

The world of mental health care was changing dramatically in the 1970s when a small group of volunteers pooled a few thousand dollars together to found Community Access. Mass closures of asylums led to spikes in homelessness on the streets of New York City — creating an urgent need for our agency to form and fulfill a promise of supporting individuals living with mental health concerns in the community.

We have worked tirelessly to fulfill that promise ever since. We have grown from grassroots beginnings to become a leader in housing and mental health in New York City, and we have never lost sight of a central tenet of our mission that people are experts in their own lives. For us, this means that we are not here to make decisions for people who live in our buildings or engage with our other services. Rather, we strive to create spaces, places, and opportunities that can serve as a strong foundation for everyone to move forward with their own lives, make informed decisions, and choose what is right for them. To do this work, we approach our services with a genuine desire to build connection: one human being supporting another as an advocate and unwavering ally.

We have accomplished a lot since our founding, including:

- Developing an integrated housing model, which has become a best practice nationally: affordable and supportive housing where families reside alongside people living with mental health concerns.
- Successfully chairing the NY NY I campaign, the first advocacy campaign to call upon New York City and New York State to partner together to make a long-term commitment to supportive housing development for people living with mental health concerns.
- Cementing our belief in the value of lived experience by establishing an organizational goal of having at least 51% of staff at all levels of the agency living with mental health concerns.
- Opening NYC's first workforce academy for mental health peers that has trained more than 2,000 graduates for direct service and management roles in human services.
- Developing the first peer-driven alternative to emergency hospitalization in New York City for people experiencing psychiatric crises.
- Developing \$500 million in real estate, providing homes to more than 2,000 individuals and families.

The world has changed even more in recent years, and there's a lot to contend with in our city: growing social and economic inequalities, increasing levels of homelessness, COVID-19-related health and mental health impacts, ongoing effects of structural racism, fractured mental health care systems, policies negatively impacting human rights, and so many other roadblocks detrimental to people's recovery and well-being.

There is a lot more to be done, and we remain committed to being an agent of change — championing mental health and housing systems transformation.