A Harlem Homecoming

October 22, 2008 By James Wortman

Housing Works is opening more doors for HIV-positive New Yorkers in Harlem. On October 22, the New York-based AIDS service organization opened the Stand Up Harlem Houses, a $2.8 million housing facility for homeless people living with HIV/AIDS.

The facility, comprised of three classic brownstones located on 130th Street between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Malcolm X Boulevard, will provide 12 permanent studio apartments for single adults, two three-bedroom apartments and two two-bedroom apartments for families in which at least one of the parents is living with the virus. The harm reduction facility also offers harm reduction programs, case management services after-school programs and 24-hour residential assistance.

The first resident of the Stand Up Harlem Houses' family units, Guy Scannavino, 43, will benefit from more than his new apartment's high ceilings, bay windows, full kitchen and other amenities—the new home will also reunite him with his 9-year-old son, also named Guy, whom he had lost custody of due to a drug addiction. However, five years ago, Scannavino found Housing Works, which helped him manage his HIV, kick his drug addiction and rekindle a relationship with his son, who is HIV negative.

"I now see him every weekend, but the last time I went to court, the judge told me that as soon as I get an apartment suitable for him—it has to be a two-bedroom—he would be able to come back home and live with me," said Scannavino, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1986.

Scannavino's son is currently living at Green Chimneys, a residential school in Brewster, New York, and does not yet know that he will be moving in with his dad.

"He needs a family member in his life, and I needed to step up to the plate," Scannavino said.

The Stand Up Harlem Houses facility—named after a now-defunct organization created by and for homeless people living with HIV—fulfills a vital need in the Harlem community. In 2006, Harlem accounted for 10 percent of new HIV infections in New York City according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. In addition, the average annual mortality rate in Central Harlem—where Stand Up Harlem is located—was more than twice both the Manhattan and overall New York City rates in 2003–2004.

“Harlem is one of the most heavily impacted communities in New York City,” said Housing Works president and CEO Charles King. “So, providing housing for people in a community to which they have their ties, where their families live and where they go to church is a really important thing.”

King estimates that roughly half of the facility’s staff are formerly homeless—having gone through Housing Works’ residential training program—and will encourage residents to take up volunteer roles in the facility’s day-to-day maintenance.

“We have two beautiful backyards with lots of room for gardening and things like that,” King said. “There will be plenty of opportunity for folks living here to engage in helping to make this place a really special home and a really special community for all of them.”

For more information on this or other Housing Works facilities or programs, visit housingworks.org.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/harlem-housing-works-hiv-15495-1700