



# NYRAG

# Voices

FROM THE FRONT LINE

PROFILES OF OUR NONPROFIT PARTNERS

## VIP Community Services



*“We’re very pleased to support VIP Community Services. It’s one of the few organizations in the city providing drug treatment services for women, and its Women’s Center offers them a reliable, safe place to deal with their problems.”*

—Roderick V. Jenkins, Program Officer,  
Children, Youth, and Families,  
The New York Community Trust

- ▶ Of the 1.3 million residents of the Bronx, **31 percent live in poverty**. The Bronx is the poorest of New York City’s five boroughs and the poorest urban county in the nation. **Unemployment in the borough is at approximately 25 percent.**
- ▶ According to a 2004 New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) risk profile, there are **five times as many adult drug-related hospital discharges** in the Crotona section of the Bronx as there are in New York City overall.
- ▶ While Bronx women comprise 17 percent of the female population of New York City, they accounted for **31.5 percent of all NYC female AIDS deaths** in 2006.

At a recent fundraiser for VIP Community Services, Gwendolyn, one of their graduates, spoke to the guests about her experiences with the organization. “Before entering VIP, my outlook about life was very dim,” she said. “I was unsure about what I wanted for my life. My background consisted of a history of incarceration, homelessness, and substance abuse for many years. I knew I would have a lot to work on if I gave treatment and myself a chance. As time progressed in treatment, I began to feel a sense of hopefulness. I felt the support from everyone around me. It was as if someone had given me a road map that started from point A and it was up to me to get to B and C. I have learned to use my obstacles as stepping stones. Stepping stones that have built a foundation for me to become a self-determined and ambitious woman.”

Founded in 1974 by Father Robert Banome in the East Tremont/Crotona section of the Bronx, VIP Community Services was created by residents and community leaders joining together to grapple with their neighborhood’s most pressing problems—safety, family disintegration, drug abuse, unemployment, and housing abandonment. Today, VIP continues to help Bronx residents find solutions to the confluence of poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, and HIV and other infectious diseases.

VIP currently serves 7,000 people a year, and has an active Alumni Association that reaches out to graduates of the program to

help them maintain their sobriety. Of VIP’s 300 staff members, 65 percent live in the Bronx, acting as “ears to the ground” that have enabled the organization to develop programs in response to the particular needs of the community.

“VIP’s programs are ‘client centered,’” said Sandra Ruiz Butter, President of VIP Community Services. “Our integrated program model promotes access to care and adherence to treatment. We have an open door, and clients are welcomed back without judgment about their ability to retain sobriety. Recovery is acknowledged as difficult. Relapse is seen as a part of treatment, and as a lifelong struggle with which VIP is willing to help.”

VIP’s services fall into four main program areas, and offer “one-stop shopping” for clients addressing multiple problems:

- **Recovery programs**, which includes licensed and nationally accredited outpatient alcohol and substance abuse treatment. VIP’s Opioid Treatment Program, which serves more than 2,000 clients a year, is one of the largest single sites in New York City for people addicted to heroin; and residential programs and transitional housing provide supportive services for clients in recovery and those preparing for independence. In 2001, VIP became the only non-hospital behavioral healthcare organization to receive a three-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

(CARF) for its methadone treatment, ambulatory treatment, and men's and women's residence programs. VIP has continued to obtain maximum accreditation from CARF.

- **Health services** offered in VIP's state-licensed outpatient clinic provide on-site primary care for clients whose substance abuse histories have often resulted in serious health complications. The clinic has a specialty in HIV care, and VIP provides extensive HIV prevention and education.

- **Vocational and educational counseling** is woven into all programs, and through their affiliate, Managed Work Services, VIP provides transitional and permanent job placement for the hardest to serve, including those on public assistance, ex-offenders, and the working poor.

- VIP has also expanded beyond its social services role to become a **key player in community development**. As a community development agency, VIP has developed 700 rental apartments in 23 buildings throughout the Bronx for low-income households, including supportive housing for single adults and other special needs populations. In addition to conventional financing techniques, VIP also uses federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits to fund its affordable housing. Through its Tenant Services Group, all occupants are offered assistance or supportive services. Combined with their commitment to tenant services, VIP has played an important role in borough-wide housing rehabilitation and stability.

"Over the past ten years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of clients who come to us for substance abuse treatment who also have other major health issues," said Ms. Butter. "These clients may have serious and persistent psychiatric disorders, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, heart disease, or other life-threatening conditions. They all face greater barriers to treatment than those coping with substance abuse alone. They are also at high risk for many other problems, including homelessness and

criminal involvement. At about 65 percent of our total client population, they are becoming the norm in our programs."

"Traditionally, substance abuse, mental health, and HIV/AIDS treatment have been isolated from each other," she continued. "Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that successful outcomes are tied to understanding and treating clients holistically."

Two of VIP's programs illustrate their approach to helping clients dealing with co-occurring disorders. Their Wellness Center provides mental health services for clients in recovery and those with HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses, as well as the chronically homeless living in supported housing. It serves as VIP's "command central" for insuring that their clients with co-occurring disorders receive the full range of services they need to support their recovery, and has been recognized as a program model for government agencies interested in supporting co-located services.

VIP's Women's Center serves as a welcoming, attractive, and safe place for women who are not yet ready to admit drug use and HIV exposure, and for those seeking help with chemical dependency, mental illness, and, often, domestic violence and foster care issues. Occupying the entire second floor in VIP's headquarters, the Women's Center offers a packed schedule of groups, counseling, and support activities for three generations of women ranging in age from 18 into their 60s, as well as a supervised childcare area for young children.

"I intend to become a substance abuse counselor," Gwendolyn said as she spoke more about her experiences with VIP. "I have completed parole and continue to live a drug-free lifestyle. My long-term goal is to spearhead my own not-for-profit treatment program. Today I am filled with so much gratitude to VIP for helping me change my life, and making me who I am." ▲

## NYRAG Members That Fund VIP Community Services Include:

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## To learn more about VIP Community Services, please contact:

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[www.vipservices.org](http://www.vipservices.org)

## Recommended Restaurants Near VIP Community Services

[El Nuevo Bohio](#)  
791 East Tremont Avenue  
718-299-4218

[North Star Cafe](#)  
850 East Tremont Avenue  
718-328-0505

[Roberto's](#)  
603 Crescent Avenue  
718-733-9503



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