

Odyssey House *news*

odysseyhousenyc.org

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Join the Run for Your Life team at our Virtual 5K this September! See page 3 for details.

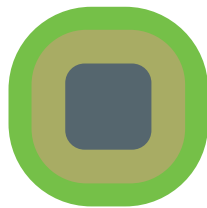
Working to keep the supply chain moving

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Art program provides creative outlet during pandemic

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Odyssey House

Where recovery gets real

Rising to the COVID-19 Challenge

When Governor Andrew Cuomo ordered the closure of non-essential businesses across New York State in response to rising coronavirus infection rates, Odyssey House stayed, and remains, open.

Our essential residential treatment centers, outpatient services, supportive housing, and primary health clinics in East Harlem and the South Bronx are located in some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in NYC. These communities, already suffering from health disparities of social injustice and inequality, were about to be hit hard by a highly infectious virus that threatened to overwhelm local social service providers and devastate fragile families.

With just a few weeks to prepare for an unprecedented public health crisis, we moved quickly to introduce procedures that limited the risk of infection in our facilities, maintained critical treatment and housing services, and pivoted administrative systems to remote functions.

These early measures not only kept the doors open for the vulnerable populations we treat, but they also helped keep our employees as safe as possible while they carried out essential services. Without the dedication of the program directors and their teams of counseling, maintenance, food service, and transportation workers, we would not have been able to keep our treatment and housing programs open. Without the efficiency of administrative staff working remotely, we would not have been able to procure necessary supplies, including personal protective equipment and other products, despite national shortages, and maintain all financial, capital, and personnel systems.

It was not only staff who worked together to keep services running: clients also pitched in to keep each other safe. Residents in substance abuse treatment centers with hundreds of beds quickly adopted new behaviors that ranged from keeping socially distant, wearing masks,

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FRONTLINE STORIES

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit New York City, staff and clients alike have been stepping up, taking on new responsibilities to keep their colleagues and fellow clients safe and healthy.

FRONTLINE STORY

Team Players in a Pandemic



Andrea Jones, Senior Resident Assistant (left), and Brenda Kearse, Resident Assistant (right), work together to keep Harbor staff and clients safe.

Essential workers stepping up and taking on new roles to keep services running safely are heroes to all New Yorkers. The staff at the Odyssey House Harbor in East Harlem are our heroes.

The Harbor houses 60 individuals who are coping with mental health issues, and staff like Andrea Jones, Senior Resident Assistant (SRA), and her coworker Brenda Kearse, Resident Assistant (RA), have been critical to running the program amid the pandemic. Neither Andrea nor Brenda has missed a single day of work since COVID-19 hit NYC. In the early days, as some employees called out sick, leaving the Harbor short-staffed, Andrea and Brenda stepped up.

“We had to hold down the fort!” said Andrea. “You do what you have to do. The residents depend on us for everything and we can’t let them down. We have to make it work, no matter what. It doesn’t matter what your job title is, we do what needs doing.”

Above and beyond

Their dedication hasn’t gone unnoticed. One of their supervisors, Val Major, Senior Director of Community Housing, said

“during this crisis, Andrea and Brenda continued to show up for work, working through their fears and apprehension. They continue to go far above what is expected of them and they have been the epitome of team players.”

Resident assistants at the Harbor develop a close working relationship with

the tenants. They dispense medications, listen when residents need to talk, offer advice, and help residents tackle their day-to-day tasks like laundry and cleaning. RAs run groups, help residents manage their finances and spend one-on-one time with those who need a little extra attention or guidance on a particular day. They’re essential workers at any time, not just during a pandemic.

Implementing safety protocols like wearing masks and encouraging social distancing can be particularly challenging in a transitional mental health housing

setting. According to Andrea, “Some of the residents don’t understand the seriousness of the virus – so we continually remind them to wear masks, show them how to wear them properly, encourage social distancing, frequent handwashing, and to let us know immediately if they start to feel unwell.”

‘Our goal is 100% safety’

Despite the challenges of keeping everyone safe during this unprecedented health crisis, the staff focus on keeping things as normal as possible and engage residents in in-house activities that minimize time outside. Brenda said, “We’re always talking about safety, safety, safety. Most get it, but some struggle. I don’t care how many times I have to remind them to wear masks, I want them to be safe. Our goal is 100% safety.”

It’s demanding, essential work during a time when many people are understandably fearful for the health of themselves and their loved ones. But Andrea and Brenda aren’t worried because

“We work as a team here. It takes a team to do what we do,” said Brenda.

they take all the necessary steps to reduce risk and have each other’s backs. “We work as a team here. It takes a team to do what we do,” said Brenda.

And they know they’re fully supported by their supervisors. “They don’t ask you to do anything they aren’t willing to do themselves. It keeps you going and it makes whatever you’re faced with easier. It makes a difference,” said Andrea. “When you know you’re completely supported, it’s awesome.”

“In a way, nothing much has changed,” Andrea continued. “I still come to work every day. Now I just wear gloves and a mask!” ●

Neighbor Helping Neighbor



Soundview Avenue tenant Stephen Bates is helping his neighbors through this challenging time.

Since the coronavirus pandemic made social isolation a public safety necessity, behavioral healthcare providers have been sounding the alarm on the potential harmful effects on people with mental health issues. This makes supportive housing programs for people living with behavioral and physical health challenges even more essential as they ensure vulnerable adults maintain stable housing and access to community services.

New Yorker Stephen Bates is one such person who experienced homelessness and struggled with mental health issues before he came to live in the Odyssey House Soundview Avenue supportive

housing program in the Bronx. This 56-unit apartment building provides single, low-income adults living with special needs, the help they need to function independently – essential in normal times, but even more critical during this public health emergency.

When Stephen moved to Soundview in 2014, he focused his life on giving back and getting to know his neighbors. When the pandemic hit, Stephen saw that many of the neighbors he'd gotten to know well were experiencing higher levels of anxiety, and he jumped in to help calm their fears by lending a listening ear, keeping them up-to-date on the news, and picking up items from the store.

Calm help in a crisis

"It gets to you, and you just want to do something, anything to help," says Stephen, who is aiding staff by urging his neighbors to comply with social distancing and wearing masks.

"I do research and inform my neighbors about how to stay safe. It's important to stay informed. I do the best that I can to help out because a lot of people are suffering, losing their jobs, their family members. It's hard to see that."

This is no surprise to Darlene Moore, Soundview Avenue Program Director, who calls Stephen a "model tenant." In 2018, the Supportive Housing Network of New York named Stephen "Tenant of the Year" for his "tenacity and strength to overcome tremendous hardships and rebuild his life in supportive housing." Read more about Stephen's journey to and through supportive housing at odysseyhousenyc.org. ●

Rising to the COVID-19 Challenge

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increased handwashing and other sanitation protocols, to accepting limits on visits and outside travel. And for people with mental health challenges living in our supportive housing, helping them incorporate new health guidance became a life or death priority.

Ready to meet increasing needs

The long-term impact of the coronavirus on the health and well-being of New Yorkers is still unfolding. Fears that a second (or more) wave of infection will return, that the economy will take a long time to recover, and that substance abuse and other mental and physical health problems will increase are real. Government leaders warn of significant cuts to services and urge all Americans to prepare for difficult times ahead while we rebuild from this public health crisis.

For Dr. Peter Provet, President and CEO, this is a challenge we are ready to meet.

"We are doing all we can at Odyssey House to prepare for increased demands on our services and we will not turn anyone away who comes to us for help," he said. "We were starting to make a dent in the opioid epidemic and are concerned that the coronavirus pandemic will undermine that progress and exacerbate the health risks in our communities.

"Our mission is to help New Yorkers in need overcome drug and alcohol abuse, improve their physical and mental health, and defeat homelessness. By working together, we continue to demonstrate that we can do that, and more, amid a global health crisis." ●

Virtual Race!

FIFTEENTH

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

September 2020

Please join Odyssey House for the 15th Annual Run for Your Life Virtual Run/Walk this September! This event raises awareness of, and funds for, the recovery movement.

With our Virtual Run/Walk, you can run anywhere, anytime in September for Recovery Month. We'll even mail you a finisher medal and t-shirt.

REGISTER & DONATE @ ODYSSEYHOUSENYC.ORG/DONATE

Staying Connected in Recovery — Outpatient Services Online and In Touch



Maria Tapia, Clinical Supervisor, has been instrumental in transitioning Outpatient Services to telehealth.

During daily check-ins with her clients in treatment for substance use disorders at the Odyssey House Outpatient Program in the South Bronx, Maria Tapia, Clinical Supervisor, and her colleagues noticed

high levels of anxiety and isolation among their clients as the concerns about the coronavirus infection and shutdown of services grew. Not knowing how long the health crisis would last, the team moved quickly to keep clients connected to their familiar support systems and made themselves available to clients in crisis 24/7 via a telephone hotline.

When Odyssey House implemented coronavirus containment measures like

social distancing and reducing group sizes while continuing to provide essential services to clients, Maria's role expanded to include virtual care. Though certain services, such as managing the medication-assisted treatment program, remain on-site, the bulk of treatment has transitioned to online and telehealth services.

As Clinical Supervisor of Outpatient Services, Maria manages the day-to-day operations of the clinic, ensuring staff is trained properly, safety protocols are being upheld, and monitors daily reports and supplies. But with most of the staff working remotely, and the urgent needs of clients in recovery to stay connected to services, Maria's role became instrumental in getting the telehealth services up and running.

Working closely with Renas Tili, Director of Information Systems and Technology, each staff member was set up with a laptop and cell phone. "IT really came through for us," she says. "I depend highly on Renas and Tony Chi, IT Administrator, to make sure our telehealth service runs smoothly – and it is!"

Team work in the trenches

Once the staff had the equipment

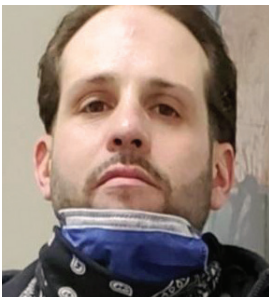
they needed, Maria's next step was to get everyone trained. She conducted mock interviews with the staff to identify potential glitches and build their confidence.

According to her supervisor, Mary Callahan, Senior Director of Outpatient Services, Maria's role in assisting the clinical staff with transitioning from face-to-face to telehealth services, and her enthusiasm in doing so, was critical to helping them become comfortable with the technology. "I never doubted it, but this crisis has shown Maria's dedication to her colleagues and staff," said Mary.

The effort has paid off – telehealth services are proving to be a hit with the clients. "Our daily numbers are better than we expected. The clients are really latching onto this as a resource," added Mary.

Despite the challenges of working remotely, Maria feels more connected to her colleagues and Odyssey House as a whole. "I feel supported and not at all isolated, and it's helping me get through this time of need. Feeling connected gives me a boost. We're all in the trenches together, and it's important to show the staff that they're not alone in this." ●

Telehealth Services Support Essential Workers in Opioid Recovery



Essential worker John B. is finding the support he needs through Outpatient Services.

John B., 37, came to Odyssey House Outpatient Services in June 2019 for group and individual counseling and connection with a doctor to prescribe Suboxone, a medication

used to treat opioid use disorder.

That help has made a big difference in John's life. He was on parole but still struggling with opioid addiction. It was vital for his recovery and parole agreement that he participate in outpatient services.

"I went through some dark places, but I got help and life is much better," he said. "I'm taking my recovery a lot more seriously now and my life has started falling into place."

Construction on the frontlines: Helping NYC hospitals handle the pandemic

Working in the midst of a pandemic has been stressful. As a member of the Carpenters Local Union 157, John is considered an essential worker, and his work has taken him to particularly somber places. Recently, John worked for Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, constructing temporary mortuary tents to expand capacity.

It's bleak – but necessary – work, and John is grateful he has his counselors at Outpatient Services to reach out to

when the strain starts to get to him. "It's been rewarding in a way – I feel like I'm doing something to help. But it's been challenging. I try not to take it home with me but it's not easy."

John said the counselors at Outpatient Services are very supportive, and that is key to his recovery process. "They believed in me and taught me that I deserved to give myself credit, to let go of guilt and shame, and work through those obstacles. This place really did show me how much they cared. They're happy to see me doing well, and it makes me want to do even better."

"He is an unsung hero," says Maria Tapia, "John has expressed how hard this job has been for him and how he has found support and solace in his recovery by working with his counselor, Mike Reddick, and his peer advocate."

Continued...

Mary Callahan, Senior Director of Outpatient Services, agrees, and adds that “John has been consistently dedicated to his recovery from opioids since he joined us, and his motivation has never wavered, not even during this crisis.”

Though there are so many things that have changed as a result of the coronavirus, John says one thing remains the same: his ability to access the services he needs to maintain his recovery. Though he still comes in occasionally for his medication, his groups and counseling sessions are now done via telehealth, and John feels as committed and supported as ever.

“I’ve gotten to know the staff and I know I can call them anytime I feel I need them,” he said. “The people here don’t give up on you, and it reminds me not to give up on myself.” ●



A graphic for a phone-in recovery support group. It features a white coffee cup, a smartphone, and two white sticky notes on a wooden surface. A white card in the center contains the text: "Phone-in Recovery Support Group Monday - Friday 1 - 2 pm FREE!".

TELEHEALTH SERVICES AT THE RECOVERY CENTER

The Odyssey House Recovery Center is now offering a daily phone-in Recovery Support Group from 1-2pm, Monday through Friday, for all those who would like to call in. Additionally, our Friday 6pm Recovery Support meeting is open to all. All telephone groups are facilitated by a Recovery Coach.

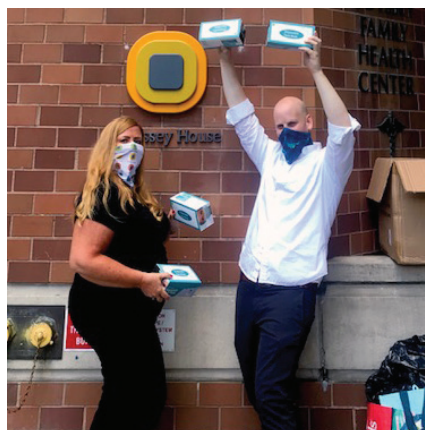
The number is
1-302-202-1116

when prompted, please put in the code 300630.

Keeping Our Community Safe



With hand sanitizer, one of the most important tools to prevent the spread of coronavirus, in short supply, New York State began producing its own product to keep community organizations and state residents safe. To help with the enormous task of disseminating thousands of gallons of sanitizer across the state, the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports tapped Odyssey House to act as a distributor to downstate treatment programs. Here, Danielle Mills, Assistant Director of the George Rosenfeld Center for Recovery, hands over a box to a staff member from Services for the Underserved.



When the pandemic hit NYC and left us short of supplies, several of our city and community partners stepped up, sending us thousands of disposable masks, gowns, gloves, and shields. A big thank you to the NYS Office of Addiction and Support Services, NYS Office of Mental Health, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYC Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit, Supportive Housing Network of New York, and Manhattan Borough President’s Office for providing us with supplies to keep our staff and clients safe!

Help us Fight the Epidemic within the Pandemic



The global pandemic is dominating the news but at Odyssey House, we are still working hard to fight the deadly opioid epidemic that killed more than 67,000 Americans in 2019 – a tragic number that is predicted to increase significantly this year.

More than 1,500 vulnerable men and women count on our residential and outpatient services to keep them safe while they are in recovery. Our special programs treating women with children, older adults, teenagers, people with HIV/AIDS, and/or mental illness need these services more than ever.

Please consider supporting our work – your donation will save lives. We wish you and your loved ones safety and good health as we face the months ahead together as a community.

Donate online at odysseyhousenyc.org/donate

FRONTLINE STORY

“It’s all hands on deck.”



Ledescia Eversley Denny is one of many employees to take on extra duties amid the coronavirus crisis.

Since joining Odyssey House two years ago as a Housing Specialist, Ledescia Eversley Denny’s main duties have involved helping our ElderCare clients secure post-treatment housing. She assists them with applications, escorts them to interviews, helps them apply for social security benefits, find assisted living or adult daycare centers, and access various community resources.

Now, amid the coronavirus pandemic, Ledescia has taken on another role: that of medical expediter. Effectively, she is coordinating telehealth visits between providers and clients, ensuring appointments are upheld and clients’ privacy is protected. With in-person doctor visits discouraged for all but the most serious cases, this has become a crucial responsibility.

Coordinating telehealth visits for all of the George Rosenfeld Center for Recovery’s clients between three different clinics is a big undertaking, but one Ledescia is happy to take on.

“In times like these, when you see a gap in services, you jump in. It’s all hands on deck,” she said.

Jeremy King, who as Senior Manager and Director of OASAS Residential Services works closely with Ledescia, says that her performance during the COVID-19 crisis has only underscored what her colleagues

have known throughout her tenure with Odyssey House: Ledescia is a caring, sensitive, and intelligent health care professional who excels in all aspects of her role.

“Ledescia brings energy and compassion to her work with clients. She is consistently willing to address client issues, even when they fall outside of her area of responsibility,” he said. “She cares – and, for our clients, having a professional who cares is often the difference between staying in treatment for program completion and leaving treatment before attaining their recovery goals.”

Though her responsibilities have broadened, Ledescia is still meeting with her ElderCare clients to keep them calm and safe and is continuing to submit applications and prepare them for life outside Odyssey House.

“I just want all their needs to be met,” she said. “I try to reassure them, ‘Your needs may have to be met in a different way, but at the end of the day, they will be met and I will be here with you.’” ●

FRONTLINE STORY

Staying Focused on Recovery in the Midst of a Pandemic



ElderCare client Gary R. has taken a hands-on approach to helping others during the pandemic.

Gary R., 56, entered Odyssey House last summer, after years of alcohol and opioid

abuse proved untenable and he was mandated to treatment by a drug court judge. His introduction to ElderCare was challenging but as he adjusted, he has fully committed. “It grew on me. When you want change, that’s when you realize you have to give up the street life. I want something better for myself and my family.”

Treatment looks a lot different right now than it did when Gary entered treatment last summer. Until recently, his days were mostly filled with groups, one-on-one meetings with counselors, and general maintenance and kitchen work. Now, with social distancing measures in place, the groups have disappeared, leaving only one-on-one meetings. But what remains constant is his commitment to his recovery goals: staying sober, reconnecting with his family, and finding a job.

And while the changes brought by the coronavirus have been tough, he understands the seriousness of the situation. “The counselors give me what I need and I know that I’m safer in here than out there. So I’m keeping the lines of communication open, working out every day, just trying to make the best of it,” he said.

He’s also taken on a leadership role in the program. He has been helping his fellow clients, some of whom are wheelchair-bound, bringing them meals and doing their laundry. He’s restocking food, cleaning up the kitchen, and keeping supplies (e.g., milk, diapers, wipes) for the mothers and children topped up.

Ledescia describes him as “very hands-on and all over the program. He takes initiative – if he sees a problem, he finds a solution. He checks in on staff to make sure they’re okay, checks on the children, just goes above and beyond. He’s very focused, and with this crisis, he has shown himself to be a natural leader.”

Other clients go to him for clarity and advice, including the mothers in the program. He’s uplifting and supportive while pushing them to do better. Some of the clients have had anxiety since coronavirus landed in NYC, and he has been a reassuring presence.

As for Gary, he finds reassurance in the staff. “I give all of the staff here a pat on the back – they’re putting their own lives on the line. For them to leave their families to come to work, to care for us, is a blessing. They’re on the front lines too.” ●

Public Affairs Executive Joins Boards of Trustees



Odyssey House and Odyssey Foundation are pleased to welcome Prisca Salazar-Rodriguez to our Boards of Trustees.

A seasoned public servant who has held increasingly responsible positions at all levels of government for more than two decades, she shares our deep commitment to helping vulnerable New Yorkers.

"When the opportunity presented itself to become part of the Odyssey House family, it was a no brainer," said Ms. Salazar-Rodriguez. "My father dedicated his life to helping those with addiction and for me to be able to continue that work in some way hit home. It is an honor to be able to work with an amazing and dedicated group of

people who maintain focus on the mission of Odyssey House."

Ms. Salazar-Rodriguez serves as the Director of the New York office of Hilltop Public Solutions, a national public affairs firm. Previously, she served as the Director of Executive Operations and Scheduling for NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio, Deputy Chief of Staff in the Office of the Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., and Director of Operations and Scheduling at Empire State Development Corporation.

Ms. Salazar-Rodriguez's program design and management skills translate into solid initiatives that advance the needs of a district, industry, or constituents. Known for her down-to-earth, pragmatic style that also welcomes challenges, she is adept at assessing and managing risk. Along with her public administration experience, Prisca has worked on several national and local political campaigns. ●

Odyssey House Receives Starbucks Neighborhood Grant



The Starbucks Foundation has awarded Odyssey House a \$2,500 Neighborhood Grant to support our COVID-19 response efforts. Odyssey House is one of 400 organizations nationwide to receive grants as part of its efforts to support communities impacted by the pandemic. The grants were informed and inspired by Starbucks partners who highlighted the causes and organizations uplifting their communities during COVID-19.

"Thank you, Starbucks, for recognizing the hard work Odyssey House and other community health care providers do and continue to do throughout this crisis," said Odyssey House President Dr. Peter Provet. "Grants like this allow us to continue our mission: helping New Yorkers in need to overcome substance misuse, mental health challenges, and homelessness." ●

Creative Classes



When Governor Cuomo issued the stay-at-home order, many of the activities our clients participate in as part of their treatment process had to go on pause with the rest of New York. Things like working out at the gym, attending groups and seminars, or leaving for home visits were no longer safe. Indoor activities that gave our clients something productive to do with their time became even more critical to keeping the clients safe and our programs running smoothly. And that's where our art program staff stepped in.

Social distancing made hands-on instruction and traveling to the art studio difficult, so Jerald Frampton, Director of Expressive Arts, got creative. He started leading virtual art classes and traveling to different facilities to make it easier for clients to participate. To make art accessible to everyone regardless of experience or ability, Jerald devised several easy, fun crafts like making masks and stenciling cloth bags.

"We've always had a robust art program, but now people who may not have come before are participating," Jerald says. "Sometimes it's so busy I have to tell people to come back later to maintain social distancing!" ●





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212-361-1600

Odyssey House

Where recovery gets real



GET REAL ABOUT RECOVERY

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, call us at **866-888-7880**. We can help. Residential, outpatient, and housing services available immediately.

Visit our blog for more news and updates from Odyssey House!
odysseyhousenyc.org/news



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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
- Suffer from mental illness

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

To support personal rehabilitation, renewal and family restoration.

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