

Spring/Summer 2013



The magazine of Community Access

# Breaking new ground

*in mental health care and housing*

Inside this issue...

Community Access opens doors for  
New Yorkers experiencing an emotional crisis

Rebuilding and responding to Hurricane Sandy

9th Annual NYC Mental Health Film Festival

...and more!





**From Tragedy to Recovery and Hope**

On December 14, 2012, came shocking news that a gunman had murdered 20 children and six staff at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. Six days later I was invited to be on Brian Lehrer's radio show on WNYC to discuss mental health policy and gun violence.

I was ambivalent about this opportunity. On one hand, there is no evidence linking gun violence, or mass murder, to people with a mental health diagnosis. On the other hand, Community Access is developing some important new programs that, if widely replicated, will dramatically improve access to mental health care—a major theme following the Newtown shootings.

Our cover story features one of these new initiatives, with a focus on Lorraine Maynard, who works at New York City's first crisis respite center, which opened in January. The program is designed to replace the chaotic (and frightening) hospital emergency room experience endured by people experiencing an emotional crisis. Instead of a "medical" response, the respite center offers a calm refuge where staff members (most of whom have had a personal experience in a psychiatric facility) can begin a discussion with the "guests" about what they are feeling and what they believe will improve their lives.

For many other people with mental illness, the most important service we can provide is a good home. For this reason we are pleased to recognize Karen Backus and Maggi Knox at our 2013 Gala on May 7. Karen has been a long-time supporter of our cause and Maggi has overseen the construction of every building we have developed over the past 25 years.

We also want to share with you the special story of Betty Froelich, one of our original board members and a close friend. Her generous spirit and sense of social justice define Community Access today and was a personal inspiration for me for almost 35 years. Betty died on January 7.

Finally, we had a heck of storm since we last saw you. After losing power at nine of our sites, including our office, I'm pleased to report we are almost back to 100%. Our Sandy story describes the generous outpouring of support we received from all of you.

**9th Annual  
NYC Mental Health**

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Possibility  
Imagination  
Healing  
Together

**FILM  
FESTIVAL**

**5/5/13**

**PURCHASE TICKETS**  
by calling 212-780-1400, ext.7726

**www.communityaccess.org/filmfestival**



**RethinkBPD**

An amateur boxer makes sense of her borderline personality disorder.  
*(And talks to us at [www.communityaccess.org/filmfestival](http://www.communityaccess.org/filmfestival))*  
*(9 min)*

**Stephen Fry: NYC film festival premiere!**  
**The Secret Life of the Manic Depressive**

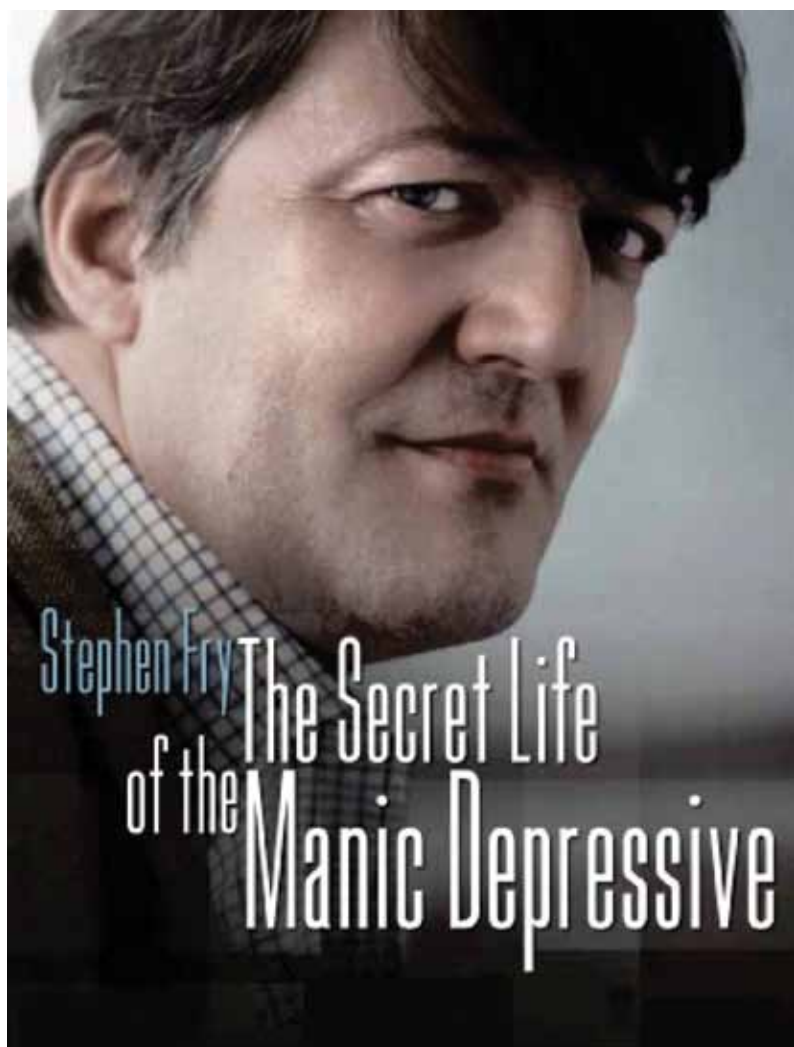
In this Emmy Award winning documentary, British actor/writer/broadcaster Stephen Fry explores the remarkable highs and lows of manic depression: his own experience of the condition and through candid conversations with others affected by it (including the actors Carrie Fisher and Richard Dreyfuss).  
*(120 min)*

**Three Voices**

Three young adults with mental health symptoms share tales of confusion, despair, stigma, and hope.  
*(60 min)*

**Heart and Soul**

The power of healthy living – profiles of people in recovery. Featuring Ted "Golden Voice" Williams.  
*(20 min)*





Lorraine Maynard,  
Peer Respite Worker

# Respite: OPEN

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2011 Distant hope  
Concrete plan  
Fully-funded

## Hurricane Sandy

2013 Fully-staffed  
Open!

In our last issue of *C* magazine, a few simple words described a giant undertaking: “Community Access is preparing to open New York City’s first crisis respite center.”

To be the first *anything* in New York isn’t easy and Superstorm Sandy only added a degree of difficulty to the challenge.

But, thanks to a lot of hard work, resourcefulness, and generous help from partners and supporters, we did it. Our crisis respite center is now fully up and running. Developed in partnership with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, it stands proud as a major innovation in behavioral health care: offering a warm, safe, and supportive home-like environment for individuals experiencing psychiatric crises. The facility itself and the services provided are markedly different to emergency room settings at hospitals, which have been the default destination that individuals in crisis have typically experienced.

People can stay at the respite center for up to 14 days, not as *patients*, but as voluntary *guests*. Throughout their stay—and beyond it too, via new networks of support and better access to primary health care—guests get to focus on long-term recovery and wellness, rather than (what for too many people is too often the norm) short-term stabilization using medication.

Guests at the center will be joined on the road to recovery by professional peer workers: individuals with personal experiences of mental illness who have been trained to provide support to others. At least two staff members are present 24/7 to support guests in their recovery, which is tailored for each person. Basic services include access to high-quality health care (through a collaboration with Community Healthcare Network) and a range of group and one-on-one activities, such as yoga and stretching, art and poetry, wellness self-management, meditation and diet, and meal planning.

“ Because of my experience and the things that I went through – both negative and positive – I’m useful... I can give hope to someone and let them know that, hey, I’ve been where you are. ”

–Lorraine

At our Howie the Harp Advocacy Center in Harlem, we’ve been successfully training peers for employment for nearly two decades. Never before, however, have we had a comparable opportunity to demonstrate a core belief that has always informed our work in countless smaller ways: recovery is not only possible, it is also an outstanding qualification for helping others to recover.

Lorraine Maynard, a 2012 Howie the Harp graduate, applied to work at the respite center at the first available opportunity and has been there ever since—both as a peer respite worker and as one of the operators of 646-741-HOPE, a new support line also housed at the center.

“It’s a very supportive environment,” says Lorraine, “where we always try to have each other’s backs. Everyone is very empathetic, sensitive, and understanding... It’s an awesome feeling. Because you’re giving back, you know? I can give hope to people and let them know that, hey, I’ve been where you are.”

“After I got sick, Community Access helped me to recover,” Lorraine continues, “and I’m just grateful that they’re giving me the opportunity to help others bounce back and get on their feet. At Howie the Harp, we were all survivors—still there, still trying. And now I feel like I went through everything I went through so that I could be here today... to shine my light so that I can help others.”

To hear more from Lorraine, visit [www.communityaccess.org/ca-voices](http://www.communityaccess.org/ca-voices)—a new online series in which the people of Community Access share their stories in their own words.



Need someone to talk to?

Call

646-741-HOPE

Community Access now runs New York City’s first peer-operated support line. Open daily from **4 P.M. to midnight**, this support line is a contact point for New Yorkers experiencing emotional distress, offering an opportunity to connect with individuals who have had similar experiences.

# 39 Years of Breaking new ground

The spirit to defend basic human rights has fueled Community Access' mission for almost 40 years.

The volunteer founders of Community Access made decent housing their first priority and pooled their own money to rent and repair apartments in the Lower East Side to provide housing for community members struggling with mental illness and homelessness. In 1977 they bought two tenement buildings that were on the verge of foreclosure and created, what would be called a decade later, supportive housing.

Today, Community Access owns and manages over 1,100 units of housing, and the qualities that characterized our first project remain alive today. We continue to believe that access to decent, affordable housing can open doors of opportunity to individuals with psychiatric disabilities. And, in addition to pioneering new housing models, we have developed some of the nation's most innovative job training, education, and recovery programs.

We are proud of our history, traditions, and the programs we've created over the past four decades, and we're not resting on our laurels. We continue to break new ground in housing, health care, and education. Much remains to be done to improve the lives of those diagnosed with mental illness, but the good news is that we know what the solutions are and remain dedicated to fulfilling the vision of our founders.



Meet Our Honorees

# From housing to hope

Karen Backus and Maggi Knox have dedicated their careers to building communities



**P**resident of the real estate firm K. Backus & Associates, Karen is a long-standing friend of Community Access who served as a volunteer on our real estate development committee for several years and was instrumental in helping us shape our strategic housing initiatives. In 2007, Karen's firm assisted us in selecting a broker to sell our office condo and relocate to our current location at 2 Washington Street—a critically important step in our long-term strategic plan.

Prior to founding K. Backus & Associates in 1997, Karen was vice president of Forest City Ratner Companies' Retail Development Division from 1995 to 1997, where she managed the development of five projects in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. She was responsible for leasing, financial analysis, public approvals, and overall project management for five major retail development projects.

Karen also served as vice president of real estate development and vice president of corporate recruitment and retention at the New York City Economic Development Corporation and its predecessors. Her career at NYCEDC spanned almost 10 years. She led a variety of major projects ranging from the relocation of The New York Times printing plant from Times Square to Queens, to the development of the first residential building at Queens West. Overall, she oversaw more than 100 city-sponsored development projects.

Early in her career, Karen worked for several nonprofit management consulting organizations and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency.

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*For details about our Good Neighbor Gala on May 7, visit: [www.communityaccess.org/gala](http://www.communityaccess.org/gala)*

**W**hen Maggi started working at Community Access in 1988 the field of supportive housing didn't formally exist. But, as a law expert in real estate, that's exactly the job she was hired to help pioneer—and is a role in which she has now devoted 25 years of service, excellence and heart. In that time, Maggi has led and nurtured the development and construction of 20 Community Access housing programs in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, which are home to more than 1,100 New Yorkers living with psychiatric disabilities, many of whom were formerly homeless, as well as working families, and other individuals with special needs.

What has made Maggi's journey all the more special for the tenants of Community Access is that she has always strived to build housing programs that feel like home—to be places where people want to live. To this end, every site is attractively furnished, has original artwork on the walls created by participants of our

art program, and most buildings have community rooms and outdoor gardens where tenants can gather for movie and game nights, barbecues, dinners and socializing.

In many of the communities where Community Access has built new apartment programs or renovated existing buildings, our efforts have initiated a full-on renaissance of neighborhoods. Often, what starts out as a vacant lot when Community Access 'moves in,' sparks thriving neighborhoods with new housing constructions, shopping, delis, restaurants, daycare centers, and other amenities.

Maggi's work has always been much more than just a bricks and mortar endeavor: tenants are not strangers to her; they are neighbors who know her well and chat with her when she regularly visits to check up on the buildings to make sure they are well-maintained.



“ I had a great time visiting Community Access. Everyone was so amazingly hopeful. I want to come back and see how everyone is. ”

–Kristin Davis

Recovering

# REBUILDING

Hurricane hit Historic Gouverneur Court with **nearly \$1M worth of damage**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, **Gouverneur Court** is a former hospital acquired and renovated by Community Access in the early 1990s, aided by architect Peter L. Woll and contractor Sparrow Construction Corp. The building subsequently received the Preservation League of New York State award for Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation, and a Fannie Mae Foundation Maxwell Award for Excellence for Special Needs Housing. Its 123 tenants include individuals living with psychiatric disabilities and HIV/AIDS, and low-income community members.



New Yorkers continue to experience the aftereffects of Superstorm Sandy. Several months after the storm, it wasn't unusual to hear about another downtown business still without power—with employees working at satellite or temporary offices. Such was the case for Community Access' headquarters at Battery Park where heat, electricity and phone service were not restored until late January, following a massive effort to rebuild the basement's electrical systems and boilers.

Nine of Community Access' programs in Lower Manhattan were also affected by the storm, with our Gouverneur Court housing program suffering the heaviest blow. In a matter of hours, flooding on the ground level destroyed the commercial kitchen, food pantries, a computer lab, and offices—as well as our art program's studio, all its supplies, and original art work.

In the days following the storm, Community Access hired environmental clean-up crews who traveled from the southeast

to quickly begin the recovery effort. Our overarching priority was to make sure that our tenants were safe, warm, had hot meals to eat, and strong support from on-site staff. Thanks to an outpouring of love from community members, we received blankets, food, flashlights, and other emergency items. Actress Kristin Davis was among the dozens of New Yorkers who lent a helping hand—donating much-needed supplies and bringing a whole lot of smiles during her visit with tenants and staff.

It will take at least another six months before the Gouverneur Court ground level is fully rebuilt, repainted, and refurnished—and we extend continuing thanks to the many community members who are helping us in this effort.

For the latest updates about our progress, visit: [www.communityaccess.org/blog](http://www.communityaccess.org/blog) or “Like” us on Facebook at [www.fb.com/communityaccess](http://www.fb.com/communityaccess).

# BETTY

I met Betty Froelich in 1979, when, as a graduate student at the New School for Social Research, I started working part-time as an intern at Community Access. We first met at a board meeting in Betty's home on Park Avenue. As a student, and west coast transplant, I had never been in a real "luxury" building, where you're greeted by a uniformed doorman who calls first to clear your admission and the elevator deposits you in a private foyer.

If I was expecting a wealthy matron who dabbled in do-gooder activities, I quickly discovered Betty was not cast for that role. She told me her daughter had needed mental health services when she was a teenager. After that time she became an activist by helping others—and not within the confines of a private facility, but at the state-run outpatient clinic in Lower Manhattan. It was here that she had learned about the work of Community Access and its mission to provide housing to former state hospital patients.

We quickly became friends; Betty was open, enthusiastic, and hard working. She was generous with her time and not afraid to get her hands dirty.

**"FROM THE MOMENT BETTY FIRST INTRODUCED ME TO COMMUNITY ACCESS, I WAS HOOKED. HER ENTHUSIASM WAS INFECTIOUS, AND I'VE BEEN INVOLVED EVER SINCE. WE MISS YOU, BETTY."**

**STEPHEN H. CHASE, PRESIDENT, BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

For many years she managed the Mental Health Association's thrift shop and she always selected the nicest items for Christmas presents for all the tenants living in our first building on Stanton Street—a run-down tenement on the Lower East Side, long before the neighborhood became a haven for shoppers and foodies.

Betty and her husband Ralph were not afraid to buttonhole their Upper East Side neighbors to donate money and become involved in CA. (Betty always said "older is bolder.") She was an early multi-tasker; even while on vacation, she would talk up CA with her fellow travelers and come back with new leads that she was always eager to share with me. One of her best catches was a young attorney who had recently moved back to NYC after working as a legal aid attorney in Boston: Stephen Chase, our current board president.

I grew up in California, and I lived 3,000 miles from my mother. Over the years, Betty became my surrogate New York mom who got to meet all the girlfriends before things got too serious. Needless to say, my wife, Maggi, passed with flying colors. In her 25 years on the CA board, Betty's commitment never waned, but age and health issues finally slowed her down. She left a legacy of goodwill, respect for each person, and a gentle kindness that is truly rare. She was the best, and I miss her. Everyone who knew her does.

-Steve Coe



Betty Froelich alongside Dick Cavett at the CA Gala.

In loving memory of  
Elizabeth "Betty" Froelich  
1924-2013





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