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# DAILY NEWS

## Center for Urban Community Services opens 'Single Stop' office for instant public assistance

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Struggling [Bronx](#) residents who may not even think they qualify for public assistance can find a range of help at a new "Single Stop" office in the borough.

The [Center for Urban Community Services](#) has opened a Bronx facility - 1510 Southern Blvd. at E. 172nd St. in [Crotona Park](#) - featuring a center that calculates eligibility for a wide array of federal, state and local help programs.

"It's like a light at the end of the tunnel," said [Biriam Ortiz](#), 28, a single mother of three who attends nursing school by day and works as a hospital housekeeper at night.

Though struggling, Ortiz had never considered seeking public assistance before being referred to CUCS by a social worker friend. But after a visit there, she found out she's eligible for food stamps, housing assistance, a child care subsidy and legal aid.

"I didn't have any idea how to go about applying for any of this," Ortiz said. "I didn't think I qualified anyway, because I work."

"There are a lot of myths out there about qualifying for benefits," said [Megan Sergi](#), assistant program director at CUCS. "Only 7% of the working poor receive all the benefits they're entitled to."

Even people who didn't qualify in the past may now be eligible for benefits because of changes enacted by Congress during the economic crisis, Sergi said.

More working families can qualify for a child care subsidy, and people with higher incomes now also can receive food stamps.

Sergi said CUCS' East [Harlem](#) office helped 1,100 families access \$3 million in additional benefits in the past year alone.

"That's what we want to do for the Bronx," Sergi said.

Some CUCS clients simply need help navigating the bureaucratic maze.

Jean Daniel Gustave, 54, was hit with a [Medicare](#) co-pay, which resulted in a court summons ordering the disabled homeless man to pay \$2,000, said CUCS "benefits navigator," [Gladys Pagan](#).

Now in a CUCS residence for homeless people discharged from hospitals, he is working with Legal Aid lawyers to clear the summons, and Pagan is helping him apply for [Medicaid](#) to cover any future Medicare co-pays.

"I was worried what would happen to me," said [Gustave](#), who became homeless when his mother died and he lost her apartment. "But I think I can make it now."

Ortiz tells struggling families who aren't sure if they qualify for help: "You ought to try. You don't lose anything by coming in and asking about it."

For more information, visit [www.cucs.org](http://www.cucs.org) or call (347) 833-4900.

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