



# CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE

of Mental Health & Housing



# OUR MISSION

Community Access expands opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy and healing-focused services.

We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

Dear Friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it much disruption, fear and uncertainty, social isolation, daily challenges for parents and children, as well as profound loss and grief for too many. We certainly hope that the year ahead will bring us closer to better days.

We have all been impacted in different ways, but one thing is clear: this pandemic is not color-blind. Black and Latinx New Yorkers have experienced the highest rates of COVID cases, hospitalizations, and mortality, as well as job loss and missed time in school. People who are marginalized, people without stable homes or incomes, and those living with chronic health conditions and other disabilities are more vulnerable to experiencing severe impact from this public health and economic crisis — and that is why Community Access' work is more important now than ever before.

While Community Access has always stood for human rights, the vital task of centering racial equity in our work — work that is largely necessary because of the effects of structural racism — has never been clearer. Present and historic racism undergirds much of the police brutality we are combating in the city's mental health crisis response system, just as it runs through the housing and health care systems that negatively impact our participants.

Community Access is committed to doing both the internal and external work to move a racial equity agenda forward and institutionalize anti-racism as a core value. This commitment includes the allocation of organizational resources to this effort and transparency as we move forward. White people, and particularly white leaders like myself, have much to learn and do to be more effective racial justice allies and actors.

Grappling with the pandemic has, above all, affirmed what those of us who provide supportive housing have long known: housing is healthcare and necessary for individual well-being. Though this has been a challenging and at times heartbreaking year, it has only strengthened our resolve, and I am extremely proud of what our community has accomplished.

Cal Hedigan



Chief Executive Officer





# HAVING A HOME

By Mario Moore

I'll never forget the first time I put my key into the door of my Community Access apartment.

It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced in my life. I felt the full weight of all the years leading up to that moment. All the ups and downs, the long road that had brought me from my grandmother's backyard in Jamaica, to street benches in New York, to the shelter system, and now, finally, to a place I could call my own: a home.

It felt like two-thousand bricks fell right off me. Lying in bed that night, for the first time in years, I felt peace.

The journey to my Community Access apartment was long and difficult. Mental health concerns had followed me throughout my adult life, starting at age 18. I wound up sleeping out on a park bench. For three years, I lived in a homeless shelter, and cycled in and out of psychiatric hospitals.

I felt like my life could be different, but I didn't know where to begin. Then, something miraculous happened: My shelter counselor told me about Community Access, and got me an interview for my own apartment.

Since then, I've gotten to live the life I've always wanted. I have a job I enjoy. I pay my bills. I have loving relationships, a supportive community, and goals for the future. One of those goals is to become a motivational speaker, so that I can use my story to help others.

Having my own home made all this possible. With the support of Community Access, I've learned that my struggles can be overcome.

# THROUGH THE STEPS WE TAKE EVERY DAY...



We fight to end homelessness in New York City – as a provider of supportive housing since 1974, and as a leader of multiple campaigns to fund affordable housing development.



At our housing sites, **on-site staff provide a range of healing-focused services and supports** – to help people live successfully in the community.



We meet people where they are at, recognizing that people are best served when they define their own goals and pursue them at their own pace.

Our work – including our pet therapy and adoption program – is built on **the healing power of connection.**



We amplify the voices of people living with mental health concerns, by affirming the rights of all people to create lives of their own choosing.



Our Howie the Harp job training program has prepared hundreds of people for **careers within the mental health workforce**, while transforming this workforce in the process.



Our Health and Wellness activities **bring people together** in all sorts of ways – anything with the potential to positively impact quality of life.



We create communities from the ground up: **places that are welcoming and inclusive**, where people may recover from the trauma and discrimination of homelessness and stigma.

## ...WE MAKE NEW YORK MORE COMPASSIONATE AND MORE JUST

# WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Community Access has always been rooted in a set of values:

## Human Rights

We challenge and lead the mental health system towards greater rights-based policies and practices.

## Peer Expertise

We have a core goal of hiring at least 51% peer staff (people with experience of using mental health services), including in leadership positions.

## Self-Determination

We defend the right of all individuals to create lives of their own choosing.

## Harm Reduction

We embrace policies and practices that promote dignity, wellbeing, and access to health care.

## Healing and Recovery

We seek out and promote culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and research-based opportunities for individual and community wellness.

It is our commitment to these values, in every aspect of our work, that has helped us change the landscape of mental health services and supportive housing in New York.

On average,  
people with serious  
mental health issues  
die **20 years**  
earlier than the  
general population

**63,000**

New Yorkers are  
sleeping in homeless  
shelters tonight –  
including thousands of  
families and children

**80%**

of people with severe  
mental health concerns  
are unemployed or  
underemployed

Many people who come to us have cycled through institutions for decades – hospitals, shelters, jails, and prisons – while also facing the effects of food insecurity and poverty. For most, the world has not been a welcoming place. **At Community Access, we seek to change that by opening our doors and nurturing communities built upon respect and a belief in human capacity.**

# STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Over the course of 40+ years, Community Access has changed the landscape of mental health and housing in New York City and beyond. We think big. We're experts in our field. And we have a track-record of delivering impressive results.

Pioneered an **integrated supportive housing model** that has been widely adopted nationally



Launched a job training program that has been **replicated internationally**



Named as an **NYC Nonprofit Excellence Award Finalist**

Lead a coalition of **200 nonprofit agencies** advocating to improve NYC crisis response protocols

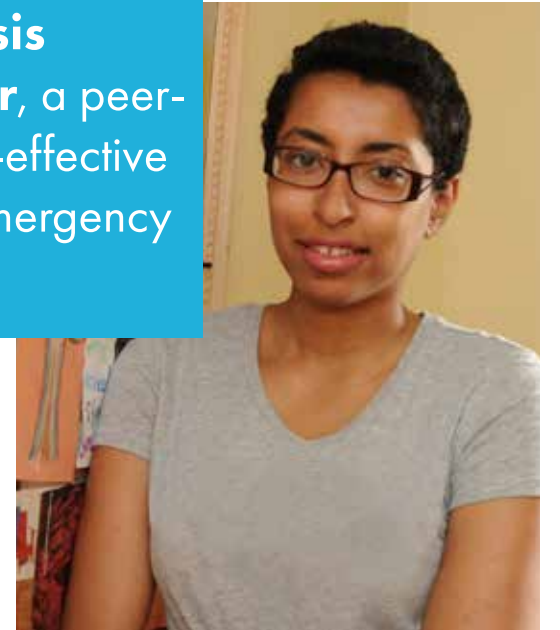


Recognized as a **Guidestar Gold level** charity



Reached public-private financing deals: **\$500 million investments in real estate developments**

Opened **New York City's first Crisis Respite Center**, a peer-driven and cost-effective alternative to emergency hospitalization



Established the **Blueprint Supported Education program**, leading the charge for equity in access to education



Received prestigious **national awards** in housing, advocacy, and mental health



Host the **oldest and largest mental health film festival** in the United States





Doctors Without Borders visits Community Access Community Residences to discuss best practices

Our social media call for support rallied caring neighbors across the U.S.

**Cynthia Nixon** @CynthiaNixon · 19m

This non-profit is on the front lines working with homeless people & people living in supportive housing.

They desperately need masks to keep their workers & their clients safe. Please donate if you can 🙏



TIME magazine's "America Must Change" issue, features Community Access' advocacy work



Community Access breaks ground on new River Avenue housing development

Facilities manager Bob Shary delivers a sewing machine for staff and tenants making masks



In loving memory of Community Access tenants and participants who passed away from COVID-19 illness

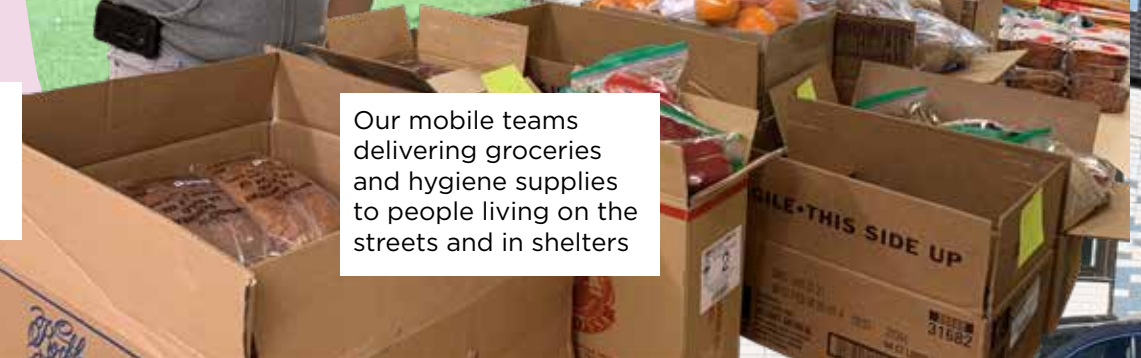
Univision news interviews service coordinator Scarlet González



New Bruckner tenant, Thaddeus, enjoying the backyard and some Namaste



800+ cell phones purchased for tenants and participants all over town



Our mobile teams delivering groceries and hygiene supplies to people living on the streets and in shelters



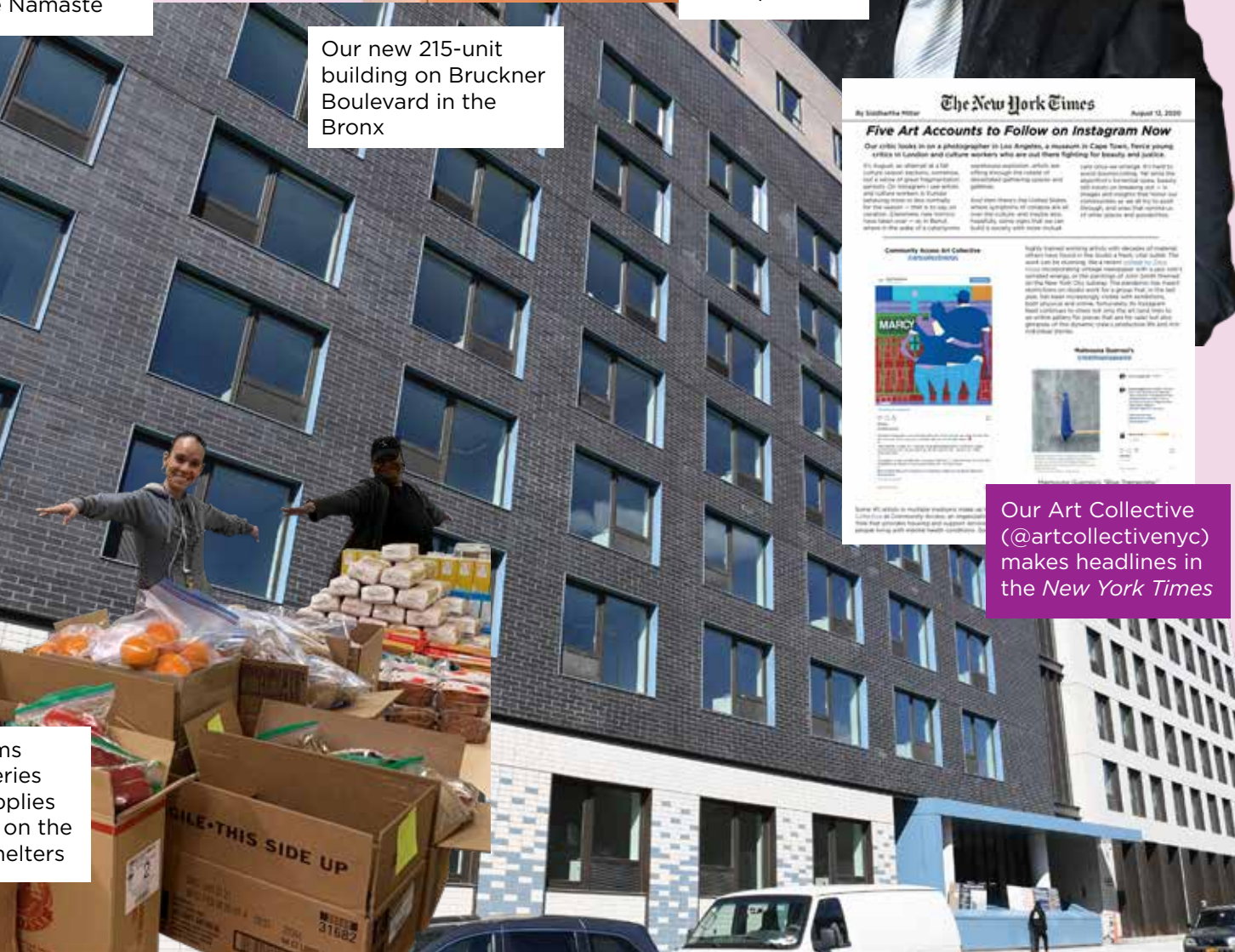
Gardening and urban farming in full swing, thanks to community food coordinator Ana Morán



Cloth masks sewn and donated by Met Museum staff



Bruckner tenant, Shirley, at home in a new apartment



Our new 215-unit building on Bruckner Boulevard in the Bronx



Our Art Collective (@artcollectivenyc) makes headlines in the New York Times

# WHY YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

We're proud of our history and the programs we've created – but there's more to be done. For Community Access to thrive, we need your support. We depend on private supporters, both to run our programs and realize our goals, such as building 1,000 units of housing.

Government contracts and property income cover 90% of our operating costs, and we work diligently to fundraising the rest – about \$3 million per year – from individuals, corporations, and foundations.

This generous private support allows us to be a powerful and positive force in the lives of thousands of low-income New Yorkers each year. And it's an essential resource as we plan for the future.



## Taxpayer Savings

Our programs improve lives and save millions of taxpayer dollars every year. For example, quality supportive housing costs ~\$12,000 per person, per year – compared to ~\$41,000 per year for someone to cycle through hospitals, jails, and the shelter system.

## Economic Wellbeing

The buildings we develop spark community revitalizations, safer neighborhoods, and business growth.

## Workforce Development

Our job training graduates are a vital part of New York City's workforce – in hospitals, clinics, social services agencies, and beyond.

## Building Community

We always strive to be a good neighbor, fostering partnerships with community boards, community gardens, local businesses, schools, colleges, and other social service providers.

## Investing in People

With the right support, people can get through almost anything. This is the promise that Community Access brings.



# HOUSING

Since 1974, Community Access has supported New Yorkers in getting off the streets and out of the shelter system – as a provider of quality supportive housing for people living with mental health concerns, and as a tireless advocate for more housing.

“After suffering with depression for years, and being homeless, getting a place to call my own brought my life back to me.”

- Carmine Bassano, tenant

Our founders came together to respond to an urgent public health crisis: the court-ordered release of people who had spent years of trauma and isolation in psychiatric hospitals and institutions. They pooled their resources and rented apartments for these most vulnerable citizens and established a commitment to housing as a basic human right that guides Community Access to this day.

Community Access grew, and eventually pioneered a new approach to housing that has become a national model: integrated housing, with onsite social services, where low-income families live alongside people with mental health concerns.

Each Community Access home represents a fresh opportunity for tenants to build lives of their own choosing. The simple joys of life are paramount: adopting and caring for pets, cooking meals with friends and family, growing vegetables, or simply enjoying quiet time in one of our beautiful gardens. The ripple effects of this work can be seen in rejuvenated neighborhoods, reunited families, new friendships, and connections for people to shape a brighter future.

# REAL ESTATE

Community Access has developed 19 affordable and supportive housing buildings in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, with three more under construction or in development, representing \$500 million in real estate investments.

We use a variety of innovative public/private financing models, and have a strong track-record of working with prominent architects and builders. Many of our buildings have won design awards for excellence in affordable housing.



**1** In Development: **TREMONT AVE**  
Bronx • West Bronx • Projected opening: 2026  
202 units  
Project cost: **\$100 million**

**2** In Development: **BAEZ PLACE**  
Bronx • Mount Hope • Projected opening: 2024  
163 units  
Project cost: **\$72 million**

**3** In Development: **RIVER AVENUE**  
Bronx • Concourse  
Projected opening: 2022 • 245 units  
Project cost: **\$122 million**

**4** **BRUCKNER BOULEVARD**  
Bronx • Hunt's Point  
Opened: 2021 • 215 units • 193,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$87 million**

**5** **EAST 172ND STREET**  
Bronx • Mount Eden  
Opened: 2019 • 126 units • 118,000 sq. ft.  
Projected cost: **\$53 million**

**6** **CEDAR AVENUE**  
Bronx • Morris Heights  
Opened: 2011 • 105 units • 90,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$38 million**

**7** **VYSE AVENUE**  
Bronx • Crotona Park East  
Opened: 2012 • 64 units • 35,250 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$14 million**

**8** **WATER STREET (GOUVERNEUR COURT)**  
Manhattan • Lower East Side  
Opened: 1994 • 123 units • 60,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$13 million**

**9** **EAST 2ND STREET**  
Manhattan • East Village  
Opened: 2008 • 53 units • 33,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$12 million**

**10** **DAVIDSON AVENUE**  
Bronx • Morris Heights  
Opened: 2007 • 74 units • 53,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$12 million**

**11** **FRANKLIN AVENUE**  
Bronx • Morrisania  
Opened: 2005 • 66 units • 52,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$12 million**

**12** **DEKALB AVENUE**  
Brooklyn • Bedford-Stuyvesant  
Opened: 2004 • 63 units • 46,777 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$11 million**

**13** **POLITE AVENUE**  
Bronx • Foxhurst  
Opened: 2005 • 68 units • 34,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$9 million**

**14** **WARREN STREET**  
Brooklyn • Boerum Hill  
Opened: 2000 • 67 units • 31,200 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$9 million**

**15** **TINTON AVENUE**  
Bronx • Morrisania  
Opened: 2006 • 59 units • 25,500 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$8 million**

**16** **EAST 4TH STREET**  
Manhattan • East Village  
Opened: 1993 • 50 units • 45,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$8 million**

**17** **AVENUE D**  
Manhattan • East Village  
Opened: 1992 • 45 units • 16,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$4 million**

**18** **STANTON STREET**  
Manhattan • Lower East Side  
Opened: 2010 • 12 units • 7,688 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$2 million**

**19** **EAST BROADWAY**  
Manhattan • Lower East Side  
Opened: 2010 • 14 units • 7,000 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$1 million**

**20** **EAST 7TH STREET (ACCESS HOUSE)**  
Manhattan • East Village  
Opened: 1988 • 15 units • 8,325 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **\$1 million**

**21** **WEST 108TH STREET**  
Manhattan • Manhattan Valley  
Opened: 2005 • 5 units • 6,500 sq. ft.  
Project cost: **donated**





# EDUCATION AND JOB TRAINING

Our award-winning education and job training programs empower people to reach their goals, find employment, and build lives of their own choosing.

Living with a mental health concern shouldn't be a barrier to getting a good education. That's why, through our Blueprint Supported Education program and other initiatives, we support participants in seeking high school equivalencies, post-secondary degrees, and vocational certifications.

The same is true of employment: Living with a mental health concern shouldn't stand in the way. Our Howie the Harp Advocacy Center (HTH), which opened in 1995, has trained more than 1,000 graduates for careers within the mental health workforce, many of whom now work in hospitals, clinics, social service agencies, and a variety of mental health agencies throughout New York City and state. These graduates are changing the system from within and demonstrating that the best way to build an effective mental health system is to involve peers in designing that system. Today, HTH is the gold standard in job training for mental health peers.

At HTH, and in other Community Access job training and job-readiness programs, we work to overcome the barriers that stand between the people we serve and rewarding employment, including by providing support in developing resume and interview skills and by connecting people to volunteer and internship opportunities.

“I’ve had a lot of people who believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself. That’s a true gift.”

- Gerald Jenkins,  
tenant and HTH graduate



# HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Our approach to health and wellness is person-centered and proactive, and emphasizes the importance of treating people with dignity and respect. And it informs everything we do.

Most people who connect with Community Access have experienced some combination of homelessness, institutionalization, trauma, and abuse. Often, they are just beginning the process of healing and recovery. Our job is to support them in building healthier lives of their choosing, and to provide services and resources that lead to informed decisions about health and wellness.

Our health and wellness activities bring people together in all sorts of ways. With countless factors influencing our physical and mental wellbeing, we work to create opportunities for people to come together around growing food, meal preparation, movement, and stress reduction – anything with the potential to have a positive impact on quality of life.

Participants in our health and wellness initiatives are encouraged to identify their strengths and develop skills for pursuing their goals. Including: reconnecting with family; starting a new career; healing old wounds; and, finding new joy in everyday life. We also offer a bike share program and gym facilities in each of our housing sites; cooking demos and a thriving urban farming program; a pet adoption program; and, simply, the chance to connect with neighbors and friends.

“Getting housing was a life-and-death situation. I was homeless, and had dwindled to 72 pounds. Now I’m happy, healthy, and fulfilled.”

- Rochelle Rosa, tenant,  
with her dog Elvira

A portrait of a woman with light brown hair, smiling slightly, wearing a patterned sweater. The background is blurred.

# CRISIS SUPPORT

For too long, the default destination for New Yorkers in emotional distress has been either the emergency room or jail. But we're working hard to replace those locked doors and places of isolation with warmth, empathy, and compassion.

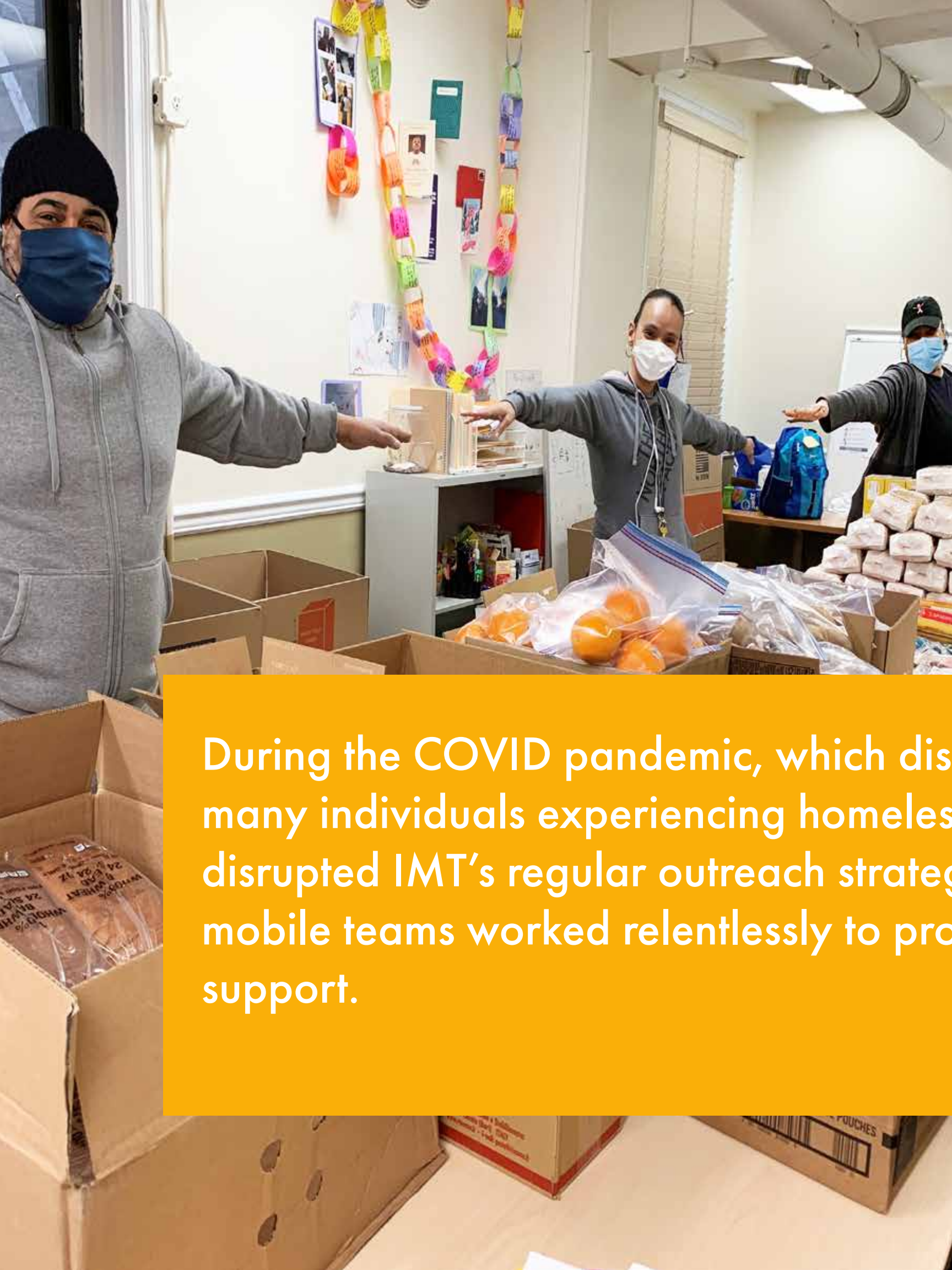
In 2012, Community Access opened New York City's first Crisis Respite Center, providing a safe, cost-effective alternative to hospitalization for adults in emotional distress.

The Crisis Respite Center is a place where people can take a deep breath and be treated with care and respect. From the moment someone arrives at the Respite Center, they are welcomed as a guest, not treated as a patient. Each guest has a private, beautifully furnished room, and the ability to connect with staff and fellow guests as they work through whatever struggles they face.

With 24-hour support provided by peer specialists (people with their own experiences in the mental health system, trained to help others), and with access to primary health care, guests get to focus on long-term recovery and wellness. They leave with greater peace of mind, and a plan for facing the days ahead with confidence.

“Some of the kindest, most compassionate people I've ever met work at the Respite Center. I left there feeling like I could do whatever I set my mind to.”

— Phyll Fisher,  
Respite Center guest



# MOBILE TEAMS

COVID-19 brings into sharper focus some of our society's most persistent injustices. Some of the hardest-to-reach New Yorkers, who have cycled in and out of hospitals, shelters, and jails, are especially vulnerable.

Community Access' Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams have been working tirelessly to connect many of these New Yorkers to essential supports. The spread of coronavirus – especially in the Bronx and throughout the shelter system – makes this work both particularly challenging and vitally important.

While this work continues to focus on connecting individuals in the Bronx shelter system with stable housing, dealing with coronavirus has inevitably become an urgent new priority.

Community Access always aims to meet people where they're at; for our mobile teams this is literally true, as well. In rental cars, they've been going to Bronx shelters and street canvassing to deliver groceries, medical aid, prescriptions, and individualized care packages. For the recipients of this support – individuals with life experiences that often involve being shut out – it's a connection that really counts.

During the COVID pandemic, which dislocated many individuals experiencing homelessness and disrupted IMT's regular outreach strategies, our mobile teams worked relentlessly to provide critical support.

# ADVOCACY

Throughout the mental health and criminal justice systems, and in how people think and talk about mental health issues, our advocacy efforts effect real, lasting change.

Our advocacy work is built upon a fundamental principle: People who access mental health services should be involved in shaping and delivering those services. How can we amplify the voices of the people we serve?

We model the broader changes we'd like to see. We have a core goal of hiring at least 51% peer staff (people with mental health concerns), and our advocacy agenda is set in a similarly aspirational way.

Through press conferences, voter-education forums, and other community events – including the NYC Mental Health Film Festival – we are always seeking opportunities to share our perspective in mainstream media outlets, and to change the way the wider public thinks and talks about mental health.

Our most visible advocacy campaign – we formed and lead a large coalition – has focused on police responses to people in emotional distress. The results are impressive: \$130 million in city funding to strengthen ties between criminal justice and behavioral health in NYC, an additional \$37 million in city funding for co-response teams and preventive mental health services, and 200,000+ NYPD training hours. We're now pushing for more non-police interventions/services.

A woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey blazer over a blue and white patterned scarf, is speaking into a microphone. The microphone has a white label with 'Wfuv.org' and a red '1' logo. To her left, a portion of a red and blue circular seal is visible, featuring the text 'SHERIFF-CLERK'. In the background, other people are partially visible, including one in a black shirt.

“When you empower someone to regain control of their lives and advocate for themselves – that’s a wonderful feeling.”

- Carla Rabinowitz,  
Advocacy Coordinator



# ART

For decades, the creative arts have been a special part of Community Access. We work with people to express themselves, hone their talents, and build community through art.

Our tenants and participants have a variety of creative interests, including painting, writing, theater, photography, and much else. Through a variety of workshops and programs around town, we support them in developing their creativity and learning from their experiences, and we help them achieve that most fundamental human right: the right to personal expression.

Founded in 1988, our Art Collective is the beating heart of our art initiatives. The Art Collective is a community of artists that works together to create, share resources, exhibit, and develop professional skills as contemporary artists. Our artists receive free year-round instruction, shared studio spaces, and support to achieve their vision. Art Collective artists also volunteer in-studio and in the community through workshops and public projects.

**“As an artist, I want to convey my daily experience. I don’t have all the answers, but I ask the questions.”**

**- John Smith, Art Collective artist**

artist  
without art, there is no art.  
© 1988



# SAVING LIVES

By Marcia Richard

When I first encountered Community Access, it was as if everyone was running to my aid, all at once. It was overwhelming – and wonderful.

I wasn't used to this kind of attention. For the past 22 years, I'd been trapped in the same cycle: addicted to drugs, homeless, in jail.

It seemed that so much of me was out of sight, out of mind. Most of all: the little girl I used to be, who was routinely violated, and who struggled with mental health in a system not designed to treat her well.

As a young teenager, I spent a lot of time in psych wards. I remember dark, padded rooms. Injections. Straitjackets. Years later, when I used, I was trying to escape this trauma.

But trauma is stubborn. Community Access knows this. I was all kinds of broken when they first started to help me – at their East Village Access treatment program. In fact, I was literally broken. Two men assaulted me on the street, badly beating me.

But the staff at Community Access didn't see me as broken. With great compassion and skill, they created a space for me to get better, and provided real, solid help. Exercise. Groups. Healthy eating. And working with me to set concrete goals.

As I kept checking off these goals, they grew. Today, I'm now part of something much bigger than myself: a movement transforming the mental health workforce.

I completed a Community Access peer training program, and now work fulltime answering calls at NYC's suicide hotline. When I stop to think about how far I've come, I couldn't be prouder. I feel as though my life was saved, and now I help to save lives too.



# Welcome to Bruckner Blvd.

In the height of lockdown in NYC, Community Access completed construction of our newest supportive housing building and started moving individuals and families with children out of the shelter system.

**HOME TO 215 HOUSEHOLDS**

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