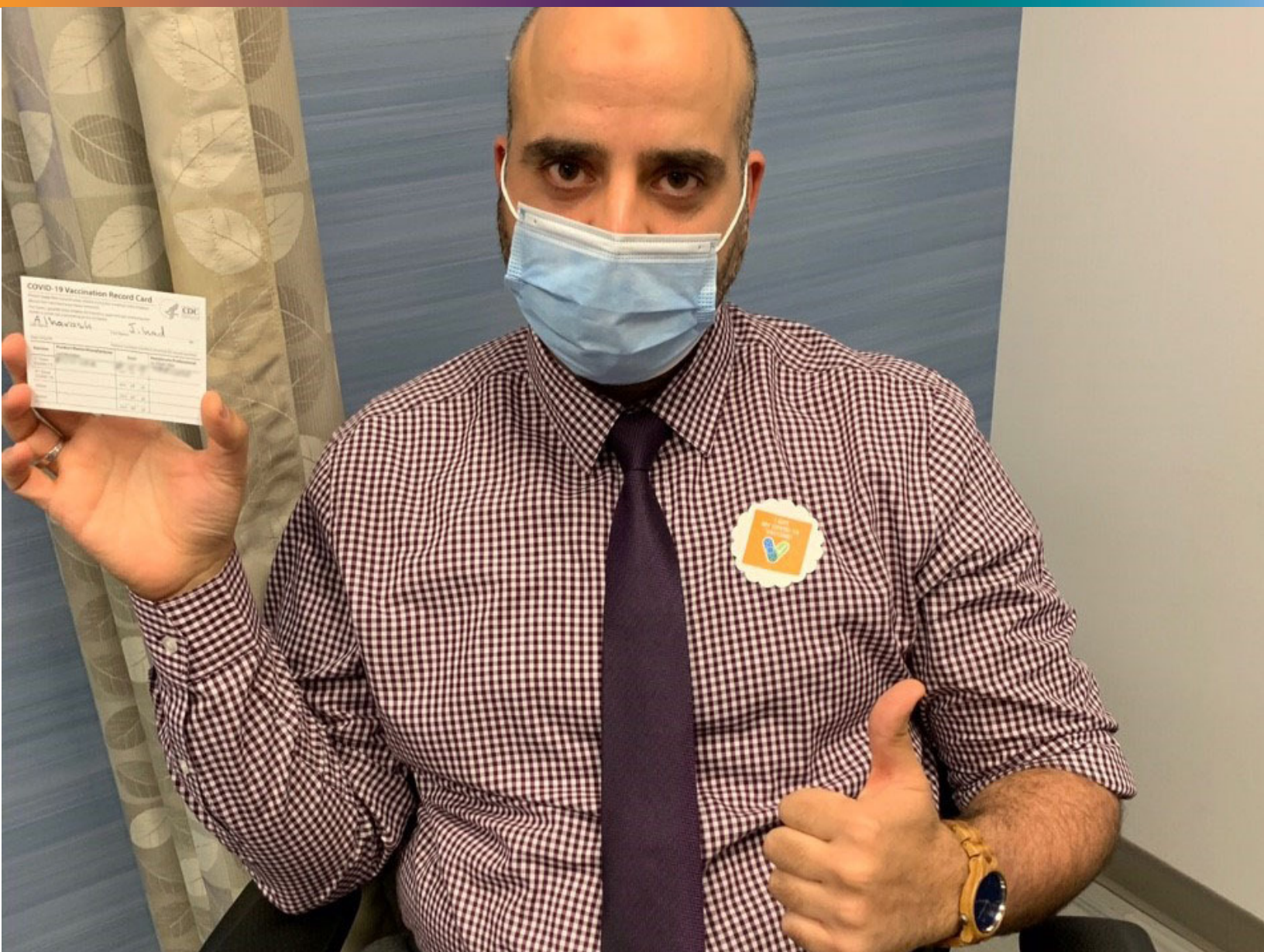


MAR 2021

# NWSLTR

## HARLEM UNITED ISSUE 10



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*Photo: Dr. Alharash after his COVID-19 vaccination at The Nest*



## Dear Harlem United Family,

Welcome to the 10th edition of our staff newsletter, which launched nearly two years ago! Within these 10 issues, we've documented some of the life-changing work you all do every day. I'm so proud to work with this amazing staff- your dedication and care for our community is endlessly inspiring. [You can find past editions of the newsletter on the Harlem United website.](#)

This is our first newsletter in 2021, and already we've accomplished so much this year. Starting in January, [we began administering COVID-19 vaccinations](#) at The Nest Community Health Center. The roll-out of the vaccine across the U.S., though bumpy at times, offers a glimmer of hope in the fight against the virus that has claimed more than 2.6 million lives worldwide. We can all be proud of Harlem United's role in offering protection and peace of mind to hundreds of at-risk community members here in NYC.

Despite all our critical work with communities at increased risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, Harlem United and other safety net providers are still facing a New York State policy that could eliminate millions of dollars from our budgets. We have been advocating against this carve-out for 11 months and now is the time for another big push. I'm asking everyone to contact your legislators and the Governor by email to reject and delay the Medicaid Pharmacy Carve-Out and protect NY's safety net providers, like Harlem United. If we lose access to savings from the Federal 340B drug discount program, the communities we serve will lose access to life-saving care. All it takes is one minute to follow these quick steps:

1. Go to [www.savenysafetynet.com](http://www.savenysafetynet.com)
2. Click the "Contact Your Legislator" button
3. Fill in your info and hit send and it will automatically send emails to the Governor and your State Legislators.

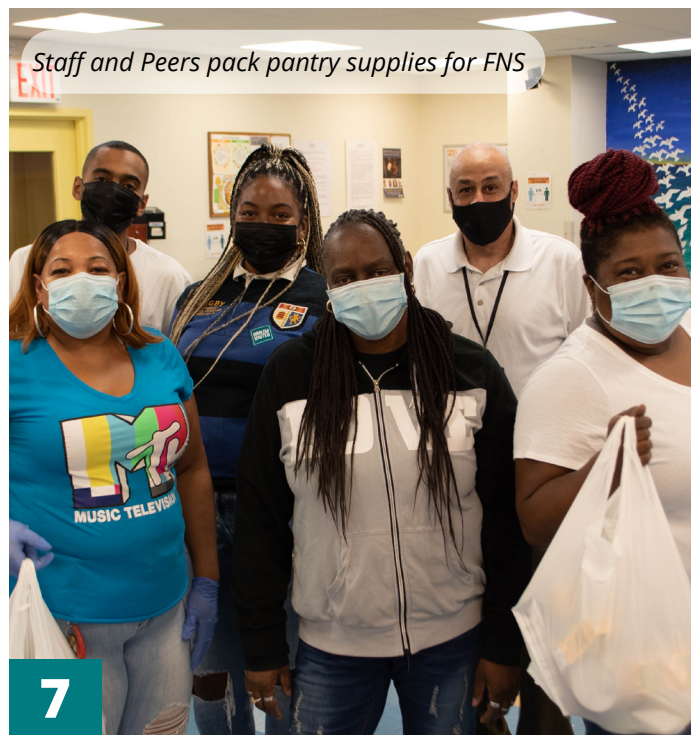
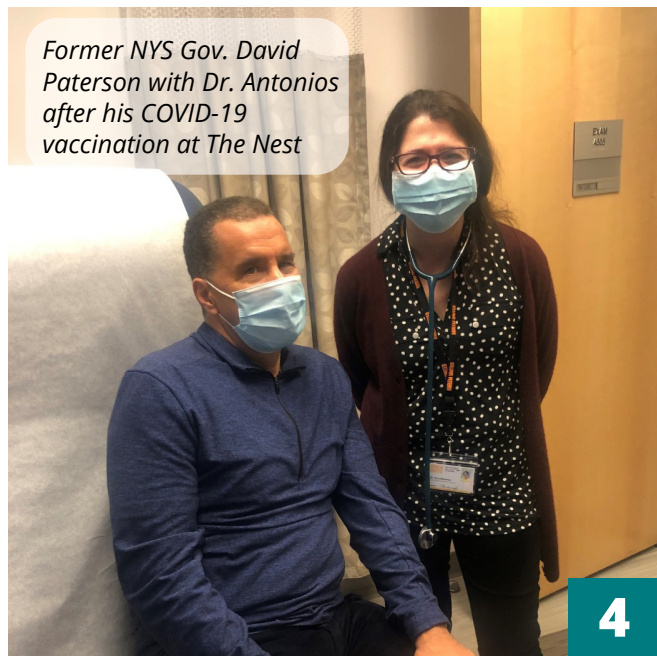
This really takes less than 60 seconds and it makes a big difference for elected officials to hear from us on saving our 340B safety net.

**Even if you have already visited the Save NY's Safety Net website and sent letters, we've updated the letter, and now more than ever we need to flood our lawmakers with letters!** We are in a critical time - State budget negotiations are happening now, and the pharmacy carve-out is one of the items being discussed; this week, we welcomed budget proposals from the state Assembly and Senate, each of which, if passed, would reject or delay the implementation of the carve-out. The budget will be finalized by the end of March, so we only have a few weeks to make our voices heard! You can learn more about [the 340B program and our advocacy on page five.](#)

Wishing you good health,

  
Jacqui Kilmer  
CEO





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#### **Employee Assistance Program**

Licensed Counselors are prepared to take calls from employees or household members who are experiencing fears or anxieties related to COVID-19. Call: 800-386-7055  
Visit: [www.ibhworklife.com](http://www.ibhworklife.com)







*Photo (top left to right): Aicha Doumbia, Dr. Vera Antonios, Firoella Ramirez, S. Empatha Merkerson, Mari Eva Mendes, Betsy Balkind, Stephanie Fischman, and Aidan Wildes after their receiving their vaccines*

## COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic

In December 2020, the FDA granted Emergency Use Authorization for two new COVID-19 vaccines, offering a first glimmer of hope in the fight against COVID-19. As a [Federally Qualified Health Center](#), Harlem United's The Nest Community Health Center was asked to partner with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to conduct COVID-19 vaccinations.

As a community vaccination partner, the Nest provided more than 1,200 doses of COVID-19 vaccine during the first two months of operation. Existing patients of The Nest and clients enrolled in other Harlem United programs have received vaccines, in addition to scores of new patients who are only hearing about Harlem United for the first time! We've even had a few public figures choose The Nest as the location of their own vaccinations, including [Former New York Governor David Paterson](#) and [S Epatha Merkerson](#) (Emmy award-winning actor, best known for playing Lieutenant Anita Van Buren from Law and Order).

Our patients have shared glowing reviews of their experience with the vaccine clinic, sending flowers and thank-you notes to the staff. These gestures of appreciation are a testament to the world-class care provided by our colleagues at The Nest and the peace of mind brought to many of those living with increased risk through the pandemic through receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.

New York State has been steadily adding high-risk communities to the [list of groups](#) eligible to receive the vaccine. Healthcare workers (such as all Harlem United staff), congregate housing and shelter residents, people with certain underlying conditions (such as HIV, asthma, diabetes, and heart conditions), and those 60 years of age and older are just a few of the groups on the list. Continue check the [NYS Dept. of Health website](#) for the most up-to-date eligibility list.

If you have clients who meet the [eligibility criteria](#), please encourage them to consider getting vaccinated. Client referrals can be made to [Shonte Williams](#) over email or at 646-715-4995.

## Vaccinations for Staff

As an essential services organization, Harlem United staff can be vaccinated at The Nest! Last month, we hosted four education sessions, attended by about 85 staff members, to provide information about the vaccine and answer your questions. You can find recordings of those sessions as well as answers to frequently asked questions [on our website](#). If you would like to get vaccinated, please email [Ann Daphne Payoen](#) and she will help to get you set up with an appointment.

Since the start of the vaccination campaign through the end of February, 93 staff received at least one dose and 89 are fully vaccinated, having received a second dose. Congratulations on all the hard work.



Photo: Tamisha McPherson, Chief External Affairs and Development Officer and Executive Director of URAM, speaks at 340B virtual townhall event

## Community Advocacy: 340B

For the better part of 2020 and now into 2021, Harlem United and the [Save NY's Safety Net—340B Saves Lives](#) coalition of other safety net providers, have been advocating against a provision in New York State's (NYS) FY2021 Budget which will have dramatic implications on the programming that Federally Qualified Health Centers like The Nest Community Center are able to offer.

The NYS Budget directs the Department of Health to carve out the Medicaid pharmacy benefit from managed care and transition it to a fee-for-service model, starting April 1, 2021. This change could decimate safety net providers, reversing the hard-won progress we've made toward ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and causing communities of color whom we serve to become sicker—the very same communities who are now hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and already struggling with disparate health outcomes.

The 340B program is a Federal program that allows safety net providers like Harlem United to buy drugs at discounted prices and get reimbursed at a higher rate. We use the savings to help subsidize the cost of medications for patients and by reinvesting the savings in our other programs and services. In short, 340B helps make Harlem United's work possible, as we stretch every dollar as far as we possibly can. If the pharmacy carve-out goes into effect, then the 340B savings would be eliminated. Across the state, hundreds of millions of dollars will be pulled from safety net providers, forcing many FQHCs to close their doors. As a provider of last resort to so many patients who are challenged with homelessness and extreme poverty, we must keep the 340B Program intact.

As a leading member of the coalition, Harlem United has participated in two different Zoom town halls, which were attended by elected officials, safety net providers, activists, and community members. We've been lucky to

get news coverage about this issue in the recent weeks, including an [AMNY Op-Ed by Jacqui Kilmer](#), CEO, and several [articles in Gay City News](#). Also, we continue to meet with key lawmakers to educate them on this issue and advocate for their support in saving this important resource.

This week, the NYS Assembly and Senate each proposed budgets that would preserve the 340B program, if passed.

Harlem United will keep working with the coalition to ensure that this devastating policy does not come into effect. Staff members and interested community members can take action by [emailing elected officials](#) from the easy form on the Save NY's Safety Net website. It takes two minutes and makes a big difference!

### Intro to 340B

Our CEO Jacqui Kilmer explains the importance of 340B in this excellent explainer video.



## Strategic Advancement Updates

Strategic Advancement hit the ground running in 2021. In February, we welcomed Nomsa Taremba to the new Strategic Advancement Coordinator role. She holds a Masters of Science in Development Studies from Women's University in Africa, and is currently pursuing her MBA at King Graduate School, Monroe College. Nomsa joins the Strategic Advancement team after providing part-time volunteer support with the department since January 2019. We wish her all the best in her new role.

**Grants:** In January, we were awarded \$100,000 from the RTW Charitable Foundation to expand our COVID-19 vaccination program at The Nest. This gift of \$100,000 promotes health equity in communities of color most impacted by COVID-19.

Funds will help to offset the cost of delivering vaccinations and will significantly expand our existing COVID-19 immunization program in our Harlem-based clinic. We are so grateful to RTW Charitable Foundation and look forward to a long relationship.

**Individual Giving:** In January, we received a \$10,000 gift from Amida Care and a \$1,000 Family Foundation gift from Tim Smith Giving Fund. We received \$14,579.47 total, 9.5 times more than January 2020, from 29 individual gifts, 7 of which were from new donors.

February donations continued to be very generous, as we received a \$1,000 Family Foundation gift from the Kathy Kinne and Rich Renikoff Family Charitable Gift Fund and \$13,777.09 total, a 6,621% increase over February 2020, in 27 gifts, 9 of which were from new donors.

**Communications:** In January 2021, we released our [2020 Annual report](#), detailing the spectacular accomplishments of our staff in 2020. We invite you all to [read the full report](#); you'll find photos of staff in action, Peer profiles, statistics about our impact, and much more.

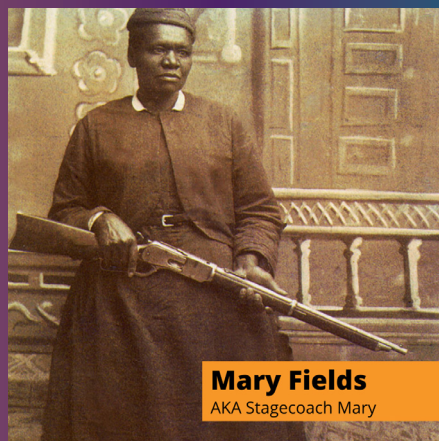
Throughout February, our team worked on the updated 2021 [Program Guide](#), supported filming of a client feature for a VICE documentary, and collaborated with program staff to develop program-specific executive summaries for our four program areas: Healthcare, Housing, Prevention, and Supportive Services.

## Top Social Media Posts

As we continue to grow our social media presence, we ask for all staff to follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#) and share our posts with your personal networks.



**Facebook:** We were excited to share photos of staff members (including [Danielle Strauss](#), pictured above) who received vaccinations at The Nest to celebrate the launch of our vaccine clinic in January and February 2021. The post received 99 engagements on Facebook, more than 125% of average posts.



**Twitter:** In February, Harlem United celebrated Black History Month on our social media by sharing overlooked moments and figures. Our top post on Twitter, with 36 engagements, told the story of Mary Fields, the first African American to work as a mail carrier in the U.S.



**Instagram:** By sharing other accounts' viral content related to our mission of providing healthcare, housing, prevention, and supportive services, we are able to engage with the public conversation and reach wider audiences. In February 2021, our top Instagram post obtained 69 engagements and argued that [people's basic needs should be met](#) without preconditions.



## Food and Nutrition Services

Since 2005, Harlem United's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has provided hot meals and pantry supplies to clients living with HIV/AIDS. Though congregate hot meals have been paused since March 2020 and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program pivoted to providing pantry food kits and grab-and-go style meals. In 2020, they distributed 6,007 pantry kits.

FNS is a critical program, addressing an urgent issue in our communities. Food access is a central social determinant of health, and we are able to address food security issues and its long term health consequences for our HIV+ clients across the agency because of FNS' diligent work. According to [a recent Robin Hood Foundation report](#), one in three New Yorkers faced food hardship before COVID-19; by October 2020, that number had risen to 42%.

In recognition of FNS' exceptional work, our funder, NYC DOHMH, whose contract is managed by Public Health Solutions, offered a contract enhancement to the program, to the tune of more than \$22,000 dollars. Congratulations to the FNS team!

## Peer Highlight

Don't let her quiet demeanor fool you. Ellen is a vital community member in FNS and ADHC: a mother figure to her peers, a talented artist, and a data entry wiz.

A mother of six and grandmother to five, Ellen came to Harlem United 16 years ago, seeking a sense of community. At the time, she was isolated, depressed and not taking her HIV medication regularly. When she started attending the day program, she was shy, wearing a hat to hide her face.

Today, all of that has changed. Ellen is a Peer with FNS, doing data entry before the pandemic, and helping pack pantry kits since her office work was suspended due to COVID-19. She receives primary care from Harlem United and takes her medication regularly to control her HIV. She manages her diabetes with help from FNS. She loves working with our art therapist to create beautiful paintings, which are hung throughout multiple Harlem United buildings. She is active in the ADHC community.



## Staff Survey on COVID-19 Attitudes

Late last month, we completed a short survey of staff's attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of the COVID-19 vaccine. The survey was put together by Evaluation and Population Health, in order to understand staff's comfort with talking to clients, patients and other members of the community about benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine. Nearly half (45%) of the agency participated, with 127 responses representing every department and position within the agency.

About half of the staff members who responded reported that they have already received the COVID-19 vaccine and felt comfortable talking about the vaccine and answering questions about it. However, the other half offered a variety of responses about their concerns and discomfort with the topic.

This information will prove very useful as we move forward with decisions about how best to help support staff in the process of getting as many people vaccinated as possible so that we as a community can reach herd immunity and end this pandemic. A more detailed analysis of the survey will be available by the end of this month.

## Participate in a Medication Adherence Study

Our own [Danielle Strauss](#), Associate Vice President of Evaluation and Population Health, is conducting a qualitative research study as part of her PhD dissertation at CUNY Graduate Center. She is currently recruiting virally suppressed PLWHA in order to generate theory around the motivating factors to take HIV medication. The results of her study will be used to inform HIV policy and the strategies used by HIV/AIDS service providers to help PLWH adhere to their medication regimens.

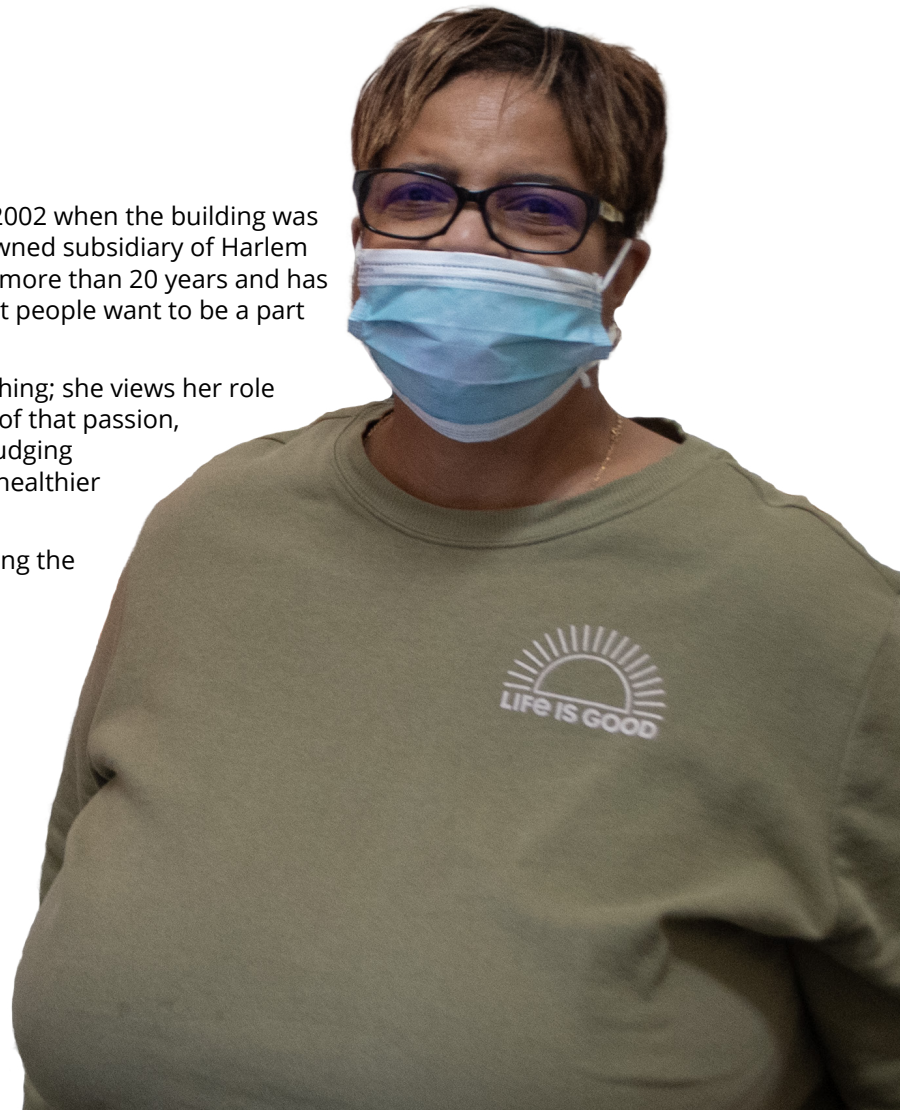
In addition to being HIV positive and virally suppressed, eligibility for her study includes being a person of color who is at least 26 years old and on Medicaid or ADAP. If you or someone you know is interested in participating, please contact her at (845) 459-0409. All participants will receive a \$20 gift card for their participation. Due to the pandemic, interviews will take place over Zoom or if necessary, over the phone.

## Staff Highlight

Susan started working at Foundation House East in 2002 when the building was operated by North General, which is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Harlem United. She has been a substance use counselor for more than 20 years and has always been committed to creating communities that people want to be a part of, where everyone looks out for one another.

Since she was a child, she has had a passion for teaching; she views her role as a Senior Mental Health Specialist as an extension of that passion, supporting clients to keep moving forward without judging themselves for their past and helping them to learn healthier ways to live their lives.

Thank you, Susan, for your many years of transforming the lives of our clients.





## Upcoming Events - March/April 2021



## Upcoming Events

### March is ... Women's History Month

March 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>  
[LGBT Health Awareness Week](#)

March 27<sup>th</sup> – April 4<sup>th</sup>  
[Passover](#)

March 6<sup>th</sup>  
[National Dentist Day](#)

March 10<sup>th</sup>  
[National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#)

March 20<sup>th</sup>  
[National Native American HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#)

March 28<sup>th</sup>  
[Holi](#)

March 30<sup>th</sup>  
[National Doctor's Day](#)

March 31<sup>st</sup>  
[Transgender Day of Visibility](#)

### April is ... National Minority Health Month

April 5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>  
[National Public Health Week](#)

April 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>  
[Black Maternal Health Week](#)

April 12<sup>th</sup> – May 12<sup>th</sup>  
[Ramadan](#)

April 2<sup>nd</sup>  
[Good Friday](#)  
 (Harlem United closed)

April 4<sup>th</sup>  
[Easter](#)

April 8<sup>th</sup>  
[Buddha's Birthday](#) (Buddha Purnima)

April 10<sup>th</sup>  
[National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#)

April 18<sup>th</sup>  
[National Transgender HIV Testing Day](#)

April 26<sup>th</sup>  
[Lesbian Visibility Day](#)

## Training Corner

Please join us for our upcoming trainings. For more information, please contact [Jamila Taylor](#), Director of Administrative Operations.

**May 13<sup>th</sup>**  
 Narcissistic Personality Disorder  
 2:00pm - 4:00pm  
 Facilitator: Diana Christoforou

