative is doing the critical work helping homeless New Yorkers with compassionate, empathetic, and fact based solutions that can make a difference in their lives,” said **Josh Parkin, a formerly street homeless New Yorker** who went through the New York Shelter System and has successfully sustained supported housing for over 10 years.

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