

# ODYSSEY HOUSE

## news

www.odysseyhouseinc.org

Saving lives, rebuilding families, restoring communities

Fall 2009



Children at the Family Re-Entry Program in the Bronx got a special gift this year – a brand new playground! See centerspread.

## Odyssey House Program Named “Outstanding Residence of the Year”

*The Odyssey House Haven on 121st St in East Harlem joins the ranks of top-rated supportive housing programs in New York State*

Calling it an example of “superb collaboration between providers, architects and builders that creates real homes for real people,” the state-wide Supportive Housing Network of New York (SHNNY) chose the Haven as its 2009 “downstate” winner for this coveted award.

Opened in 2001, the Odyssey House Haven is home to 63 formerly homeless single men and women with chronic medical conditions who, with supportive services, are able to live independent lives. Examples of the kind of comprehensive services offered are the communal kitchen and the Haven Café where

each tenant can enjoy a home-cooked evening meal, a multi-purpose meeting space and recreation room, a landscaped garden and outdoor patio dining area, and a community-supported art gallery.

Judges from SHNNY said they were immediately impressed with the Haven as soon as they walked through its large glass doors into a spacious sun-lit lobby. “Everywhere the eye lands,” they said, “there is something beautiful, from the artworks that bedeck the lobby and two-story gallery, to the modern, open staircase, to the residence’s total spotlessness.”

The Haven was designed by Tony Shitemi of Urban Architectural Initiatives with construction by MEGA Contracting.

## SUPPORTING NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH

Every September, National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month raises awareness about addiction, shares stories of recovery, and assists those who are still struggling. This year, Odyssey House residents and staff participated in a number of events to celebrate Recovery Month, including our 4th Annual “Run for Your Life” 5K Fun Run/2 Mile Walk. See page 3 for details.



## Family-Focused Treatment Enhanced with SAMHSA Support

Odyssey House has received two separate multi-year federal grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) totaling \$2.3 million.

Both grants are for three years, target at-risk special populations and build on treatment services offered within Odyssey House’s residential and outpatient programs. “Healthy Mothers, Healthy Families” is a new \$1.4 million program for pregnant and postpartum women in residential substance abuse treatment, and the Bronx Urban Youth Initiative (BUY-IN) is a \$900,000 community-based outpatient service for 18-24 year-olds.

The first grant provides funding to the Odyssey House Family Center of Excellence to allow counseling and healthcare professionals to address the substance abuse, medical, social and psychological needs of pregnant women and women with children. The enhanced program will also

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## Art Show Explores Dreams and the Unconscious



*Goddess Fortuna Sees All*, by the ElderCare Art Group



Detail from *Poison's Lab*, by the Lafayette Art Group



Detail from *UNITYCOMMUNITY*, by Albert C.

The Odyssey House Art Project recently opened its fifth exhibit, “The Royal Road to the Unconscious.” The exhibit features paintings, sculptures, drawings and multi-media works from artists in several different programs, including adolescents, senior citizens and residents in mental health housing.

Sigmund Freud described dreams as the “royal road to the unconscious.”

With this as a starting point, the Odyssey House Art Project began work, using the creative process to access the deepest recesses of the mind. The result is a series of artworks inspired by dreams, myths, archetypes and surrealist theory.

Odyssey House has an active and vibrant expressive arts program. Creating art helps residents find new ways to access feelings and a new medium to express these feelings. Many residents, who were socially and culturally isolated by

their addiction and mental illness, are encouraged to become engaged in the creative process. For residents in recovery at Odyssey House, developing positive socialization and personal interactions are integral to their continued growth.

“The Royal Road to the Unconscious” will be on display into the new year at the Haven Art Gallery, 239 E. 121st Street in Harlem. Additional selections from the exhibit can be viewed on our website: [www.odysseyhouseinc.org](http://www.odysseyhouseinc.org).

### Art Festival Celebrates Recovery

Odyssey House Harbor resident Miguel F.’s painting, “Friends,” was selected as the winner of the visual arts/acrylic category at the Sixth Annual New York State Recovery Fine Arts Festival.

The festival showcases the artistic achievement by individuals in recovery from addiction. The Recovery Fine Arts Festival is sponsored by OASAS each year during September in conjunction with National Recovery Month.

“The arts festival provides an opportunity for individuals who have begun a life of recovery to impart their journey through artistic expression,” said OASAS Commissioner Karen Carpenter-Palumbo. “Each year, I am overwhelmed by the talent, creativity, and emotion that is present in all of the art submissions. Collectively, this exhibit has a profound effect on all those who visit the display.”



*Friends* by Miguel F.

### OASAS Honors Odyssey House Mom

LaQuanda E., a resident of the Family Re-Entry Program, was honored by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) at the Pathways to Recovery Forum in September. She, along with 11 others, received a badge of honor for sharing her story of recovery for the “Your Story Matters” campaign.

During her time in treatment, LaQuanda earned her GED and completed vocational training, while maintaining abstinence and being a full-time mom. Read her inspiring story at [www.iamrecovery.com](http://www.iamrecovery.com).



LaQuanda E. with her daughter

Now in its second year, the “Your Story Matters” campaign encourages New Yorkers to share their stories of recovery in an effort to break the cycle of addiction, eliminate stigma and promote lives of sobriety.

# Celebrating National Recovery Month

## Run for Your Life Marks 4th Successful Year

National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month is an important opportunity to promote the benefits of substance abuse treatment and spread awareness that recovery is possible. Each year, to commemorate National Recovery Month, Odyssey House holds a 5K fun run and walk. This year, our 4th annual “Run for Your Life” race took place on September 26th.

More than 1,500 people came out to Icahn Stadium on a beautiful Saturday morning to show their support for men and women in treatment for substance abuse problems. Participants included clients from 10 other NYC-based treatment agencies, friends and family of peo-

ple in recovery and many of our corporate partners.

In proclaiming September 26th “Odyssey House Day,” Mayor Michael Bloomberg congratulated Odyssey House for being “a great resource and advocate for those with substance abuse problems.”

WCBS-TV reporter Jay Dow emceed the race day activities for the second consecutive year. “I’m proud to have a small role in today’s celebration of recovery,” said Dow. “Congratulations to all the

winners here today who are working towards a better life.”

“What makes this event so special,” said John Tavalacci, executive vice president and chief operating officer, “is that for many of the participants in treatment, completing the 5K race helps instill a sense of success and pride. And that can help people in recovery stay focused on sobriety.”

### Rallying for Recovery

On September 12, nearly 200 Odyssey House staff members and clients attended the A&E Recovery Rally. They joined more than 10,000 individuals and families in recovery and treatment programs and advocates from all 50 states for a rally at Foley Square in Lower Manhattan, followed by a symbolic walk across the Brooklyn Bridge to Cadman Plaza.

*Thank you to our sponsors  
for making “Run for Your Life”  
such a successful event!*



Hanging out at the NY Knicks Groove Truck.



Playing Double Dutch on the field.



Runners get ready to start the race.



Jay Dow congratulating a winner.



John Tavalacci (second from left) with Jody Silva Falk (left), Theresa Gentry and Jerry Silva from ChemRx.

# 6-18-09 A NEW PLAYGROUND

**Odyssey House, KOOL-AID and KaBOOM! team up to build a playground in one day**



Children playing on "the vortex," a component of the new playground.

Children living at the Family Re-Entry Program in the Bronx now have a state-of-the-art playground, thanks to volunteers from KOOL-AID and Odyssey House who joined together this summer to build the new play-space. The project was organized by KaBOOM!, a non-profit organization that helps communities build local play spaces for children.

"We were thrilled when KaBOOM! told us they had chosen our Family Re-Entry program as a playground site, and the excitement just kept building over several months of meticulous planning. What was once a concrete backyard is now a fun, safe playground that'll bring joy to children for years to come," said Peter Provet, president of Odyssey House.

### **Designed by children, for children**

As part of the planning process, children living at Odyssey House had the opportunity to imagine their dream playground

at Design Day. The children drew pictures of their ideas and, with the help of their parents, made a wish list of features and colors. The designers created three blueprints based on the children's wishes and the final design was chosen by consensus. The result is a one-of-a-kind, playground designed by the children.

### **"Sunshine in our hearts"**

After seven weeks of planning, the build day came in mid-June. All of the playground equipment and supplies arrived as scheduled and the build was on track as planned. Unfortunately, the build day happened to fall on the rainiest day of the month in the second rainiest June on record for New York City.

Despite the torrential downpour, more than 150 people showed up early in the morning to assemble the playground in a single day. In addition to the playground components, we built a number of side projects, includ-



The KOOL-AID man visits the children on Build Day.



Installing the slide.



Planting the garden.



# AT FAMILY RE-ENTRY 6-18-09

ing new planters, picnic tables and a mural to make the park a fun, relaxing spot for our residents.

Said Joan Jackson, program director of Family Re-Entry, “This just shows you what can be accomplished when people come together for a worthwhile cause. It may have rained all day, but there was sunshine in our hearts.”

Hip Hop pioneer Reverend Run and his wife Justine Simmons; Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr.; and volunteer groups including Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, LLP and SoBRO (South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation) were all on hand to build the playground with Odyssey House staff, clients, family members and other community supporters. The approximate value of the KaBOOM! grant, including the playground, side projects and surfacing, is \$100,000.

**On your mark, get set, play!**

After the playground was built, the children still had to wait for the rubber surfacing to be poured before they could safely play on it. Once that was complete, we held a special day for the children as part of KaBOOM!’s national Play Day program. Adriane Armstrong, director of children’s services, planned a fun-filled day that included an art project, a performance by magician Looney Louie, and other playground activities.

**The importance of play**

Children of clients at Odyssey House share a common bond in the difficulties they’ve faced while growing up with a chemical dependent parent or parents. Often they have spent time in and out of foster care, living with different relatives or family members and being a part of the child welfare system. The Family Re-Entry Program provides these children the opportunity to reunite with their recovering parent, and to live with them in a safe and nurturing environment where the parent can work on recovery, and the family can begin to heal. The new playground provides the children with a safe and protected area where they can connect with their parents, allowing Odyssey House to provide needed recreation and a place where family bonding and reunification can continue.



Children had the opportunity to draw their dream playground on Design Day.



After the surfacing was poured, we held a Play Day for all of the Odyssey House children. Left, a little girl explores the main structure. Right, two kids pose with Looney Louie, a magician.



Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Dr. Peter Provet, Justine Simmons & Reverend Run at the closing ceremony.



A section of the jungle-themed mural.

## Program Graduates Prove that Treatment Works



Graduate Ulysses I. receives his diploma from Steve Owens.

On a rainy afternoon this fall, Odyssey House staff, current and former residents, and friends and family members gathered at the MABON facility on Ward's Island to commemorate the day our residents dream about: graduation. The ceremony marked the completion of treatment by men and women from the MABON and adolescents from the Teen Leadership Center and Lafayette Avenue programs.

Congratulating them on their achievement, Odyssey House Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

John Tavolacci told the graduates that they are “ambassadors for recovery. You are living proof that treatment works.”

Graduation is a special event at Odyssey House. It's an opportunity for graduates to talk about their treatment experience and future plans to an audience of family and friends. It is also a chance for graduates to encourage their peers who are still in treatment to “stick with it.” This October, some of the graduates had the opportunity to do just that.

Charles S. arrived at Odyssey House in 2007 under an eight month mandate, but stayed longer because he hadn't accomplished everything he wanted to. “I owed it to myself to make that change,” he said, “because nobody else was going to do it for me.”

Another graduate, Isabel S., spoke of reconnecting with her three daughters and how proud she was to have completed the program. “I've never finished anything I've started before, not until I came to Odyssey House,” she said. “I will always remember where I got a chance at a new life.”

### Achieving Educational Goals

Earlier in the summer, Odyssey House also held a graduation ceremony for 44

residents who earned General Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs).

Grace C., the valedictorian from the Manor Family Center, said that what drives residents to pursue their GED at Odyssey House is “the knowledge that we can do better, and that we deserve better.” Grace was awarded the Outstanding Student Achievement Award.

For Ernest M., earning his GED was no easy feat: he repeated the ninth grade three times. He said he is deeply grateful for the opportunity to study at Odyssey House. “These teachers are no ordinary teachers; they spend their personal time to help us learn to become better people.” Inspired by his participation in the Odyssey House Theatre Project, Ernest enrolled in Kingsborough Community College this fall to study acting. He completed treatment in August.

Odyssey House's Vocational Rehabilitation Services, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education and Project Restart, provides on-site educational services available to all residential clients and administers the GED exam five times a year.

*“I will always remember where I got a chance at a new life.”*

Isabel S.

## Funding Program Development

*Continued from page 1:* include resources to engage the residents' extended family members and/or significant others in the treatment process and for outreach into the community.

Dr. Peter Provet, president and CEO of Odyssey House, described the grant as a “significant investment in the depth and range of services we offer mothers in our Family Center programs. This new award gives us the resources to do more: more family therapy, more family reunification, and more community outreach.”

The BUY-IN award will fund an innovative family-focused substance abuse treatment program for transition age youth, a population increasingly seen as falling through the cracks of traditional social service efforts.

For Dr. Provet, this additional federal funding could not come at a better time as demand for services and shrinking revenues stretch treatment resources.

“Partnership with SAMHSA and its Center for Substance Abuse Treatment will allow us to deepen the range of services we currently offer at-risk youth and families, and bring additional federal dollars to an underserved New York City community,” said Dr. Provet.

## Community Service Award



Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau presented Odyssey House President Dr. Peter Provet with an award for his “Dedication and Continued Support to the Mission and Goals of The 125th Street Community Alliance.”

The 125th Street Alliance is a voluntary membership group of local business owners, community leaders, police, fire and sanitation officials whose mission is to improve the quality of life of people who live and work in East Harlem.

## New Board Members Show Support for People in Recovery

Odyssey House and Odyssey Foundation are pleased to add two new members to its Boards of Trustees: Anne Board and Linda Willett. Both have extensive experience as board members of nonprofit organizations and were attracted to the range of services Odyssey House provides to underprivileged New Yorkers with substance abuse problems.

### Communications know-how

Ms. Board is Head of External Relations at American Securities where she facilitates investment development and external communications. Prior to this position, she was Director of Marketing and Business Development for the law firm of Mayer Brown LLP, and before that, Director of External Relations and Practice Management at McKinsey & Company.

As well as bringing a wealth of strategic communications experience to her role as board member, Ms. Board brings a deep commitment to helping individuals in crisis. "All my life," she said, "I've believed in the power of the words 'we'

and 'can' and that's what Odyssey House is all about to me.

"I was particularly impressed by the holistic approach Odyssey House takes to treatment, including the arts, educational classes, job training, housing and physical exercise. As a runner, I know how much getting back to running races with others helped me heal from the domestic violence I survived. Odyssey House programs and locations are ones that people want to run to, not away from."

### Legal expertise

A legal expert in risk management, intellectual property, product liability, government and corporate governance, Linda Willett has substantial in-house and major law firm experience.

Currently Chair of the Sedgwick, Deeter, Moran & Arnold LLP Drug and



Anne Board (left) and Linda Willett (right) with Odyssey House President Peter Provet and supporter Kimberly Bishop at "Run for Your Life" in September.

Medical Device practice, she has more than a decade of experience as vice president and deputy general counsel for pharmaceutical manufacturer Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Ms. Willett says she joined the Board of Odyssey House "because I think it is vitally important to play an active role in helping others in our community. Healthy and self-sufficient people make our community strong. Odyssey House plays a role in achieving that goal and I wanted to be part of the effort."

## Running for a Cause: Marathon Team Members Reach Their Goals

The skills needed to participate in a marathon – organization, focus, persistence and resilience – are similar to the skills people need to succeed in recovery from substance abuse. Over the past ten years, Odyssey House "Run for Your Life" has trained more than 140 men and women for the NYC Marathon.

This year, another 40 clients, graduates, staff and volunteers, led by veteran marathoners John Tavolacci and director of recreation Andre Matthews, challenged themselves to conquer one of the world's most grueling road races, and once again proved they were more than a match for the streets of New York.

Among them was Odyssey House board member Grant Miller who, together with his friend David Bohn and volunteer Michael Patent, turned their marathon races into a successful fundraiser for Odyssey House, raising nearly \$15,000 for the agency's physical fitness programs.

Mr. Miller said he decided six months before the marathon to "finally take the plunge and sign-up" and that it was the "the efforts of clients, former clients and staff of Odyssey House who had completed the marathon over the last few years" that inspired him to do it.

"I knew that it would be hard work and sacrifice, but I frankly had no idea of the physical and mental demands of the training regimen, or the race itself. There were certainly times during the training and the race that I thought that this was not worth the effort, but I was wrong. It was worth every minute."

Also among them was Odyssey House resident Maria S., a young woman in recovery from heroin addiction who walks with a permanent limp from devastating back injuries and who almost died of an overdose. Maria said the challenge to complete the marathon is part of a larger goal she is setting for herself to overcome obstacles that have held her back. Maria is well on the way to meeting her goals; she completed the marathon in eight hours.

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John Tavolacci and Odyssey House Board Member Grant Miller after running the NYC Marathon.



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## Odyssey House Community-Based Services



Founded in 1967, Odyssey House is an Enhanced Therapeutic Community (TC) providing innovative services and programs for a broad population of drug-troubled individuals and families, including:

- |                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mothers & children          | Mentally ill chemical abusers (MICA) |
| Pregnant women              | Single adults                        |
| Adolescents                 | Court mandated clients               |
| Elders (55 years and older) | Homeless adults                      |

Odyssey House runs the largest and oldest parent and child residential/outpatient TC program in the country and the only residential/outpatient TC program for senior citizens.

For more information about Odyssey House programs, call 212-987-5100 or visit us online at [www.odysseyhouseinc.org](http://www.odysseyhouseinc.org)