

NEWS & NOTES

Chief Executive Officer, DONNA COLONNA

ACCESS TO HOME

Do you know a senior citizen or individual with a disability needing modifications to their house or apartment so they can continue to live independently at home?

To qualify, they must live in the Brooklyn Heights, Boerum Hill, Fort Greene, Crown Heights, Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant or Brownsville neighborhoods of **Brooklyn** or the University Heights, Morris Heights, Fordham or Bedford Park neighborhoods of the **Bronx**.

For more information and to obtain an application, please call 718.403.9846, ext. 248.

ABOUT SUS

SUS is a non-profit organization that provides housing and supportive services to New Yorkers with special needs to live with dignity in the community, direct their own lives and attain personal fulfillment. Founded in 1978, today SUS serves over 3,000 of the most vulnerable among us—individuals with special needs due to a developmental, mental or physical disability often compounded by poverty, homelessness, inadequate education, substance abuse or a history of institutionalization.

For more information, visit www.susinc.org or contact us at info@susinc.org or 212.633.6900.

A GLIMPSE INTO LIFE AT SUS



From left to right: Juan, Courtney and Steven eating dinner together.

Every morning from 6:00 to 7:30 a.m., it's hectic at the corner of Buffalo Avenue and Park Place in Brooklyn. Understandably so. In the two connected houses, ten young men, from 16 to 20 years old, need to wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast and leave for school or work.

Having a developmental disability presents extra challenges—like needing more time to learn a task or needing assistance to take care of personal needs—but each one of these young men, despite these extra challenges, has big goals and dreams. Because of the small and personal setting at Buffalo/Park, the staff is able to give residents the individual attention they need to make their dreams happen.

When Juan, 20 years old, first arrived, he was non-verbal and barely spoke with the staff or the other teens. In the eight months since Buffalo/Park opened, the staff has consistently and persistently encouraged Juan to speak. Juan is now able to communicate “thank you,” “please,” “yes”

and “no.”

Christian, 17 years old, attends high school. A typical teenager, Christian seeks to be as independent as possible and travels to and from school on public transportation, rejecting offers to be driven to school by staff. While still adjusting to his new high school, Christian is also in the process of obtaining a non-driver photo ID card and finding suitable employment at the local McDonald's.

David, 20 years old, was abandoned at birth and has lived in 13 different foster care homes. He loves the family setting at Buffalo. After a hard day's work as a teacher's assistant, David takes a moment to talk about his day to the staff and his housemates before helping to cook dinner. After dinner, David hangs out with his housemates, as they watch TV or talk about their favorite hip hop musicians.

In their daily activities—meals, laundry, homework, cooking, chores—the residents practice and learn life skills while forming

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PERSONAL CAMPAIGNS

When you think of war stories, you probably think of combat. And the men living at SUS' Knickerbocker residence in Bushwick, Brooklyn, certainly have their share of harrowing tales to tell about life under fire. But each one has had private horrors and fought brutal battles—with drugs, with mental illness, with homelessness and, sometimes, personal tragedy. If you heard tell of them, you might reconsider just what a war story is.

They made it to Knickerbocker by being referred through SUS' extensive outreach to shelters, mental-health programs and city and state hospitals. All have some form of mental illness—depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia among them. Additionally, 40 percent have post-traumatic stress disorder. Most have a long history of substance abuse as well. Few have been consistently employed, and years of self-destructive behavior long ago alienated many family members.

Long-time Knickerbocker resident Fred Petzold lost his wife and twin daughters in an auto accident on Veterans' Day, 1976, while traveling to an event at which Fred was to speak about serving as a paratrooper in Vietnam, where he earned silver and bronze medals. "I don't know what God was thinking that day," he says, shaking his head. "I lost interest in everything then."

For Fred, who turned 60 on January 12, the loss of his family sent him down a path of ever-worsening drug abuse that lasted for decades. Though he's never fully recovered emotionally, he has now been sober for nearly 18 months, thanks to the Bridge Back to Life program offered at Knickerbocker.

On the wall of Knickerbocker program director Tyrone Nero's office is a framed photo of Fred being awarded a certificate for completing the nine-month program. Fred now hopes to work as a peer advocate for others like himself who haven't been able to get clean yet. The Veterans' Administration will pay for him to go back to school.

The Knickerbocker residence, built by SUS in 1995 for the purpose of providing



Fred Petzold shares his story at SUS' annual Veterans Day celebration.

homes for homeless veterans with mental illness, has 48 studio apartments for veterans who have military experience in conflicts ranging from the Korean War to the current war in Iraq.

The comfortable apartments include private kitchens and bathrooms. Dinner is served daily in the cheery yellow communal dining area. Two large-screen TVs in the couch-filled rooms downstairs are often tuned to sports, and exercise equipment and games are also available. A grassy backyard offers a haven from the sidewalk and street. Case management and substance abuse counseling are provided on site.

And perhaps most important, "they're happy here," says Tyrone Nero. Tyrone himself served in the U.S. Navy for a decade, mostly as a drug and alcohol counselor. "The men often have bad relationships with their own families, and being here gives them an outlet to communicate. The older folks are usually rough and tough when they first move in, but then they often identify with the staff. They start to trust the staff – 'that could be my granddaughter.' We have a family atmosphere," Tyrone says.

On Veterans' Day last year, Fred gave a frank speech at Knickerbocker in which he acknowledged how extraordinarily difficult it is to beat substance abuse and

how easy it can be for addicts to grow cynical about it.

"After years of drug use, you start to believe the word 'recovery' means a business where people go through revolving doors to satisfy the people at programs, placate judges, pacify parole officers, and make parents and spouses feel at ease but just for a while," he told his fellow veterans. "But addiction shall return till you do the recovery for you, yourself, and nobody else."

He compares his battles with drug abuse to the war he served in. "In both these wars, I've lost loved ones and will miss them dearly," he said. "But I don't know why or how I survived both wars." ❖

Are you interested in volunteering for a great cause?

SUS is looking for volunteers to help with organizing special events. If you have event planning, fundraising and/or marketing skills, contact us at volunteer@susinc.org or 917.408.1623.

WALK WITH SUS

For years, Jennifer Findley's coworker at P.S. 21 in Bedford-Stuyvesant had urged her to use her feet to fundraise by participating in the annual AIDS Walk New York and the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer. Jennifer wanted to, but somehow she never did. Then, in 1999, her coworker died of breast cancer.

"I felt badly that I had never walked," she says. "So I decided to take up her cause." Jennifer approached teachers, staff and parents at P.S. 21, where she has been an NYPD school safety guard for 18 years, and asked them to sponsor her. "I decided, you know what? This is a good thing. It made me feel good." When an aunt died of breast cancer shortly after, she became even more motivated.

Meanwhile, Jennifer's sister, Myrna Wilson, had been doing some charitable walking of her own. As an SUS social worker for people living with HIV/AIDS, Myrna knew firsthand the destructiveness of the disease. She had been participating in AIDS Walk New York since 1994, shortly after she started working at SUS. It has become a family affair with her granddaughters, Martika and Jaymilee, walking with her.

Myrna saw how good walking for breast cancer made Jennifer feel and suggested she join the AIDS Walk New York—for SUS. And so Jennifer joined the team. That first year she raised \$500. And each year since, Jennifer has raised at least \$1,000 – and one year as much as \$1,500. Jennifer's daughter Kanika and grandson Kaliq have also walked with the SUS team.

With ongoing, committed support from programs like those SUS provides, people living with HIV/AIDS now often have a quality of life unimaginable in the early nineties. Myrna remembers how, back then, many consumers had "the look." Wasting syndrome made them bone-thin as their immune systems became feeble in the face of myriad opportunistic infections. Many were expected to live a mere nine months after entering an SUS program.

But with advances in medications in the past dozen years, consumers can live



Jennifer Findley (wearing her well-deserved gold crown) and friend ready for their walk.

longer, healthier lives. Now, Myrna helps her consumers less with the daily management of AIDS than with a host of issues that likely predate their infections, such as domestic abuse, substance abuse, mental illness and poverty.

It's people like these that Jennifer's fleet-footed volunteerism helps. Her fundraising method is direct and effective: "I don't take no for an answer."

In the spring before the AIDS Walk, which is held in May, she alerts everyone—coworkers, teachers, parents, family—who she will be asking to sponsor her. "If they do say no, I keep asking until the last minute. I'm relentless. But you'd be surprised. I seldom hear no. Even students want to help. It's so nice to hear students come in and say, 'I have a dollar, can I help?'"

After the walk, Jennifer gets a thank you card and a photo from the event, and hangs them up for everyone to see how much money was raised—and how they were a part of it. She believes it's essential to involve sponsors. "Folks like that kind of feedback. It encourages them. Someone gives \$5, and then the next time they might give more."

Of course, sponsors can become volunteers, too. At P.S. 21, two teachers and a parent have joined Jennifer, Myrna and the rest of the SUS team in AIDS Walk New York.

Where does SUS' AIDS Walk money go? "The money mostly goes towards funding recreational activities—holiday parties, Thanksgiving dinners, trips, important events that may come up," says Myrna.

These recreational activities are important components of SUS' programs for individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS as they provide opportunities to reduce stress and isolation, enhance overall health and wellbeing, and build positive relationships. ❖

**THANKS to all of
SUS' Walkers!**

**It's not too late to
support the SUS team.
To sponsor the SUS team,
please visit
www.aidswalk.net/newyork
by June 15th and type in
Ralph Figueroa as the
participant's name.**

NEW BOARD CHAIR: Carolyn Powell

When Carolyn Powell joined SUS' Board of Directors fifteen years ago, SUS was one-fourth of its current size. But Carolyn readily admits that it still took a couple of years for her to fully understand the complexity of its funding, the breadth and depth of services offered and—finally—the meaning of all of its acronyms.

When asked about her long-lasting relationship with SUS, Carolyn passionately declares, "I love SUS!"

She explains her devotion this way, "No one ever forgets the reason why they are involved with SUS – not the Board, management staff or program staff... We are all dedicated to supporting the consumers. The SUS culture is such that everyone's first question before acting is 'How will this affect the consumer?' SUS staff members are very concerned about the quality of service provided. They intensely care about the mission. And it's a strong mission. This is a powerful thing to be associated with."

In her new leadership role as Chair of SUS' Board of Directors, Carolyn will guide the Board on how to strategically position SUS in order to generate new resources.

Carolyn knows a lot about capitalizing on experience and knowledge to advance a

social mission. Years ago, she transferred her skills from the corporate world of managing product lines for various companies and from her MBA (Columbia University) to the nonprofit world.

As the Chief Financial and Administrative Officer at the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), Carolyn oversees day-to-day operations and systems, provides strategic support to program offices and negotiates with financial institutions to achieve CSH's goals. CSH, a national organization with a presence in over ten states, helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness.

While SUS provides over 1,500 individuals with supportive housing, Carolyn hopes her experience at CSH will enable her to help SUS create even more opportunities for the many New Yorkers who need affordable housing with services.

Along with her commitment to SUS, Carolyn is actively involved in other aspects of the New York community. Her other interests include serving as a member of the Blue Hill Troupe, an organization that produces Gilbert and Sullivan operettas to support various nonprofits in



Carolyn Powell with George Petit, Associate Commissioner of NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, at SUS' 2007 Spring Benefit

New York, and serving as a Board member of the St. Matthew and St. Timothy Neighborhood Center on the Upper Westside of Manhattan.

As SUS' Board Chair, Carolyn is aware of the challenges that lie ahead for SUS but is confident that the Board's diversity of skills, experiences and backgrounds open the door to many new possibilities and opportunities to make SUS stronger and better able to serve consumers. ❖

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OF THE IN-KIND SUPPORTERS OF OUR 2007 SPRING BENEFIT:

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The Colbert Report
The John Allan Company
Trump International Sonesta Beach
Resort Hotel
Whole Foods Market

LIFE AT SUS

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relationships with adults and their peers. And their free time together—after school, after dinner and on weekends—also has a secondary purpose. “Some of the kids tend not to speak much or socialize,” says Melissa DaCosta, the residence manager at the Buffalo and Park apartments. “So activities such as playing board games, bowling, going to the movies and even shopping encourage them to socialize more with each other and the greater community.”

Another positive aspect to the Buffalo/Park residence is that the young adults see their families on a regular basis. Since moving to Brooklyn, Juan and Christian, who were voluntarily placed in the foster care system because their mothers were unable to provide the care they needed, see their mothers every weekend.



Christian folding his laundry.

Most of these young men came from a group home that served 73 children with developmental disabilities. For them, Buffalo/Park offers a new kind of home and the possibility of a much more fulfilling future.

SUS offers an extensive array of residential and support services for people with developmental disabilities. Each person’s medical, nursing, psychological, nutritional, and recreational needs are met through an individualized plan. Staff assists residents in their journey towards the highest level of independence they can achieve. ❖



David cooking a meal.



Donna Colonna, SUS CEO, and Robert Isaksen, Market Executive, Health Care and Institutions of Bank of America

On Wednesday, May 2, 2007, SUS honored at its annual benefit:

Bank of America, for its commitment to working with and investing in local communities to build better neighborhoods, and for partnering with SUS on developing supportive housing.

Louis J. Fratto, Jr., President of MTM Pharmacy Services, for his dedicated and compassionate commitment to providing pharmaceutical services to SUS’ consumers for almost twenty years.



Louis J. Fratto, Jr and Louis Cavaliere, SUS Senior Vice President of Developmental Disabilities Services and Children Services



New York City Council Member G. Oliver Koppell, Chair of the Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse & Disability Services Committee, for his outstanding leadership on issues that affect the many vulnerable New Yorkers with special needs that SUS serves.

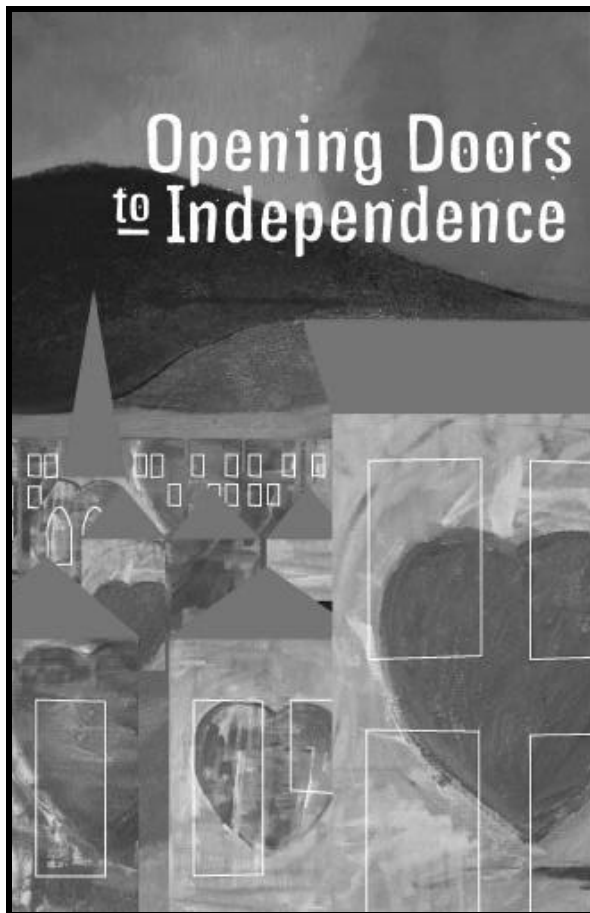
Earl Brown, SUS Board Vice Chair, and G. Oliver Koppell



305 Seventh Avenue, 10th Floor
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www.susinc.org

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