

barrier free living



**Annual Report**  
**2016**

# Letter from the Chairman



Gerald Francese, Chair, Board of Directors

Thirty-six years ago, Barrier Free Living (BFL) was founded with a simple mission: to create a barrier free world for New York's most vulnerable citizens; a world free from abuse and bias and where people with disabilities enjoy a supportive environment.

Since its founding in 1978 as a federally-funded research and demonstration project first known as "Project Outward Bound," BFL has supported thousands of people with disabilities, has launched several award winning programs, and has become a leader in working with survivors of domestic violence with disabilities.

2016 was another milestone year for the BFL family of companies. Under the guidance of our CEO, Paul Feuerstein, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to helping

people with disabilities survive and thrive in New York. Barrier Free Living Apartments, which broke ground in 2013 and opened its doors in 2015, now offers fifty family units for families with a disabled head of household who is a victim/survivor of domestic violence and seventy studio apartments for disabled victims/survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities who are being diverted from possible nursing home placement, and veterans with disabilities. It is my pleasure to report that our apartments were 100% occupied by the end of this calendar year. Our other

programs, including Freedom House for Domestic Violence Shelter, Secret Garden Domestic Violence Program, and our Transitional Housing Shelter, continued to provide support, encouragement, and a safe environment desperately needed by survivors of domestic violence with disabilities.

BFL was also an active participant in the work of the Human Services Council, an umbrella organization for all

human service providers in New York City. Our CEO has been a long-time member of the HSC board and an active member of its Equity Group. In 2016, Paul became a participant in HSC's Priority and Strategy Council, which works directly with city and state leadership to address the health of the not-for-profit sector.

In addition to the resounding success of our programs, our Board of Directors recognizes the need to better reflect the people we serve. The Board took a position that Barrier Free Living would play an active role in undoing structural racism,

which negatively impacts both our diverse staff as well as our community. Mary Pender Greene, one of the leaders in the not-for-profit movement who addresses issues of racism, conducted two-day workshops with every staff member at Barrier Free Living and worked with BFL's management team on a monthly basis to address leadership issues and to plan for additional work. All of this was done to ensure that

our personnel practices and our policies reflect our commitment to the people we serve.

Please take time to reflect upon our great successes, as well as the greater unmet needs of our constituents. Thanks to all who make our mission possible and our goals achievable – thanks to all the wonderful partners that we have in New York State and City government, our superlative and dedicated staff, the members of the BFL boards of trustees, the community at large who house and support our programs, and most of all to our deserving clientele. We invite you to read our Annual

## **This is a very special and impactful organization.**

Report to learn more, make a donation (financial or in-kind) and to find out how you, too, can join our long-standing tradition of supporting our disabled community. Please see our website, <http://www.bflnyc.org>, for more details about the BFL team and its programs. This is a very special and impactful organization. Thank you for helping to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



Paul Feuerstein, BFL President/CEO surveys the original Transitional Housing Shelter on the Lower East Side.

## New Gateways

In 1990, BFL renovated a burnt-out school house on New York's lower east side, turning it into a much-needed shelter for 48 severely disabled people. Over 25 years later, the agency has its sights set on erecting a new 12 story building at that location, as part of Mayor DeB-lasio's Gateway Initiative (read more in the Letter from the CEO). "Our goal is to move our present programs out of our old building, demolish it, and build a new 12 story building in its place," says BFL President/CEO Paul Feuerstein.

"Once that building is built we will be able to serve 54 individuals in our transitional housing program and create 48 units of supportive housing for severely disabled people, as well as individuals with disabilities and families who are survivors of domestic violence." BFL is working with JCJ Architecture on the project.





David Peters holds an Undoing Racism workshop at BFL.

## Undoing Racism

BFL continued its commitment to “Undoing Racism” in 2016, holding two-day intensive workshops for all agency staff led by David Peters of MPG Consultant. “Over the past 10 months, BFL has embarked on a deliberate process of introspection to promote racial equity in its delivery system. This is an example of transformative intent during a difficult social and political environment, to bring more humanity to all,” says Peters. MPG Consultants specializes in providing culturally and racially attuned workshops addressing the impact of structural racism.



The cast of a Charlie Brown Thanksgiving at BFL Apartments last November.

## Community Building

In 2016, BFL continued to foster community building and personal growth at our shelters, counseling program, and Bronx based apartment complex. From innovative survivor support groups at our Secret Garden domestic violence program, to a holiday play put on by the children at our BFL Apartments complex, the focus on community and unified support remains front and center.



An icon image designed by Coa Design to represent the Secret Garden program.

## Strong Communication

BFL streamlined and reimagined its website in 2016, refining the language and imagery to reflect the agency's growth. Working with the creative team at New York based Coa Design, BFL conducted a series of focus groups with staff and stake holders to guide the process. The result: new icon imagery to embody the agency's reach and mission, sharper messaging, and improved mobile compatibility. 2017 will see the launch of a Spanish language version of the site. From Chris Ritchie and Noel Mendez of Coa Design: "The content is supported by new illustrations based on the distinctive logo we designed to visually convey BFL's brand message. The result is a more contemporary design that is bringing BFL's website to the forefront of the non-profit world."





The clothes line project, part of Turn off the Violence Week.

## Turn Off the Violence

BFL continued its collaborative work with St. John's University in 2016 as a featured partner in the campus-wide Turn Off The Violence week, which promotes "awareness, empowerment, and action in response to sexual violence." Additionally, BFL was the recipient of St. John's Caritas Medal this past year, honoring the agency's excellence in reflecting the "values of respect for the individual, service to those in need, and commitment to the belief that giving of one's self helps make the world a better place."

## What Matters Most



Now that she's living in a safe home of her own, BFL Apartments' resident Shanika can focus on her most important life goal: strengthening her relationship with her 14-year-old daughter.

A survivor of domestic violence, Shanika was living at a shelter in Brooklyn, working with her case manager to reclaim her life and find a permanent home back in 2014. In addition to healing from years of abuse and trauma, she was learning to understand and manage her life as a bi-polar person.

"It was challenging living in the shelter," she says. "I am a very private person. At times I felt like I was spiraling. My case worker helped me focus on my goals."

In 2015, Shanika learned about the soon-to-open Barrier Free Living apartment complex in the Bronx and felt it was going to be the next right step for her.

"It was new. I was so excited, thinking I'd love to live in a building like this," Shanika says. "I was like wow! When I saw the front desk security I felt good, to know safety is important here. Even when you don't think you need it, that is when you need it most."

Shanika moved into her new home at BFL Apartments in 2015. Since then she has joined the BFL Apartments' tenants advisory committee and plans to work with the garden club this summer, which is led by tenants. She also wants to work in real estate and is preparing this spring to take the licensing exam.

"I work with the psychiatric nurse here to feel my feelings and I use art therapy. I wrote an article for the tenant community newsletter about mental health and that's coming out soon," says Shanika. "And now my main goal is to really work on my relationship with my daughter. That's what matters most."



# Letter from the CEO



Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO

2016 has brought Barrier Free Living new challenges and opportunities. Our most important accomplishment of the year was opening our supportive housing buildings and welcoming our tenants into their new homes. This was the biggest project Barrier Free Living has undertaken since our inception. Our singles building has 70 studio units for single people who were either veterans or victims of intimate partner violence.

Our family building has 50 units for families with a disabled head of household who was a survivor of domestic violence.

We received the Temporary Certificate of Occupancy for our singles building in April 2015 and a temporary certificate of occupancy for our family building on June 30, 2015. We spent the first half of fiscal

year 2016 filling up our buildings. On December 22, 2016, we welcomed the last of our tenants into our buildings. We were 100% occupied before the end of the calendar year. That was an important accomplishment because a major source of funding for the project was low-income tax credits. We had a mandate to fill up the buildings before December 31 or face significant fines. That was the beginning of our supportive housing story.

After moving everyone in,

## **Our most important accomplishment of the year was opening our supportive housing buildings and welcoming our new tenants into their new homes.**

there was a period of getting to know all of our tenants and addressing their immediate needs. Moving into permanent housing was a major adjustment for many of these tenants. Almost all of them came from either domestic violence shelters or homeless shelters. Some were referred from street outreach teams for homeless people.

Because the safety of our tenants was our primary concern, we made sure that we had staff at the front door of each of our buildings. For some, that was a source of security. For others, it felt too much like living in a shelter. Gradually, a majority of our tenants came to see the value of having staff and security guards to make sure that they were safe. We had our first Thanksgiving and holiday events and, when the weather was better, cookouts in our backyard. Our tenants have

formed an advisory council that is working with staff on creating special events and building a supportive community.

Freedom House, our emergency domestic violence shelter, is becoming well-known for its expertise in working with disabled victims of domestic violence. The number of families with adults or children with

disabilities has increased. The number of men with disabilities seeking services has increased as well. We have strengthened the working relationship between our community-based domestic violence program and Freedom House and this year, with the state grant, we have hired a case manager shared between the two programs who specializes in working with deaf victims of domestic violence.

This year, the city approached us with a new proposal. We have spent the last few years searching for capital funding to repair our aging building on Second Street. In 1985, we won a competition under the Capital Budget Homeless Housing Program of then Mayor Koch. We were operating the program out of a storefront on Avenue A when the impact of President Reagan's budget cuts began to impact New York City. Wheelchair users began to come to our storefront to report that they had been discharged from a hospital that day with no place to go for shelter. We organized the disabled community to meet with New York



City's Human Resources Administration to advocate for accessible shelters.

In the midst of that advocacy, we realized that there were a group of homeless people with disabilities that were cycling between Bellevue Hospital and Bellevue Shelter for lack of appropriate care while in shelter. We proposed the first homeless shelter to address the needs of Activity of Daily Living dependent individuals. If these folks had their own apartments, the city would be providing them with a care attendant to address their needs. Because they were in shelter, they didn't qualify. We made the case for establishing a shelter program for folks in need of care on the basis of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

We took over a burned out former school building and renovated it to become a shelter for 48 severely disabled people. We have been operating that transitional housing program since November 1990. We were the first not-for-profit singles shelter to open in the city's homeless system. The program was recognized in the United Nations International Year of



#### **BFL Apartments Holiday Party.**

Shelter for the Homeless as one of 100 model programs for homeless people in the United States.

This year, the city proposed that we become part of the Gateway Initiative. Mayor DeBlasio announced an initiative to create 200,000 new units of affordable housing in New York City. One of the ways that was possible was by identifying older shelter buildings owned by nonprofits that were in need of major repair and were in locations where zoning regulations allowed for significant increases

in our ability to serve the housing needs of our target populations. Our goal is to move our present programs out of our old building, demolish it, and build a new 12-story building in its place. Once that building is built, we will be able to serve 60 individuals in our transitional housing program, create 48 units of supportive housing for severely disabled people as well as individuals and families who are survivors of domestic violence, and have expanded space for our citywide community-based domestic violence

program. We are in the process of looking for interim space as well as working with an architectural and engineering team to design a new flagship building for our agency. This is an ambitious project for us, but given our successful venture in supportive housing, we feel up to the task.

Thank you for all of your support of Barrier Free Living as we continue to find new ways to support the people we serve.



# Financial Health

The data below is a consolidated balance sheet. Details on BFL's financial statements are available at [bflnyc.org/about-us/leadership/](http://bflnyc.org/about-us/leadership/)

## Assets

\$4,148,089

current assets

\$3,839,720

deferred charge

\$4,813,932

property and equipment

**\$12,801,741**

Total Assets

## Liabilities

\$1,644,149

current liabilities

\$8,326,039

notes payable

\$2,831,553

net assets

**\$12,801,741**

Total liabilities and net assets

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## **Donald E. Logan, MPA Chief Operating Officer**

## **Cynthia Amodeo, LMHC, Chief Program Officer**

## **Transitional Housing**

- LeShan Gaulman, MSW Program Director
- Felipe Sepulveda, LMSW Director of Social Services
- David Rodriguez, Facility Manager

## **Secret Garden**

- Jules Perkel, LCSW, Program Director
- Kaylen Hagadorn, LCSW, Assistant Program Director

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- Myra Ricard, LMSW, Program Director
- Linette Holmes, Resident Aide Manager
- Cynthia Amodeo, LMHC, Director of Social Services
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## **Barrier Free Living Apartments**

- Julie Pena, MSW, Program Director
- Lenore Warren, LMSW, Director of Social Services
- Maritza Gomez, Resident Aide Manager

## **Barrier Free Living Executive Team**

- Yueqin Li, Director of Finance
- Aeilushi Mistry, Organizational Development Manager/HR
- Laura Fidler, MPH, BFL Project Director OVW Collaboration
- Scott Hess, Director of Communications

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**Contact Us: [info@bflnyc.org](mailto:info@bflnyc.org)**