

Community Access Celebrates Graduation of Howie the Harp Peer Workforce Training Participants



Photo Credit: Carlos Alayo

- Graduates of the gold standard peer training program become community mental health leaders, equipped for direct service, supervisory, and management roles within the human services sector -

NEW YORK, Jan. 10, 2024 /PRNewswire/ -- On Monday, January 8, the mental health nonprofit Community Access celebrated graduates of its Howie the Harp Peer Workforce training program at a moving ceremony featuring families, friends, and supporters. It was the organization's first in-person celebration of graduates since 2019.

Founded in 1995, the award-winning Community Access Howie the Harp Peer Training Program equips individuals with a lived experience in the mental health system for direct service, supervisory, and management roles within the human services sector. The program is named in honor of Howard Geld—better known by the moniker “Howie the Harp,” psychiatric survivor and activist who championed the power of peer support and self-help.

Generous supporters of the program include The Abbott and Lila Stillman Family Foundation, Anthem BlueCross BlueShield, Eugene M. Lang Foundation, Jean and Louis Dreyfus Foundation, and KKR Citizenship, in addition to our long-time partner, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

“We are thrilled to celebrate the hard work of the program's graduates as they embark on the next chapter of their lives,” says **Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access**. “Community Access knows that in order to transform the mental health system, we need to transform its workforce. Peers fill critical roles, leveraging both their lived experience and professional expertise to support others in ways that acknowledge our shared humanity and common struggles. We

look forward to expanding Howie the Harp to further strengthen the human services workforce in the years to come.”

“Everyone at Community Access is warm, open, and encouraging,” says **Christina Brown, a Howie the Harp graduate and recipient of the Commitment Award for a Student.** “The love, caring, and encouragement I received at Howie the Harp will stay with me forever. Thanks to their commitment to me and my commitment to myself, I am proud to have completed the program and to be working as a youth peer advocate.”

The Community Access Howie the Harp Peer Training Program is the oldest peer training program in the United States. It provides an intensive 14-week classroom-based training and 12-week internship experience to train people in mental health recovery to work as peer providers in human services. Peers use their expertise to build relationships, support the goals of people who have come

from similar backgrounds, and promote well-being. The model has been internationally recognized and replicated.

About Community Access

Founded in 1974, Community Access is a provider of supportive housing and support services in New York City for people living with mental health concerns. Rooted in the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives, Community Access expands opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. Community Access provides person-centered services that help people pursue goals that are important to them - from gaining access to an affordable home, to learning new skills; from re-establishing community ties, to setting goals for the future.

SOURCE Community Access