

breaking barriers

Winter 2010

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NYNP Names BFL Agency of the Month



Photo: Paul Feuerstein

The BFL Family Management Team: (L to R) Front Row: Molly Freyer, Aeilushi Mistry, Cathy Gormley, Donald Logan; Myra Ricard. Back Row: Manuel Diaz, David Rodriguez, Angel Caula, Paul Feuerstein, Tom Wilson. Not pictured: Georgette Delinois, Scott Alexander Hess, Isa Martinez.

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Barrier Free Living was recently named Agency of the Month by the New York Nonprofit Press. Below is an excerpt from the complete story written by NYNP Editor, Fred Scaglione.

There are many local nonprofits that serve individuals with disabilities; many more that serve the homeless or victims of domestic violence. Yet, only one – Barrier Free Living – reaches across these programmatic divides to serve individuals who have disabilities and are homeless or escaping domestic abuse.

Barrier Free Living runs the only transitional housing program within the NYC shelter system for homeless individuals with severe physical disabilities. Similarly, the agency's Freedom House is the sole emergency domestic violence shelter for women or families with disabilities. It also operates a citywide non-residential DV program for the same population and a street outreach project for homeless individuals with disabilities. And, while Barrier Free Living has focused its programming on these previously un-served populations, the agency

has also been a powerful advocacy voice on behalf of all people with disabilities – particularly in the areas of access and housing.

Originally launched in 1978, Barrier Free Living has covered a lot of programmatic ground to become the agency it is now.

"We began as a program within FED-CAP," explains Paul Feuerstein, the agency's President and CEO, who has been with the organization from the very start. "They had gotten a federal grant to work with newly disabled people on the lower East Side."

Feuerstein and the agency's small group of staff set out to engage people who were just getting out of the hospital with traumatic brain injury, amputations, spinal cord injury, etc. "The initial model was to hook people up with services, get them into vocational training programs and ultimately back into the world of work. That was the focus," says Feuerstein. Soon, various complications began to surface.

Read the complete story, link below.

Read More: <http://nynp.biz/index.php/agencies-of-the-month/1692-barrier-free-living-when-disability-isnt-the-only-challenge>

A Message from the C.E.O.



We are placing more severely disabled people into permanent housing than anyone else in the State of New York.

Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO

Depending on who you talk to, 2010 is either the beginning of a new decade or the last year of the prior one. However it's regarded, it seems like a good time to reflect on where we have been since the year 2000.

Major events have defined our lives. September 11th was a tragedy that touched everyone, but particularly the lives of six of our staff who lost family in the World Trade Center. Besides dealing with our own grief as a community, BFL was asked to coordinate all Project Liberty Crisis Intervention Services for people with disabilities in the City of New York. Thirty staff members and three partner agencies reached 30,000 disabled New Yorkers in the months following that event.

2006 marked the opening of Freedom House, the first emergency domestic violence shelter in the country developed specifically for victims with disabilities. We have served 1700 victims from 19 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, but most of our residents come from New York City.

It has been exciting to be part of the development of the multidisciplinary team which is equipped to work with a variety of adults and children with disabilities. Leadership of the Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime has visited us and come away saying that our domestic violence program should be cloned all over the country.


This inspired us to kick off "Breaking Barriers in Domestic Violence," our monthly e-newsletter which shares a facet of our work in each monthly bulletin. We have subscribers from as far away as Australia (sign up at www.bflnyc.org).

Our Transitional Residence placed 50 severely disabled people into permanent housing this year. This is a new record for us. We celebrate and congratulate that team for a job well done. We are placing more severely disabled people into permanent housing than anyone else in the State of New York. We have to thank our colleagues at NYC Department of Homeless Services for all of the good work they have done to support us in reaching that goal.

While 2009 was a year that focused on bringing our human resource administration into the 21st Century, 2010 is the year when we are focusing on measuring the outcomes our work has on the people we serve. Our management team went through outcome measurement training in December and we are taking the lessons we learned to each of our programs to move beyond measuring how much we do (which is required by city and state funders) to measuring how effective we are.

The Great Recession impacted us as it did so many others. We have lost income in some of our programs. We, like others, have been worried about the state of the economy and its long term implications on the funding of services to poor people and people with disabilities. We had to lay off and cut back some staff, but we were able to do so without compromising services to our people.

We feel that the best thing we can do in this time of crisis is to insure that we are providing the best quality services to our constituents and to let others know about what we are doing.

FIGURES		+	FACTS	
3,000 Family's	Number of family's expecting to live in subsidized housing that were told in December 2009 that their vouchers were worthless*		50,000 DOLLARS	approximate CUT FROM BFL'S TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM BUDGET BY THE CITY FOR 2010
			10,000	Dollars generated by BFL's holiday donor appeal in December 2009
1833	Number of voucher holding families that were once homeless*		10 thousand	Dollars awarded to BFL's Secret Garden program by the Mary Byron Project to recognize outstanding work in the field of domestic violence

*NY Daily News



Organizational Development Team: L to R, Aeilushi Mistry, Donald Logan, Scott Alexander Hess

BFL Launches Organizational Development Team

Barrier Free Living has created the Organizational Development Team (ODT) to meet the growing and diverse needs of the agency's four programs. ODT is the brainchild of BFL's Chief Operating Officer, Donald Logan, who works closely with ODT team members Scott Alexander Hess, Organizational Development Manager, and Aeilushi Mistry, Organizational Development Associate.

"We will serve as a resource for every staff member, intern and volunteer at BFL as well as providing the expected programmatic support for each of our programs," said Logan. In January, ODT is spearheading the roll-out of the agency's new web-based HR system, which will allow staff to complete a host of tasks online. The new system will also feature the agency's first intranet newspaper and include information on recent awards, news items and employee recognition.

"It's important to us as an agency to go green. The new system will eliminate a lot of paper and also help us to connect our four separate programs and staff through one efficient communication channel," said Hess.

ODT will assist staff and management in the areas of:

- Recruitment, benefit and labor-relations information and guidance
- Staff trainings
- Overall agency development, through work with each program and staff
- One on one outreach regarding work-related issues

As adjunct to ODT, BFL also offers staff access to Corporate Counseling, a confidential free counseling service addressing on the job challenges, questions and offering specialized training. (corporatecounseling.com).

Contact: odt@bflnyc.org

Play Depicts BFL's Early Years

Playwright Richard Mover presented a glimpse into the early days of Barrier Free Living, with a presentation of his drama, "Caseworker."

The play, recently staged as part of The Torn Page Reading series in Manhattan, offers a sharp, realistic depiction of characters based on BFL staff, including agency President/CEO Paul Feuerstein.

The reading featured Angelica Torn (the daughter of Geraldine Page and Rip Torn) in a key role as a BFL case manager living with a disability.

Mover, who worked at Barrier Free Living's original grass roots East Village program in the 1980s, credits the agency and its work as his inspiration. "The play is based on my experience at BFL and revolves around some of the people I met and worked with," said Mover. "The character Gertrude is based on an extremely inspirational woman I had the good fortune to meet at that very difficult period in my life."

"Case Worker", which Mover is developing and hopes to ready for a full-scale New York production, also offers keen insights into the challenges BFL clients, and people with disabilities face on a daily basis.

"My job at Barrier Free Living turned into a journey through my own psyche and needed an outlet on the other end - the play became that outlet," said Mover.



Richard Mover

On the Calendar

January This month, Molly Freyer, Assistant Director, BFL's Non-Residential Domestic Violence Program (Secret Garden) is a featured panelist at the New York City Bar Associations event, A VULNERABLE POPULATION: A Look at Domestic Violence as it Affects Individuals with Disabilities. For information or future events: www.abcny.org or Mollyf@bflnyc.org

February 25 Homeless Services United will hold a training session on "Understanding Homelessness 101" Feb. 25 at 10 a.m. as part of a 3 part training series for Security, Maintenance and Administrative staff. Additional trainings will cover "Boundaries & Professionalism" and "Communication & Writing", dates to be announced. Homeless Services United convenes free and low-cost trainings for member agencies each year. Trainings provide member agencies' staff with invaluable opportunities to connect with experts and each other on a number of specific topics. For more information: elee@hsu.org or 646-827-2272.

Summer The 2010 Special Olympics will be held in Lincoln, Nebraska July 18-23 featuring 3,000 athletes from 50 states. Participants will compete in events ranging from gymnastics to power lifting. For information or to volunteer or participate: www.2010specialolympics.org. (Pictured Above: a competitor at the 2009 National Invitational Golf Tournament.)



Photo: Josie Cooper

Support BFL at: www.bflnyc.org/Contribute.asp

Barrier Free Living is on Facebook as (Barrier Free Living). Friend us today.

Sign up for our new Breaking Barriers In Domestic Violence E-Newsletter at www.bflnyc.org. A FREE SERVICE.

How to Donate

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