

COMMUNITY notes

We're committed to ending homelessness in Brooklyn.

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Former Resident is a Holiday Hero to Moms and Kids at Arbor Inn

Barbara Lopez knows how compassion and kindness can brighten the holidays for a young single mother who is homeless. “I used to be a resident at *Arbor Inn*,” BCHS’ program for formerly homeless single mothers with a child. “The supportive staff and services there helped me get through a very rough time in my life. The on-site childcare gave my daughter a safe place to stay while I was in school, which allowed me to continue my education and become an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) with the FDNY. Today I’m a Paramedic Instructor at the Bureau of Training.”

To show her appreciation, Barbara coordinates an annual holiday celebration for the kids and moms at *Arbor Inn*. “I’ve never forgotten where I come from and I’ll do what I can to put a smile on the faces of the girls and boys at BCHS.”

Each year, Barbara and her colleagues at the EMS Bureau gather gifts for the *Arbor Inn* residents. Each child gets his or her own giftwrapped presents, which include toys, books, games and more; and each mother receives a generous gift card for herself. To top it off, the team coordinates a visit from Santa himself, who passes out gifts and takes time for every child to get a picture with him.

Ms. Lopez’s dedication to the holiday celebration goes back to her time spent at BCHS. “When I talk to the mothers, I tell them ‘Hold your head up high and know that better times will come.’ Thanks to the staff at *Arbor Inn*, I can attest to that.”



Holiday Festivities for All at BCHS

The joys of the season were evident throughout BCHS, with tree-trimming parties for residents of the *Apartment Program* and *Brooklyn Gardens*, a special holiday-themed show donated by Brooklyn’s independent theatre group [Rabbit Hole Ensemble](#), a Multicultural Holiday Festival highlighting the many diverse traditions that are observed during the winter holiday season, and holiday dinners for residents in all of the BCHS programs.

Above: EMTs from the FDNY Bureau of Training with gifts for the children at *Arbor Inn*

Right: Holiday sing-a-long during the Multicultural Festival at *Brooklyn Gardens*

Below

Left: Performers from Rabbit Hole Ensemble with residents from *Arbor Inn*

Center: BCHS MIS Specialist Frankie Poventud (right of tree) helps residents decorate the tree in the *Brooklyn Gardens* courtyard

Right: Mike, a BCHS resident, at the *Apartment Program’s* tree-trimming party





**Message from
Executive Director
Jeff Nemetsky**

Dear friends,

Alfred suffered from schizophrenia for most of his adulthood without the proper treatment. He was arrested many times and shuttled between jail, hospital and shelter until he was in his 40s.

Then, after finally getting the right diagnosis during a long-term psychiatric hospitalization, he was referred to BCBS' *Ivy House*, a transitional housing program for individuals with a serious mental illness. *Ivy House* represented the first time Alfred was going to live in a non-institutional setting in more than a decade.

At *Ivy House* Alfred worked well with his case manager and developed good relationships with other residents and staff. The *Ivy House* cook taught him how to prepare meals for himself. The greatest gift of all, Alfred found, was that his sense of humor returned, something he hadn't been able to experience since early in his childhood: Alfred would spend hours in the BCBS courtyard, telling jokes and entertaining passersby with his stories and observations.

Over time Alfred learned how to keep track of his medications and found that his mental illness had become more manageable. After about a year or so he decided he was ready to try permanent housing that was more independent, and with the help of the *Ivy House* team moved to a one-bedroom apartment in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. That was four years ago. Since then Alfred has maintained his housing successfully and has gone back to school; he volunteers for his church and regularly comes by BCBS to say hello and trade jokes and smiles. He will be earning his degree this year and will then begin a job search - please join me in congratulating Alfred on his success.

At BCBS we believe that establishing a community for our formerly homeless residents is a vital component in helping them learn how to become stable and independent. Nowhere is this more evident than during our holiday activities, and you can see many of our wonderful events in this issue of Community Notes. **I am also happy to announce that this year's *Talented Brooklyn* gala is set for May 15th, at the beautiful Green Building in Gowanus.** Homegrown Brooklyn acts will perform for us, while the gala will also feature wonderful art work created by talented BCBS residents. I hope you will be able to come.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who so generously and thoughtfully contributed to our Annual Appeal – your support is what makes our work possible. I hope you have a wonderful Spring and thank you for your commitment to ending homelessness in Brooklyn!

A Spirited Reception for BCBS

On January 31, Board Member Margie Hanssens and her husband, Kevin McGrath, opened their beautiful Boerum Hill home for the BCBS Board of Directors' Annual Wine Tasting. More than 40 guests attended the event to learn about BCBS' recent accomplishments and the agency's work to end homelessness in Brooklyn.

"I joined the BCBS Board after attending the 2009 Wine Tasting and discovering more about this terrific agency," shared Margie. "I was pleased to host this year's event and introduce more friends to the remarkable work of BCBS."

We gratefully thank everyone who shared this lovely evening with us, and especially our hosts, Margie and Kevin. Thanks also to Judy Rundel at Heights Chateau for providing an excellent selection of wines for the tasting.



From top, left to right: Margie Hanssens, Melissa James Gibson and Cynthia Godsoe / Jonathan Jones and Ben Baxt / Diane Louard-Michel and Susan Baxt / Tracy Landers, Jeremy Primer and Betsy Lawson

BCHS Receives State Contract to Expand Homelessness Prevention Services

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), recently awarded a \$278,000 contract to significantly expand BCHS' ground-breaking homelessness prevention program, the Brooklyn Housing Assistance Center (BHAC).

The BHAC's goal is to identify Brooklyn residents who are currently living in their own apartments but are facing a one-time crisis that is threatening to make them homeless. BHAC case managers then work with clients to help them address these crises in a way that allows them to remain in their housing or move to alternative housing, and avoid ever ending up on the street or in a shelter.

BHAC Program Director Marie Degraff-Myal expressed gratitude for the OTDA's support and recognition. "New York State government is looking to fund innovative approaches for preventing homelessness. This award allows us to expand our reach and scope so we can make sure many more Brooklyn residents remain in appropriate housing and don't have to go to a shelter. Not only is this beneficial for the people involved, but taxpayers benefit as well: prevention programs like ours are a fraction of the cost of public shelters. Every time we prevent someone from becoming homeless, we are saving taxpayer dollars."

BCHS launched the Brooklyn Housing Assistance Center in March of 2011 as a demonstration initiative with generous funding from the Oak Foundation. The program initially focused on single adult males in Brooklyn -- a population identified as facing the greatest risk of becoming homeless -- and former BCHS residents whose housing is in jeopardy because of a significant setback. The BHAC has had a success rate of more than 90% since its inception.

The additional State funding will enable BCHS' BHAC program to provide services to all Brooklyn residents whose housing is at risk, including single women and families. Once fully implemented, the BHAC will serve approximately 150 households annually.

IN HONOR OF

BEN BAXT

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MICHAEL GREENSPAN

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Horowitz Ratner

SALLY YARMOLINSKY

Ben Yarmolinsky

A New Home at Navy Green

Andrea was among the first residents of the *Navy Green*, a single room occupancy (SRO) facility operated in partnership by BCHS and Pratt Area Community Council (PACC). A native of New Orleans, Andrea moved to Brooklyn in 2000 but subsequently lost her housing. With no place to live and no money to return to New Orleans, she felt depressed and hopeless, and eventually turned to drugs and alcohol. Andrea had struggled with substance abuse in her past but this time it took control.

In March of 2010, Andrea made a decision to get sober and turn her life around. That October she graduated from a drug and alcohol treatment program and moved to a women's shelter, where she focused on her sobriety and obtaining housing.

Andrea's case manager told her about a site opening with permanent supportive housing for homeless adults. The case manager referred Andrea to BCHS, which oversees social services at the *Navy Green SRO*, and Andrea presented herself as a prime candidate for the building. Finally, in July of 2012, Andrea moved into her own apartment at *Navy Green*.

Program Director Curdy Edwards describes Andrea as "an ideal role model and tenant. She fully utilizes all of the services we offer, including case management, counseling, onsite nursing and recreational activities." Andrea also leads the *Navy Green SRO* resident council, a role that has become increasingly vital now that all 97 units of the facility are occupied.



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Barbara Lopez and the Staff of the FDNY

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Rabbit Hole Ensemble

We're committed to ending homelessness in Brooklyn.

Each year, BCHS provides safe and clean supportive housing for 900 formerly homeless women, children and men.

We help them learn how to live productively and independently, with dignity and with hope.

To donate, or to learn how you can help, visit www.BCHandS.org or contact our Development Department at (718) 852-9322 ext. 2140

Summer/Fall Activities at BCHS

The BCHS Activities Team works hard throughout the year to offer fun events for everyone in the BCHS community. These gatherings provide important opportunities for residents to socialize with other clients, as well as with staff and board members.

“Activities are essential to providing a real sense of community for our residents, many of whom were isolated and withdrawn before they came to us,” says Activities Coordinator Tamara Ramsey. “We often see former clients come back to join in activities and visit with their friends at BCHS.”

In the second half of 2012, residents enjoyed a wide range of activities including a July 4th party, Summer barbecue, Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day observances, pumpkin picking, Halloween parties, a “Haunted” Walk, Thanksgiving dinners, a Multicultural Holiday Festival and more.



Above: Martha Gomez, MICA Specialist for the *Apartment Program*, celebrates Thanksgiving with BCHS resident Mark B.

Left: *Arbor Inn* Staff Members Theresa Bishop (center left) and Helen Rada (center, in red) picking pumpkins with residents

Volunteer opportunities are available for some activities. To learn how you can help, please contact the BCHS Activities Department at (718) 625-4545 or activities@bchands.org.



Creative Activities Help Residents Express Support and Hope After Tragedies



Activities Specialist Ajanae Lewis worked with BCHS residents to develop a creative expression of their compassion and support for victims of Hurricane Sandy. Together they created a mixed-media “card of comfort” that includes a drawing of the Statue of Liberty -- to symbolize strength -- a poem, and notes of encouragement from the clients. The card was sent to the Midland Beach Relief Center, to be displayed for visitors to see. Ajanae is now working with another group of resident artists to create a similar card for survivors of the tragedy in Newtown.

Barry McCrae, a BCHS resident at *Oak Hall*, wrote the following poem reflecting on the Newtown incident.

“OUR PROBLEMS”

By: Barry McCrea

*When a person has a problem
And is confused about what to do
The last thing you might think
Is they could take it out on you.*

*We all have a mother and father
Maybe sisters and brothers or a mate
And we can choose anyone of them
To discuss our likes and hates.*

*If the one you choose to talk with
Doesn't seem to understand
There's other people elsewhere
Waiting to prove they can.*

*So when you realize you have a problem
Try to solve it that very day
Don't allow it to disappear
In an unintentional way.*



Left to right: Randy Washington, Faruq Muhammad, Gregorio Taitt, Ajanae Lewis, James Dunning, Michael Foster, John Alizor, Eleanor Barker, Trevone Jaffier, Learnest Wilder, Helen Park, Silvia Ford, and Dorian Davis



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