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## NEWS

*Issue No. 5 The Newsletter of the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health*

### Staff Spotlight: Peter Bittle

During his decade-plus tenure, Peter Bittle, PCMH's Director of Residential Development, has been responsible for the opening of an impressive seven residential properties in Brooklyn and the Bronx—adding 414 units to PCMH's residential portfolio. And with four more projects currently in the pipeline, he shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

Peter joined PCMH in 2003, following a long career working in various capacities to aid the mentally ill in New York. From 1980 to 1991 he served as director for administration at Rockland Psychiatric Center, a State facility in Orangeburg, NY. He then went on to work as part of the State team on the New York/New York I agreement between the City and State that, between 1990 and 1995, provided housing and services to over 5,000 homeless people with mental illness. Starting in 1996, Peter began working as a consultant for New York City, doing the same kind of coordination work on the tail end of NY/NY I and then on the NY/NY II agreement, which was signed in 1999 and added another 2,300-plus units of housing for this population.

Peter's breadth of experience working with both State and City mental health agencies would come into play not long after he joined PCMH. He first worked in residential operations before managing the PCMH Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) master contract until 2005, when he began to focus full-time on housing development.



*PCMH Director of Residential Development, Peter Bittle, has spent over 40 years working in mental health in New York State.*

Peter's first development project was the Columbia Street Residence in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood. The site had languished after PCMH acquired it in 1995, due to a combination of issues within the agency at the time, objections from the local community, and environmental concerns. Once these were resolved, Peter started developing the site with Dr. Barak, who in 1999 became PCMH's CEO and whose goal going forward was to develop 1-2 residential properties per year. Peter lined up initial funding from the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP), and operating support from the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Columbia Street opened its doors to residents in 2008.

"When a building is complete and residents move in, you realize that you've helped to provide these individuals—many of whom have come out of shelters and substandard living conditions—with a home," says Peter. "It's very rewarding."

Next up for Peter was the Ralph Avenue Residence in Brooklyn, followed by five Bronx Residences (Bronx Park East, Teller Avenue, Grand Concourse, Hull Avenue, and Lyvere Street) that would open through the end of 2013. Presently, there are five more PCMH residences in various stages of development: Crotona Park North and Echo Place in the Bronx are under construction and are expected to be completed in early 2014 and in 2015, respectively; Gates Avenue in Brooklyn, and Shakespeare Avenue and Marion Avenue in the Bronx, are slated to open in 2016-2017. When these projects are complete, PCMH will have over 900 residential units in its portfolio.

Squarely on pace with Dr. Barak's annual development goal, Peter spends his time lining up capital support and operating subsidies from agencies including the State's Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP), the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and the State's Division of Homes & Community Renewal (HCR), and garnering community approvals for new residences.

While navigating a wide range of City and State agencies, as well as local residents and politicians, would seem like a daunting process to many, for Peter, it's all in a day's work. "It's certainly helped me that I've been on the other side of the desk in my previous careers, and have helped facilitate capital development and operating subsidies to not-for-profits," he says.

When scouting potential new residential sites, Peter is constantly on the lookout for properties that could match PCMH's needs. While Peter notes that each site comes with its own set of development challenges, he reiterates that ultimately, bringing a new residence into the agency's portfolio is very gratifying.

"I have spent over 40 years working in the mental health system in New York State, so I've seen the best and the worst of the system," he says. "Making affordable and safe community living a reality for persons with mental illness is the best."

## Client Close-Up: Alejandrina Cruz

Alejandrina Cruz, 66, is testament to the power of the Health Home program, a relatively new care model made of a network of providers, including medical, mental health, and substance abuse, which form an integrated system of care. The Health Home, created by the State Department of Health (DOH) to develop networks of care for New York residents who have Medicaid, takes primary responsibility in assuring that health and social needs for clients are met, with the goal of preventing re-hospitalization and ER visits. For Ms. Cruz, meeting her Care Coordinator, Daniel Severino, about five months ago, marked the beginning of what she describes as a “beautiful relationship.”



*Alejandrina Cruz has already forged a strong bond with her new Care Coordinator, Daniel Severino.*

Despite the relative newness of their relationship, Daniel has already begun to play a pivotal role in Ms. Cruz’s life. After moving to a new apartment in the Bronx a few months ago, she soon felt uncomfortable there, largely because of a noisy upstairs neighbor who was unkind to her. She told Daniel that she wanted to move back to her former apartment, which was still available, but it initially seemed that she wouldn’t be able to afford the moving expenses. Daniel jumped into action, and managed to come up with the

funds to cover the move by using money that had been allocated for a new closet in the apartment that Ms. Cruz now wanted to leave. With Daniel’s help, she moved back to her apartment, just a few blocks from the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, in early December.

“I don’t know what I would do without him,” says Ms. Cruz. A grandmother of five with sparkling eyes and a warm smile, she came to the U.S. from Puerto Rico when she was six years old. As a survivor of domestic violence, she is certified in self-defense.

Intensive case managers like Daniel visit clients at least once a month to make sure they’re stable and taking their medications. While Ms. Cruz is very independent, and takes her medication herself with the help of her home health aide, Yvonne, who also goes with her to her doctor’s appointment monthly, she has been in close touch with Daniel since she became his client. He is now helping Ms. Cruz, who uses oxygen for her emphysema and can’t take the stairs, to develop an emergency plan, so she doesn’t have to leave her apartment in the event the elevator breaks down.

In the meantime, Ms. Cruz is settling back into her cozy, spacious apartment. She attends a local church, which picks her up three times a week and on Sunday. In her downtime, she enjoys watching kung fu and karate movies and “Law & Order.” “Daniel helps me with everything,” Ms. Cruz says. “He even helped me get a new flat-screen TV.”

## Residential Profile: Ralph Avenue Residence



*The spacious kitchen at Ralph Avenue.*

On a bustling street just a few blocks from Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn is the Ralph Avenue Residence, which opened its doors in 2010. A walk through the residence's common areas with Natasha Applewhite, a cheerful, enthusiastic young woman who is one of two morning counselors there, reveals residents watching TV and relaxing in the lovely, large enclosed courtyard, which has plenty of seating, as well as an array of plants and flowers. A big box of fresh-baked bagels and breads sits on a table in the large community room; Natasha explains that a resident's brother owns a bread company and frequently sends treats for everyone at Ralph Avenue to enjoy.

There are 54 residents at Ralph Avenue, all singles, though the rooms are configured into three and four-bedroom suites with amenities including hardwood floors, comfortable wood furniture, and flat-screen TVs. Ralph Avenue is a Level 2 residence, which means clients are supervised by staff when taking their medicine in the morning and evening. Ralph's five residential counselors are assigned 10-11 clients each, with whom they meet at least once a week, though usually more frequently. There is a curfew of 11p.m. on weekdays and 1 a.m. on weekends, and weekend passes are available for residents to leave to visit family and friends.

Nontrell Taylor, the program director at Ralph Avenue, explains that residents, whose average age is 45-47, participate in a range of focus groups, including a Fitness Group, a Nutrition Group, a Daily Living Skills, Group, and a Meditation Group. A new Wellness Group, which addresses topics including coping skills, medication management, and nutrition, is already becoming very popular with clients. Many residents also attend programs outside of Ralph Avenue, including the Personalized Recovery



*The beautiful courtyard is a great place for Ralph Avenue residents to relax.*

Oriented Services (PROS) Program. All of the residents at Ralph Avenue come there from state facilities; applications from community residents are not accepted.



*Program Director Nontrell Taylor makes sure there's plenty for residents to do at the Ralph Avenue Residence.*

Weekly activities like bingo on Saturday and game nights on Sunday offer opportunities for residents to laugh and have fun. "We try to get people out of their rooms—it helps to stave off depression," Ms. Taylor explains. There are also community meetings for residents twice a month; local churches often come to invite them to services in an effort to help them integrate further

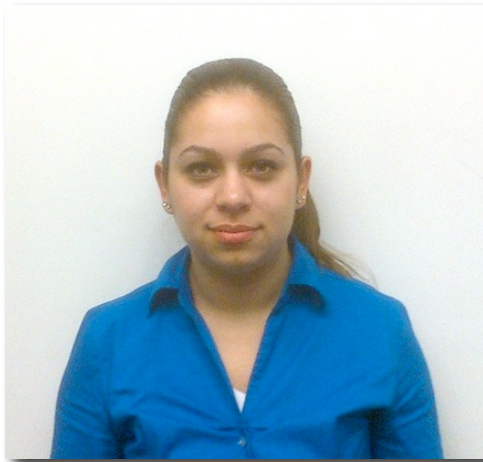
into the local community. Ms. Taylor and her staff also make it a point to celebrate the holidays in festive fashion: the last Halloween party featured a dance contest, and there are big dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Said Ms. Taylor, “We had Boston Market for Thanksgiving this year, and all the residents really enjoyed it.”

## New Faces at PCMH

### **Stephanie Pinilla, RN, ACT Team**

Hire Date: 05/20/2013

Stephanie makes sure that client health care needs are met and provides information to educate clients about medication, side effects, and health issues. She received her associate's degree in Applied Science from LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). Stephanie is a welcome addition to the ACT Team because she has a positive attitude, is a team player, and is open to feedback and learning.



### **Andrea Ruiz, RN, PROS**

Hire Date: 07/29/2013

Andrea is responsible for administering IM medications and drawing blood for PROS clients/consumers. She also tracks physician orders, on-site medication, and client/consumer visits. She received her bachelor's degree in Clinical Laboratory Science from The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey School of Nursing. A caring and dedicated professional, Andrea's valuable feedback during PROS staff meetings and case conferences help the program better serve the clients.

### **Nicole Walkes, Data Management Specialist, Scatter Site**

Hire Date: 01/30/2013

Nicole's efforts have helped to organize and improve workflow in the Scatter Site program by providing accurate information regarding a variety of issues, from rent collection to case manager productivity. She completed her B.A. in Psychology at Baruch College and has a solid background in quality assurance, with a great attention to detail and the ability to multitask.

