

# ODYSSEY HOUSE

## news

www.odysseyhouseinc.org

Saving lives, rebuilding families, restoring communities

Spring 2009

## Teens in Treatment Show Off Their Creative Talent

This spring, teens in treatment at Odyssey House have three unique opportunities to engage their creative abilities: the Odyssey House Theatre Project, a filmmaking workshop, and an art project with collage artist Chad Porter.

### Odyssey House Theatre Project

Fifteen adolescents in residential treatment are participating in a three-month playwriting workshop — the Odyssey House Theatre Project. The teens are learning about all stages of the playwriting process, from concept development to stage production.



Fifteen teens in residential treatment are participating in the Odyssey House Theatre Project.

Odyssey House is partnering with City Lights Youth Theatre to run the program, which will culminate on June 8th with

two invitation-only performances at the Studio Theatre on 42nd Street. Directing the artistic and instructional elements of the Odyssey House Theatre Project is Tom Demenkoff, education director for City Lights. The project is funded by a grant from the Elizabeth & Baretts O. Benjamin Charitable Foundation.

Visit [odysseyhousetheatreproject.org](http://odysseyhousetheatreproject.org) to learn more about the project.

### Take 2! Girls take over the cameras

Adolescent girls at the Lafayette Avenue Center are participating in a film workshop similar to the one held at the

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## Run for Your Life 5K Fun Run/2 Mile Walk September 26, 2009

Join us at Icahn Stadium as we celebrate National Recovery Month with individuals in treatment, their families and friends, and supporters of recovery services!

Online registration opens in August at [odysseyhouseinc.org](http://odysseyhouseinc.org).

## Green Team Works to Make Odyssey House Eco-Friendly

“Going green” has become more than just a passing trend. Like many organizations, Odyssey House has begun taking steps to become more environmentally-friendly. It’s obvious there are environmental benefits, but there are often a variety of social and economic benefits as well, such as healthier homes and communities and lower energy and water costs.

“Going green is a natural fit for Odyssey House,” says Dr. Peter Provet. “The whole idea of creating and sustaining a healthier environ-

ment is very much in line with our organizational mission and values. Furthermore, as a non-profit agency, because of the cost savings, we’ll be able to do more with the resources we have.”

An agency-wide committee – known as the Green Team – has been established to cut down on waste, reduce energy use and undertake green building projects. A number of tasks have already begun and others are in the works, including:

- Installing energy-efficient lighting and light sensors
- Replacing old appliances and electronics with Energy Star-compliant ones

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ODYSSEY HOUSE

## Graduates Prove it is Possible to Change Lives



Lafayette Avenue graduate Gabriella Rizzo with her mother Susan.

An “opportunity for change” — that was the theme at the adolescent facilities’ recent graduation ceremony. The two valedictorians, Michael Velasquez from the Teen Leadership Center and Gabriella Rizzo from the Lafayette Avenue Center, spoke about how they used their time at Odyssey House as a chance to change their lives.

### ***Taking advantage of opportunities***

Michael admits that he did not want to enter treatment in October 2007, but by the time he finished a year later, he was glad he did.

“Odyssey House taught me how to cope with tough situations in a positive way, without resorting to drugs or alcohol. A few months into treatment, I decided to take advantage of everything Odyssey House has to offer, and I did. I set short-term goals and long-term goals, and I exceeded my own expectations.”

While in treatment, Michael earned his GED and enrolled in Kingsborough Community College. This spring, he will begin NYU’s Langone Medical Center Surgical Technology Program.

### ***“It was a miracle”***

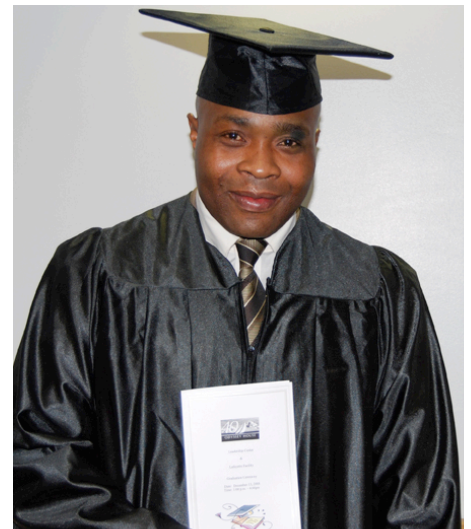
Gabriella says she arrived at Lafayette “lost, tired and addicted.” But it was here that “a miracle happened.” During her year in treatment, Gabriella earned her GED and trained to be a veterinary technician. Now that she has completed treatment, she is living with her mother and working in a veterinary clinic.

### ***Graduate returns to Odyssey House***

When Freddie Blue entered treatment more than two years ago, he never dreamed he would one day become a substance abuse counselor. But while in treatment, he realized he had the chance to change people’s lives. In addition to his own struggles with addiction, Mr. Blue lost his mother to drug abuse. “I believe I can help save a person’s life and help him

to become a clean and sober person. Because I’ve been there, done that,” he said.

Mr. Blue entered the Resident Staff Training Program offered by Vocational Services and is now working at the MABON facility on Ward’s Island. Odyssey House’s Resident Staff Training Program gives residents the opportunity to pursue careers in clinical counseling, maintenance or food service. The Clinical Counseling track is a six-month comprehensive internship program for residents whose goal it is to become Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselors.



Proud graduate Freddie Blue, now a substance abuse counselor at the Odyssey House MABON program, believes he can help save lives.

## Teens Explore Their Artistic Side

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Teen Leadership Center last fall. Sandra Ciccone, who is directing the project, says the girls are enthused about the project and the filmmaking process as a whole.

Whereas the boys’ workshop was documentary-based and resulted in six short films, the girls’ workshop will feature one film. The girls collaborated on a script about what it is like to be a new person in treatment. Though the script is fictional, it is based on their real experiences. The completed film will be posted on our YouTube channel, OdysseyHouseNY, along with the films from the boys’ workshop.

### ***Collage art project***

Teens from the Leadership Center are working with artist Chad Porter to create a series of murals. The boys have been working on collecting images from magazines, advertisements, books and photographs. The murals will be displayed at the Haven Art Gallery.



Chad Porter, center, and teens at work on one of the murals.

Mr. Porter, who creates his collages on surfboards and skateboards, will be showing his latest collection at Gallery Bar in Manhattan on May 6th. The opening will include a screening of “The Endless Summer” and a silent auction. Part of the proceeds from the opening will benefit Odyssey House. For more information about Mr. Porter, visit [archivalprints.net](http://archivalprints.net).

## A Journey into the Imagination

The Odyssey House Art Project is working on its fifth show of original art by people with substance abuse and/or mental health problems. The show will be a diverse collection of paintings, sculptures and mixed media artwork depicting various figures and ideas from the artists' imaginations. The exhibition will feature:

A series of images reflecting the 10 most common dreams, including flying, falling and being chased

An ElderCare project using deconstructed news headlines to "circumvent

the predictable image making choices of the conscious mind"

An interactive, kaleidoscopic installation of a female model head by teen girls in the Lafayette Avenue program

The Odyssey House Art Project was established for residents coping with mental illness, substance abuse and homelessness. Over the years, it has expanded to include all residents who are interested in art. The program gives residents new ways to express their feelings and overcome the social isolation caused by their addictions.

The show will open to the public in October at the Haven Art Gallery, 239 E.



**ElderCare clients hard at work on their project, Queen Fortuna's Wheel; each number corresponds to a prediction deconstructed from fortune cookie texts.**

121st Street in Harlem. Further information on the art show and the opening reception will be available at: [odysseyhouseinc.org](http://odysseyhouseinc.org).

## Odyssey House and Kool-Aid Team Up to Build New Playground

Children in Family Re-entry will be getting a brand-new playground through a community-led project sponsored by Kool-Aid. The children will have the opportunity to envision their dream playground on Design Day, May 1st. The designers will base the final blueprint on the children's wishes as well as on input from their parents.

On June 18th, the playground will be assembled in one day by more than 150 volunteers from Odyssey House, Kool-Aid and the

community. In addition to the playground itself, Kool-Aid is also sponsoring side projects such as a mural and a picnic area. The final result will be a beautiful new playspace in which families can spend time together.

Joan Jackson, program director of Family Re-entry, is thrilled about the project. "It is a wonderful example of community groups coming together to create something that might otherwise not be possible," she said.

The project is organized by KaBOOM!, a nonprofit organization that helps communities build local playspaces for children.



## Incorporating Environmental Practices into Programs

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- Using non-toxic cleaning supplies and buying them in bulk to reduce packaging

To ensure a lasting impact, the Human Resources department will be incorporating a segment on environmentally-friendly practices into training for new employees and writing a green policy into the staff manual. It will hold more video conferences to reduce travel whenever possible.

### Teaching green living

The Green Team is also planning projects to encourage client participation – a living wall at the Lafayette Avenue program; a composting bin for the MABON, built by adolescents at the Teen Leadership Center; and a vegetable garden planted and maintained by MABON residents. A client-driven campaign is now in development in which current residents will educate incoming residents on green practices with the hope that they will continue to be green after they leave Odyssey House.

### Sustainable building design

Next year, Odyssey House, in partnership with the NYS Office of Mental Health, will open its first building that will receive a certification from the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system. The building, a 60-unit supportive housing unit located on Soundview Avenue in the Bronx, is designed to use less energy and will be built with sustainable, environmentally-friendly materials. Among the features:

- Solar water heating using copper pipes on the roof
- Geothermal heating and air conditioning
- Rainwater harvesting on the roof for laundry and gardening

It will be a "teaching" building in which all the environmentally-friendly materials used will be identified and explained on plaques throughout the building so tenants and visitors will learn about the benefits of going green.

Odyssey House will receive technical assistance and funding through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Multifamily Energy Star Program to obtain the highest energy standards.

# People Pulling Together P



**Working partnerships.** Garret Jones (center), regional manager Eastern Athletic Clubs, is very happy with Odyssey House team members, maintenance supervisor Doris Mason and associate Mickey Mason. “We judge each person by the quality of the work they do today ... Doris and her team fit the bill.”



**Community partners.** Maria De La Rosa, Deputy Director, Community Affairs Unit, Manhattan DA’s Office (center, orange blouse) flanked by local business, government, public safety, and social service members of Harlem’s 125th St. Alliance, says co-founder Odyssey House is the “perfect community partner.”



**Education partners.** Teachers from New York City Board of Education work closely with clinical staff to get teens in treatment get back on track with their schoolwork at the Odyssey House Leadership Center for boys and Lafayette Avenue Center for girls.



**Parent partners.** Helping teens and parents develop healthy family p

## Power of P

“You can do it, but you can’t do it alone.”

This maxim is repeated several times a day in our residential and outpatient programs to remind program participants, and ourselves, that we are stronger together and we all need partners to support, challenge, and guide us.

Together with our valued partners on the Odyssey House and Foundation Boards of Trustees, led by Chairman George Rosenfeld, and Vice Chairmen Craig J. Montalbano and Richard C. O’Connor, we are fortunate to enjoy the support of partners in government, corporate and private foundations, employers and community leaders, colleges and research institutions, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, as well as volunteers and family members.

### Why partners matter

Everyone who walks through the door of an Odyssey House facility enters a world where respect, trust, and honesty are both awarded to and expected of every resident, worker, and visitor. It’s a world where people come to heal themselves, reunite with families, and forge new lives.

But while much is expected of each individual in treatment, none are expected to do it alone. Treatment is a partnership of

# Promotes Treatment Success



**Family partners.** Mothers with young children form strong bonds living together at the Odyssey House Family Center of Excellence.

Partnerships is a key goal of Odyssey House adolescent treatment services.

## Partnerships



**Foundation partners.** Dr. Julio Urbina, director of health-care programs for the Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation (back row, left), helps support residents in the Odyssey House ElderCare Program with specialized treatment and outreach services that target recovery needs of older addicts.



Individuals striving to overcome addiction, their peers, family members, counselors, private and public funders, and organizational supporters.

Throughout recovery, healthy partnerships are encouraged and nurtured. They are the difference between success and failure, happiness and despair.

In this newsletter we give a special 'thank you' to all our partners in recovery and share with you a snapshot of some of our partners and the people they help support.

*Become a Partner:*  
**Join Friends of Odyssey House**

Visit our website for information on special events, volunteer opportunities and more!  
[www.odysseyhouseinc.org](http://www.odysseyhouseinc.org)

Or contact us at:  
**Odyssey Foundation**  
 95 Pine Street  
 New York, NY 10005  
 (212) 361-1600

## National Writer Shines a Light on Older Addicts

New York Times Magazine writer Benoit Denizet-Lewis came back to one of his sources recently to discuss his new book, *America Anonymous: Eight Addicts in Search of a Life*, with Odyssey House ElderCare clients. *America Anonymous* is about eight men and women struggling to recover from addictions ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to overeating and compulsive gambling. For nearly three years, Denizet-Lewis immersed himself in their lives as they battled their addictions on the road to recovery. One of the profiles in the book is that of Janice, a grandmother in her fifties and a former ElderCare client.

The author followed Janice for more than two years in her recovery as she worked towards a GED and a full-time job. He shadowed her as she returned to



Author Benoit Denizet-Lewis, right, with Jon Roberts, deputy director, and former resident Janice Jefferies, whom he profiled for his book, *America Anonymous*.

her neighborhood in Harlem for a 24-hour pass, encountering old friends and drug dealers. “Janice is kind of a grandmotherly rock star, and our stroll through the area feels like her reunion tour,” wrote Denizet-Lewis.

Denizet-Lewis uses their stories as a means of exploring the idea of addiction as the underlying cause of many of our

social ills. “Addiction is our costliest and most pressing public health problem,” he says. “We talk about poverty, AIDS, crime and homelessness, but we don’t talk about addiction as a facilitator and cause of those issues.”

Not talking about addiction and recovery, according to many of the treatment experts the writer consulted, is largely responsible for a lack of funding for addiction research compared to other public health problems like HIV/AIDS and cancer. Part of the reason for this, they say, is the stigma attached to addiction. With *America Anonymous*, Mr. Denizet-Lewis hopes to “shine a spotlight on our most misunderstood health problem and break through the shame and denial that still shape our cultural understanding of it—and hamper our ability to treat it.”

To follow the author’s book tour, visit [americaanonymous.com](http://americaanonymous.com).

## Local Schoolchildren Offer Encouragement to Outpatient Clients

Clients at our Bronx Outpatient Program (BOP) received a special gift recently – encouragement bracelets from a group of local elementary schoolchildren in the Bronx. Talya Moncrease’s first-grade class at P.S. 130 participated in a lesson on appreciating differences and overcoming

obstacles. The students then made beaded bracelets as symbols of peace and hope for our clients. Each bracelet came with a note and drawing reflecting the students’ wishes for the recipients.



Left to right – Talya Moncrease, Maria Palmer and Kareemah Mohammed from Odyssey House Outpatient Services, and Kelly Borchers from Children for Children, with the first-graders from P.S. 130.

“Our clients were very touched by the gifts,” said Maria Palmer, director of Aftercare and Outreach at BOP. “They were especially appreciative of the notes that wished them peace and love.” The clients hope to visit the school soon to personally thank the students for their kind wishes.

The project was organized by Children for Children, an organization that encourages young people to get involved in volunteering, which supplied Ms. Moncrease with the curriculum and materials for the project.

Kelly Borchers, the School Programs Intern for Children for Children, said she reached out to Odyssey House because it is a community-based program for people recovering from substance abuse. “Since the children were learning about overcoming obstacles, Odyssey House seemed like a natural fit,” said Ms. Borchers.

## Smoke-Free Policy Earns Odyssey House Recognition

As part of its new Tobacco-Free Campaign, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has selected Odyssey House to be one of the founding members in the 100 Pioneers for Smoking Cessation Virtual Leadership Academy.

The Leadership Academy promotes smoke-free environments and effective smoking cessation efforts in treatment facilities; support community-based efforts to reduce tobacco use; and establish partnerships between behavioral health and nicotine cessation organizations to increase available tobacco cessation resources in communities.

In July 2008, Odyssey House implemented a tobacco-free policy in an effort to reduce rates of smoking among our residents and staff members. As a Pioneer, Odyssey House will receive an honorarium of \$1,000 designed to support our tobacco cessation efforts. In addition, SAMHSA and the Smoking Cessation Leadership Center (SCLC) will provide technical assistance and an array of available tobacco cessation resources.

### Smoking cessation program effective

Researchers at Odyssey House recently concluded a study examining the effectiveness of an integrated smoking cessation program offered to clients at our outpatient clinic.

The program helps individuals reduce and ultimately stop smoking by incorporating smoking cessation treatment and counseling into existing substance abuse services. The study found that participants were successful in reducing their smoking by more than half

and 25% of participants had reported complete cessation at six months.

The results of this program show that a smoking cessation program offered in conjunction with outpatient treatment can be successful at reducing smoking in this population.

### Intervention aims to prevent youth smoking

Children enrolled in universal prekindergarten at Odyssey House took part in a project aimed at preventing them from smoking at a later age. Smoking prevention at such a young age may seem unusual, but there is



Family Center preschooler works on a project inspired by Kim Gasselin's book, *Smoking Stinks*.

evidence that preschoolers show signs of readiness to try smoking, most likely because they are already learning about smoking through their environment.

Adriane Armstrong, director of children's services, hopes the prevention program will have another effect: to create a dialogue between parents and their children about the dangers of smoking. Ms. Armstrong believes the program will help the children support parents who have recently quit smoking while preventing future smoking.



## MISSION

It is the mission of Odyssey House to:

Provide comprehensive and innovative services to the broadest range of metro New York's population who abuse drugs, abuse alcohol, have mental illness.

Provide high quality, holistic treatment impacting all major life spheres: psychological, physical, social, family, educational, and spiritual.

Support personal rehabilitation, renewal, and family restoration.

Throughout its activities, Odyssey House undertakes to act as a responsible employer and member of the community and to manage the assets of the organization in a professional manner.

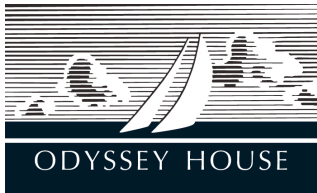
## New York State Officials Visit Odyssey House Programs



Department of Correctional Services Commissioner Brian Fischer joins representatives of criminal justice and treatment agencies at the new Odyssey House Edgemcombe Residential Treatment Facility.



Michele March, legislative aide to NYS Senate majority leader Malcolm A. Smith (second from right), and Odyssey House president Dr. Peter Provet (right) with two residents.



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 Tel: 212-361-1600

## 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
- Pregnant women
- Adolescents
- Elders (55 years and older)
- Mentally ill chemical abusers (MICA)
- Single adults
- Court mandated clients
- 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)