

# COMMUNITY *notes*

*We're committed to ending homelessness in Brooklyn.*

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## TALENTED BROOKLYN 2017 Gala



BBC World News Anchor Laura Trevelyan graciously served as this year's Gala M.C.

Photo by FreedLense Photography

Artwork by Gary Dunn

On Wednesday, May 10th, more than 240 guests joined Brooklyn Community Housing and Services (BCHS) at 501 Union to recognize and honor the partners and programs that help the agency end homelessness in Brooklyn. Attendees were treated to a celebration of talent on our doorstep through food, music, and art, featuring artisanal Brooklyn delicacies, performances by Brooklyn entertainers, and artwork created by BCHS residents, many of whom are formerly homeless.

During the opening reception, guests browsed an exciting and diverse selection of silent auction items, perused beautiful artwork by BCHS residents, and dined on an array of delicious canapés and cocktails, courtesy of Brooklyn Wine Exchange, Dish Food & Events, Pancantico Bakery, and Red Hook Lobster Pound. BBC World News Anchor Laura Trevelyan (pictured above) guided the night along as this year's Gala M.C.

Executive Director Jeff Nemetsky welcomed guests and spoke briefly before showing a video about the agency, called "Finding the Way Home." After the video, Mr. Nemetsky and Board Vice-Chairperson Jens Peter Hansen presented the Community Partner Award to architect and volunteer Beth Cooper Lawrence, the Corporate Service Award to the Stroock law firm, and Resident Achievement Recognition plaques to Jenny Chan and Hilde Freedom. Slavic Soul Party rounded out the evening with a festive set of eclectic music, which had attendees dancing while enjoying ice cream from Brooklyn's own Ample Hills Creamery.

We are tremendously grateful to 2017 Gala Co-Chairs Alexandra Bowie and Leslie Feder, and all of the Host Committee Members, Board Members, staff and volunteers who helped put together a wonderfully successful event that raised more than \$200,000 to support BCHS' life-saving programs and services. Thank you all.

*More Talented Brooklyn inside.*



## Message from Executive Director Jeff Nemetsky

*Dear friends,*

Billy was 6 years old when his father abandoned the family; his mother was an alcoholic and couldn't raise him by herself, so she sent Billy from Brooklyn to North Carolina to live with his grandmother and great aunt. They loved and nurtured Billy, but after turning 18 he began experiencing bouts of loneliness and depression and started drinking heavily. Scared by his inability to control his drinking, Billy thought the structure of the military might help and he enlisted in the Army even though the Vietnam War was still raging – unfortunately, his drinking problem only got worse and he was eventually discharged.

Warm and irreverent when sober, Billy had become surly and distant because of his drinking, and for more than two decades he barely scraped by as a security guard. But his ability to function became increasingly impaired and when he failed to show up to work for a week he was fired and couldn't find another job. He became homeless.

After a few years of cycling back and forth between the street and shelters, a shelter worker referred Billy to BCHS' *Oak Hall SRO*. At *Oak Hall*, a substance abuse counselor immediately got Billy into a nightly A.A. group, while a case manager worked to get his depression diagnosed and treated. Once Billy achieved sobriety and his mental health stabilized, staff worked to help him get his security guard license reactivated, and he soon found steady employment. Best of all, *Oak Hall* had a tight knit group of former military veterans who spent mornings having coffee together and talking politics, and evenings playing cards and dominoes, and Billy loved spending time with them, laughing and joking and sharing his thoughts. He was home.

At BCHS we believe everyone who comes to us can move from crisis to community, just like Billy. We had a spectacular evening celebrating our wonderful residents and the work of our dedicated staff and Board at this year's *Talented Brooklyn* gala, as you can see in this issue of Community Notes. Our gala raised more than it ever has before in support of the agency's lifesaving work, and I am so greatly appreciative for all our very generous supporters who helped make the evening such a terrific success.

In this issue of Community Notes you will also read about recent media coverage involving BCHS' innovative program for people with significant histories of incarceration, called FUSE, which was profiled in the respected public affairs journal *City Limits*, as well as our partnership this past year with the NY Islanders and Ridgewood Savings Bank.

Thank you so much for your support, and thank you for being part of the effort to end homelessness in Brooklyn. I hope you have had a wonderful summer!

## BCHS Helps Residents "Move On" to Independence

BCHS was pleased to be awarded a grant for the 2nd consecutive year by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) and the Robin Hood Foundation for the "Moving On" initiative. The program is designed to enable tenants who have achieved stability in supportive housing to transition to other affordable housing in the community.

The idea behind "Moving On" is straightforward. After years with BCHS some residents do so well that they no longer need the intensive services that supportive housing provides. However, most cannot afford rents in New York City, need assistance finding apartments, and may need help becoming comfortable with the idea of living in an apartment building that doesn't have on-site social services. The "Moving On" grant allows BCHS to hire a

case manager to help with this transition, and the initiative offers participants a Section 8 voucher to assist with the rent.

During the grant's first year, BCHS helped 21 of its long-term residents move into completely independent housing in the community. "These were residents who were ready to live on their own, but just needed a little extra encouragement to get there," explains Supervisor Kisha Kettles. "It's been such a joy to see these residents continue to grow, to see how excited they are when they get the keys to their own place."



## BCHS' FUSE Program in the News

William Sostre endured a violent childhood, spending more than four decades struggling with addiction and cycling between prison and the streets. But since being admitted to BCCHS' *Oak Hall* in 2009 through the agency's special initiative for people with significant histories of incarceration, called FUSE, Mr. Sostre changed his life. "I learned how to open up" he says. "I learned how to trust."

Recently, the acclaimed public affairs journal *City Limits* prominently featured BCCHS' program as a potential solution to problems in the criminal justice system in two separate articles, while profiling Mr. Sostre's experience. More than 90% of BCCHS' FUSE participants maintain their housing with the agency or move on to even greater independence each year, and special support groups help with the adjustment to community living.

In addition, because permanent housing at *Oak Hall* is so much cheaper than jail, shelter, or the hospital – and because the program is so successful at helping participants avoid a return to the criminal justice system and maximize their health and well-being – an estimated \$4 million in taxpayer money has been saved since its inception a decade ago. In fact, representatives from local governments across the country

## CITYLIMITS

Reports Indicate City's Progress is Slow on Mental Health Planning for Inmates

By Roshan Abraham | January 12, 2017



William Sostre takes medication for depression, as well as paranoia and claustrophobia, symptoms that he says began in solitary confinement. He currently lives in supportive housing and attests to its benefits.

Adam Shrier

and from as far away as Australia have traveled to Brooklyn to study the initiative with an eye towards replicating the model in their own cities.

"I try to mentor the younger guys in the building, and I reconnected with my daughter, which was so important to me" Mr. Sostre says. "Thanks to BCCHS, I'm at peace."

Visit [www.bchands.org](http://www.bchands.org) for links to the above article and more.

## Resident Activities and Events at BCCHS



Above left: "Showtime" at the Black History Month Celebration at *Navy Green*

Above right: *Arbor Inn* resident Zada W. enjoys a cupcake during the "Bombas 60K" sock donation event



The BCCHS Activities Team presents a robust schedule of events for our residents. Through a broad range of activities, socialization skills are developed and residents make friends with their peers and neighbors. This year, staff put together amazing celebrations for all the major holidays and helped oversee special activities for the residents, like Therapeutic Horticulture, Arts programming, and a weekly Crochet group.

We were also very fortunate to receive many in-kind donations for our residents, including clothes, shoes, and books. For example, on March 1st, volunteers from the event website SeatGeek visited BCCHS to distribute donated clothing for children and mothers from *Arbor Inn*. This included 1,000 pairs of socks from the footwear company Bombas, provided as part of their "Bombas 60K" initiative, which gave 60 thousand socks to 60 homeless shelters throughout NYC in a single night.

Thank you to all of the volunteers and donors who participated and contributed to our activities and events throughout the year.

# TALENTED BROOKLYN

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Photos by FreedLense Photography



Top: Featured artwork by current and former BCHS residents, including Gary Dunn's painting of John Coltrane, which was featured on this year's *Talented Brooklyn* invitation

Middle: Elise Keppler of Human Rights Watch (second from left), with Lauren Brown (far left), Elizabeth DiMichele, and Marissa Holob (far right) from the law firm of Stroock, recipient of the 2017 Corporate Service Award

Directly above: Executive Director Jeff Nemetsky welcomes attendees to the gala

Left: Hilde Freedom (left) and Jenny Chan, recipients of BCHS' 2017 Resident Achievement Recognition

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 Matthew Yarmolinsky and  
 Margaret Leipsitz

*To donate, or to learn how you can support BCHS' efforts to end homelessness in Brooklyn, visit [www.BCHandS.org](http://www.BCHandS.org) or contact our Development Office at (718) 852-9322 ext. 2140.*



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## Ridgewood Savings Bank and New York Islanders Team Up with BCHS

In keeping with their slogan, “multiply the good,” Ridgewood Savings Bank teamed up with the New York Islanders for a second season of the “Save With Ridgewood” program, pledging to donate \$10 for every save made by an Islanders goalie to two local charities chosen by the bank and team. This year, Ridgewood and the Islanders chose Brooklyn Community Housing and Services, along with the Prospect Park Alliance.

After more than 2,000 saves and a spirited run that fell just short of the playoffs, the Islanders and Ridgewood Savings Bank generated \$13,780 to support BCHS' efforts to end homelessness in Brooklyn. Additionally, in what promises to be a long-term and productive collaboration with the agency, the bank is arranging for staff from one of their local branches to provide on-site financial literacy training for BCHS residents who are learning how to live on their own for the first time.

“We are extremely grateful for the generous support of Ridgewood Savings Bank and the Islanders. The funds from “Save with Ridgewood” are helping us provide vital housing and homelessness prevention services for hundreds of at-risk individuals and families in Brooklyn,” said Jeff Nemetsky, BCHS Executive Director.



From left: Samantha Lui and Domenico Ciaccio of Ridgewood Savings Bank, and Jeff Nemetsky and Geoff Kessel of BCHS

