

Inside: Addressing NYC's Mental Health Crisis / Luis Overcomes Decades of Street Homelessness / Q&A with Psychiatrist Rob Gadomski



Renewing lives. Reclaiming hope.

MATTERS

"I could finally see that there was hope."

HELPING HEATHER HEAL

As Heather built a promising career in academia, she became overwhelmed by stress. She was teaching at the City University of New York, pursuing a PhD, and managing a difficult relationship. When anxiety and depression took hold, she turned to alcohol. Her body broke down and she was hospitalized. Unable to maintain her job, she was evicted and became homeless.

At Project Renewal's New Providence shelter, Heather began to heal. Understanding the importance of long-term care, she met weekly with our psychiatrist, who prescribed medication to stabilize her mental health. She engaged in recreational activities,

including a weekly music group and cultural outings. During check-ups at our on-site medical clinic, she focused on nutrition to maintain her long-term health. "I could finally see that there was hope," she said.

Within two years, Heather was ready to live more independently, and moved to Leona Blanche House, a Project Renewal transitional housing program. She continued visiting her psychiatrist at New Providence and when COVID hit, she transitioned seamlessly to telepsychiatry service.

Today, with our support, Heather is preparing to search for a permanent home. "If I hadn't come to Project Renewal, I would probably be dead," Heather reflects. "They helped me get to a much better place—physically, mentally, and emotionally." ■

📍 Heather at home at Leona Blanche House.

FROM OUR CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

ADDRESSING NEW YORK CITY'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS



Dear Friends,

Serious mental illness is one of the primary causes of chronic homelessness in our city. Institutions that should provide a strong network of support—hospitals, shelters, and rehab programs—are often

siload and unable to meet individuals' complex needs. Too often, New Yorkers who need mental health care fall through the cracks.

When these systems fail, Project Renewal steps up. Our health programs target the most serious cases. We provide comprehensive, trauma-informed medical and mental health services. We work toward stability and independence for our clients, while creating innovative programs that fill the gaps caused by the fractured system in which we work.

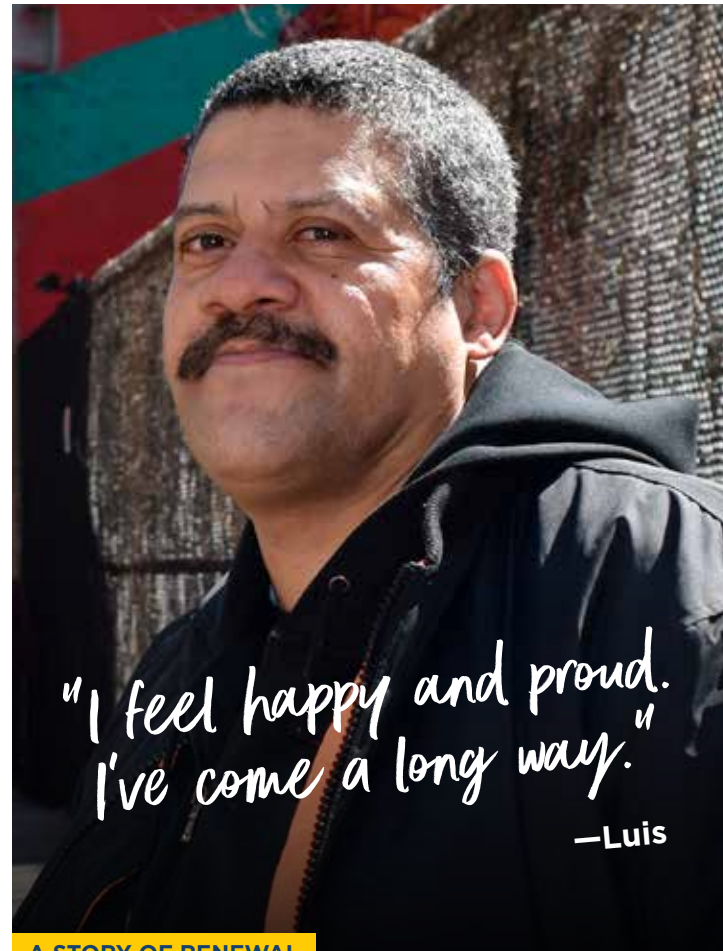
Our recent milestones in mental health care include: opening the city's first Support and Connection Center (see *Rob Gadomski Q&A*); breaking ground on the Barbara Kleiman Men's Shelter (see *back page*); and scaling up our comprehensive psychiatry services for clients like Heather (see *front page*). Additionally, we are tearing down Midtown East's New Providence Shelter so we can redevelop it as modern, purpose-built housing and shelter for women with mental health concerns.

Your support enables us to innovate and advocate, while continuing to provide housing, health care, and job training to New Yorkers with serious mental illness at our programs throughout the city.

On behalf of our clients and staff, thank you!

Sincerely,

Miranda Von Dornum, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Project Renewal



A STORY OF RENEWAL

OVERCOMING DECADES OF STREET HOMELESSNESS

As a child, Luis suffered from abuse in his family. To cope, he used alcohol and drugs. His substance use increased and he experienced severe depression and anxiety, eventually becoming homeless at 20 years old. For decades, he cycled between street homelessness, psychiatric wards, and incarceration.

When the pandemic took hold, Luis found himself deeply depressed and thought about harming himself. He entered the shelter system and was referred to psychiatric services at Project Renewal's Third Street Shelter. Through therapy and medication from his Project Renewal psychiatrist, he was finally able to regulate his emotions. "I was able to open up with my feelings and experiences for the first time," Luis says.

With newfound stability, Luis secured an apartment in Times Square in the spring of 2022. He still meets with his Project Renewal psychiatrist each month, which helps him maintain his sobriety and navigate his mental health journey. "I don't have suicidal thoughts anymore," he says. "I feel happy and proud. I've come a long way." ■

STAFF MEMBER Q&A

ROB GADOMSKI, DEPUTY MEDICAL DIRECTOR OF PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

Rob oversees psychiatry services at Project Renewal's Support and Connection Center, a first-of-its-kind program that provides short-term stabilizing services for unhoused people experiencing an acute mental health or substance use crisis. Guests typically stay up to five nights, after which many participate in aftercare services, linking them to long-term support.

Q. Rob, what is unique about the Center's approach to mental health care for people in crisis?

"We provide recovery-oriented care, working with guests on what *they* identify as their needs and goals. Often, when they interact with hospitals or the prison system it's the other way around, so their needs aren't met. Our low client-staff ratio allows us to tailor our support to each guest. We always have staff available, even in the middle of the night, so the guests can engage with a certified peer or substance use counselor."

Q. Many guests have had traumatic experiences in settings that are supposed to be rehabilitative. How do you gain their trust?

"We emphasize trauma-informed care. That starts with listening to guests, making them feel safe, and making sure they know that our services are optional—they can choose how we help them. Certified peer counselors—staff members who often have similar life experiences to our guests—are critical because of their empathy, relatability, and expertise. They are the first people to engage guests, even before a nurse or psychiatrist, and are instrumental in developing treatment and referral plans."

Q. How do you measure success?

"We must be realistic about what's possible during a five-day stay. We try to build a relationship with a guest, so that they come back for our aftercare services. Other things we can do in five days include helping someone sign up for food stamps; setting up a medication-assisted treatment plan with a suboxone prescription to help reduce opioid dependence; enrolling them in Project Renewal's job training; or placing them into a Safe Haven if they're eligible."

Q. What's the most rewarding part of your job?

"This work is not always easy, but it's gratifying to see relief on a guest's face and hear them say that they feel heard for the first time in a long time. And we have a phenomenal team. It's inspiring to work with like-minded people who care deeply about seeing guests reach their goals." ■



Rob chats with Project Renewal licensed practical nurse Theresa Blair.

GET THE FACTS



MENTAL HEALTH AT PROJECT RENEWAL

2/3

of New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness have mental health needs.

2,386

New Yorkers received psychiatric care through Project Renewal in 2022.

298

individuals live in Project Renewal mental health housing.

102

guests are served each month at the Support and Connection Center, on average.

52%

of Support and Connection Center guests return for aftercare services, including connections to long-term treatment and housing.

RENEWAL FOR NEW YORK

Project Renewal's Annual Benefit + Auction

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

6-10 PM / PIER 60, NYC

Help homeless New Yorkers renew their lives with health, homes, and jobs. For tickets, tables, and donations please visit events.projectrenewal.org.

GROUNDBREAKING

BARBARA KLEIMAN MEN'S SHELTER



In partnership with The Hudson Companies and St. Nicks Alliance, Project Renewal will break ground in late April 2023 on the 200-bed Barbara Kleiman Men's Shelter, part of a new mixed-use redevelopment at the old Greenpoint Hospital campus in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The project is a rare opportunity to gut-renoate a building and redesign it as a purpose-built shelter. Seventy beds will be reserved for men with mental health needs. On-site services will include a medical clinic, psychiatry, occupational therapy, and employment counseling.

NEXT STEP

CAREER SUCCESS

In January, volunteers from Google conducted mock interviews with our Next Step Internship Program students, so they could practice and receive feedback. The session bolstered students' job interview skills and confidence as they prepared to launch careers in the social services sector.



"As someone who has benefited from mental health services, I know how truly important they are. When I was 15, I spent a month in a mental health hospital after a series of suicide attempts. But I was lucky and I was able to get the mental health services I needed, not just to live, but to reach the position I'm in today. That's why I'm so proud to be able to use the position to support organizations like Project Renewal and the services that they provide. Through partnerships with engaged and expert stakeholders like Project Renewal, I believe that we will finally address the issue of mental health in New York City."

—New York City Council Member Erik Bottcher, District 3



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