Saving Our Homes, Saving Our Lives

The executive director of Bridging Access to Care on the importance of housing for people living with HIV/AIDS.

November 10, 2015 By Glenda Smith

Glenda G. Smith

Almost 15 year ago, I joined Bridging Access to Care (formerly known as the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force) as a health educator. Founded in 1986, BAC is one of the oldest and largest nonprofit multiservice HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment community service organizations in Brooklyn, New York. I now hold the position of executive director and have experienced first-hand the knowledge BAC has gained over the past three decades.

We provide comprehensive clinical treatment, evidence-based prevention education, harm reduction, care coordination, and mental health services to underserved racial, ethnic and minority communities in a trauma-informed and sensitive setting, including housing support services needed for individuals facing homelessness. BAC's services also include licensed mental health and substance abuse clinics and, in 2012, we were designated as a Health Home Care coordination team.

A pressing issue for many of our HIV-positive clients is housing. HIV is a chronic condition that can be managed through medication adherence and regular treatment and monitoring, but housing instability can be a major impediment to managing HIV care and treatment. Approximately 35 percent of all people living with HIV/AIDS in New York City are homeless or unstably housed and over 60 percent experience homelessness or unstable housing at least three times over the course of their illness.

Many of our HIV-positive clients also face significant barriers to finding appropriate, long-term housing, including high rents, gentrification, broker fees, and stagnant government housing subsidies. When a person is able to remain in housing their medication adherence rate is higher, their attendance at health care appointments increases, and their overall health status improves.

BAC currently provides 122 units of scatter-site supportive housing for individuals who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness, but even this is not enough to meet the soaring demand in New York City. Our challenges include maintaining housing support services, as well as

properly furnishing homes, including food and pantry items.

To help us continue providing these needed services, BAC is hosting a fundraiser on World AIDS Day, which is Tuesday, December 1. “Saving Our Homes, Saving Our Lives” will be held from 6:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. at the Downtown Brooklyn showroom of our partner Raymour & Flanigan, which is located at 490 Fulton Street. This event, which this year coincides with Giving Tuesday, will help our clients to overcome the persistent barriers to permanent housing.

We are thrilled to be honoring at the event Academy Award-nominated actress and activist Rosie Perez with the World AIDS Day Humanitarian Award. We are also honoring POZ with the World AIDS Day Excellence in Journalism Award for their exceptional work. Join us if you can to celebrate the contributions of Rosie Perez and POZ, the goals we all have accomplished and all of our achievements yet to come.



Glenda G. Smith is executive director of Bridging Access to Care. Please call 347.505.5181 or email scasseus@bac-ny.org for more information about the awards reception, including ticket purchases. Also, visit www.bac-ny.org or follow Bridging Access to Care and the #SavingOurLives hashtag on Twitter and Instagram if you are interested in supporting BAC’s #GivingTuesday initiative. Press passes and complimentary tickets are available.

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