



breaking barriers

helping people with disabilities help themselves

WINTER 2014

An Annual Publication of Barrier Free Living

Dare to Dream



From left, Miss America Kira Kazantsev spoke to BFL about her domestic violence platform; BFL's new Supportive Housing project; Thomas Dreamer working on Project Give Back.

For Barrier Free Living, this year has been all about dreams. We encouraged residents at our shelters to dream big and reach high through initiatives like *Dare to Dream* at our Freedom House domestic violence shelter, and *Project Give Back* at our Transitional Housing program (stories on pages 2).

We have been inspired by dreamers like Miss S., a Freedom House resident who fled abuse and reclaimed her vision of making and selling jewelry as part of the domestic violence shelter's new entrepreneurial initiative. On the national scene, we were moved by many dreamers, including Noah Galloway, the Iraq war vet and amputee who beat out 1200 competitors to be Men's Health magazine's cover model for November, 2014 (story on page 4).

And in 2015, we are igniting our newest dream, opening Barrier Free Living's Supportive Housing Development in the Bronx for survivors of domestic violence with disabilities and veterans with disabilities (story on page 3).

This past year we also shared our mission and accelerated our presence through social media. Our blog interview with the reigning Miss America (Kira Kazantsev) about her

domestic violence platform, has galvanized thousands of new supporters. We collaborated with our staff and Board of Directors to create a new Mission Film illustrating our visionary work (read the Miss America story and view the film on our website www.bflnyc.org).

For 2015, we will continue to dream big and to do the thing we do best: working with formerly homeless people with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence with disabilities. To do our best work, we need your support.

A financial donation of a mere \$25 buys a week's worth of diapers for a baby & mom residing at BFL's Freedom House Domestic Violence Shelter; \$100 can buy supplies to allow initiatives like *Dare To Dream* to continue; or donate warm coats or toys to brighten a young shelter resident's holiday. Donate at www.bflnyc.org.

Mostly, we need your voice.

Tell your friends and colleagues about the work we do; tweet (@barrierfree) about initiatives like *Project Give Back*; and let the world know about Barrier Free Living, a place where dreams thrive through the people we serve.

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Paying It Forward

A former resident of Barrier Free Living's Transitional Housing shelter, Thomas Dreamer (Thomas took on Dreamer as his artist surname) had one request for the program that helped him through a very challenging time: he wanted to give back.

"I wanted to give something," Thomas says. "I had the idea of painting a mural on the wall in the patio at Transitional Housing to inspire residents."

Following Thomas' creative lead, Scott Hess, BFL's Organizational Development Manager worked with Transitional Housing Director LeShaun Gaulman to create *Project Give Back*.

"We often have former residents come back who want to help out by speaking to current residents or offering a service," says Hess. "Thomas' concept, of painting a beautiful mural of nature on the wall in our patio where residents gather really blew me away. Watching Thomas paint every day, talking to and inspiring residents with his generosity and his talent, was awesome."

Gaulman sees the project as a way for residents to not only give back, but to truly inspire hope in current residents. "Project Giveback is a great program that provides a platform for former residents of our programs to express themselves either through their talents or in a volunteer service manner," he says. "It allows the residents to create a gesture of appreciation that will impact the program and its current residents in a hopeful and positive way."

Film maker Blake Drummond shot footage of Thomas during the week he painted the mural, and incorporated it into the agency's new mission film (on our website www.bflnyc.org).

Support initiatives like Project Give Back: info@bflnyc.org.



Transitional Housing Shelter Director LeShan Gaulman, at left, with Thomas Dreamer.

Glittering Inspiration

Before Miss S. found safe haven at Barrier Free Living's Freedom House domestic violence shelter, she would wake in the middle of the night, and discover her abuser sitting nearby, watching her.

"He was a drug user and was mentally and emotionally abusive. He told me I was nothing. He kept me away from my family," says Miss S.

A turning point came during her first few months at Freedom House, when she rediscovered her passion for making beautiful jewelry. She used the colors of nature as inspiration.

"I began to make jewelry for the other residents. It gave me confidence. I wanted to make things that were new and different so it did not bring back bad memories," she says. "It helped me move on after the abuse."

Miss S. joined the Freedom House program's new *Dare to Dream* initiative, an entrepreneurial workshop meant to be the first step toward helping resident's pursue a business dream. The workshop culminated with a boutique showcase of items made by participants, ranging from jewelry to homemade chocolates.

"Dreams are the beginning of a brighter future, so we were very happy to provide a platform for residents to make their dreams a reality," says Aida Colon, who conceived of and helped create the *Dare to Dream* workshop and event.

The Freedom House team is working on a second *Dare to Dream* event for 2015. To support *Dare to Dream*, reach out to info@bflnyc.org.



Aida Colon, social worker.

Igniting A Dream

Barrier Free Living's new \$42 million Supportive Housing Program in the Bronx is slated to open in 2015.

The application process is underway (for information go to our supportive housing page at www.bflnyc.org or info@bflnyc.org) for 120 apartments for survivors of domestic violence with disabilities, veterans with disabilities and women and men with disabilities who are being diverted from possible nursing home placement.

"We are coming to an exciting new phase of our Supportive Housing Program," says Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO of Barrier Free Living. "All of our apartments are permanent housing with support services. In order to be eligible to live in these apartments people need to qualify for supportive housing services."

The two building complex offers: fifty family units for families with a disabled head of household who are victims/survivors of domestic violence; and seventy studio apartments for disabled victims/survivors of domestic violence, women and men with disabilities who are being diverted from possible nursing home placement (including some of the Transitional Housing residents we serve), and veterans with disabilities.

"The opening of Barrier Free Living's Supportive Housing facility is a landmark in the advancement and protection of the disabled community," says Gerald Francese, Barrier Free Living's Chairman of the Board. "This new facility will serve the disabled community with specific focus on victims of domestic violence and military disabled. I am extremely gratified to be allowed to play a small role in the growth and programmatic development of the Barrier Free Living family."

Units will be available for families and individuals earning at or below 60 percent of the area median income, which is equivalent to an annual income of no more than \$36,120 for an individual or \$51,540 for a family of four.

The apartments will meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards and will offer 24-hour security. Staff will be on site five days a week to provide residents with social supports such as case management, occupational therapy, assistance negotiating federal medical and nutrition assistance programs and a child care center will be available.

The development was the beneficiary of almost \$1.6 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Plan 3 funds provided by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). HPD also provided more than \$4.4 million in subsidy loans from its Supportive Housing Loan program.

BFL also received construction and permanent financing from New York City's Housing Development Corporation (HDC). HDC provided \$20.5 million in bond financing during construction and a \$7.9 million subsidy loan. Citibank provided a \$16.9 million equity investment for the 4 percent low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs) through a fund managed by The Richman Group. The New York State Homeless Housing and Assistance Corporation (HHAC) also provided \$7 million in permanent financing through its Homeless Housing and Assistance Program.



A view from the supportive housing program.



Interior shots of the apartments being constructed.

News & Views



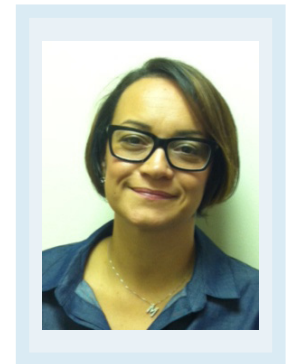
Photo by Peter Yang.

Healthy Inspiration. Noah Galloway, the Iraq war vet and amputee who beat out 1200 competitors to be *Men's Health* magazine's cover model for November, 2014 is an inspiration to people with disabilities nationwide. We got a chance to talk to Noah about the cover, how he got through challenging times after the accident, and his secrets for a great gym routine. Read the story on our *New Visions* blog.



BFL Talks To Miss America.

When Kira Kazantsev (Miss New York) was crowned Miss America 2015, it was not only a win for the Big Apple, but for survivors of domestic violence nationwide. Kira chose domestic violence as her platform and together with the Miss America Organization has launched a bold #VOWtoEndIt campaign during October's Domestic Violence (DV) Awareness Month. Barrier Free Living caught up with Kira to talk about her platform, her passion to end DV, and how she has inspired the survivors of domestic violence with disabilities at Barrier Free Living's programs. Read the story on our *New Visions* Blog.



Michelle Reyes Joins Secret Garden.

Born and raised as part of a large deaf family in Brooklyn, Michelle Reyes set her sights on giving back to the community after graduating from Gallaudet University.

This year, she joined Barrier Free Living's Secret Garden Domestic Violence program as a social worker, counseling both Deaf/HOH and hearing individuals. We caught up with Michelle to talk about her first year with BFL. *Read the story on our New Visions Blog.*



Timko, far left, with the Support Center staff at last summer's team building event.

BFL Kick's Off Organizational Assessment.

In September 2014, Barrier Free Living launched an in-depth organization assessment, working with the Support Center, a nonprofit management support organization (MSO). The assessment, which includes interviews with Board Members, leadership, staff and stake holders, and a Core Capacity Assessment Tool, will help form a blueprint for BFL's strategic priorities and future success. "We know it isn't easy for organizations to make this a priority, but a thorough organizational assessment helps to figure out where 'everyone is at.' Not only does this process provide a roadmap for where to go now but it also engages and energizes the board and staff," says Keith Timko of Support Center.

Moving Beyond Shame

Moving Beyond Shame. During Domestic Violence Awareness month, the BFL Speaker's Bureau hosted Moving Beyond Shame, a special event celebrating survivors of domestic violence who have moved beyond shame and found hope. Spearheaded by Speaker's Bureau founder Theresa McIntosh, special guests included Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities; Rosemonde Pierre-Louis, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence; along with humanitarian/advocate Brett Scudder; and writer Claire Cappetta.