

barrier free living



Annual Report

2018

Letter from the Chairman



Gerald Francese, Chair,
Board of Directors

Barrier Free Living Chairman of the Board Gerald Francese takes a moment to reflect on an extraordinary year for Barrier Free Living.

The end of one era and the start of a new one. There is no better way to describe 2018 for Barrier Free Living (BFL).

One of the year's biggest changes was that after 28 years of operation, BFL's Transitional Housing program closed its doors on April 30, 2018. The Transitional Housing Program opened in November of 1990, and it was the first not-for-profit singles' shelter in New York City's homeless system. At the time, it was the only homeless shelter in New York State that served activity of daily living (ADL) dependent people with disabilities.

"One of the great joys that I have had over the years has been bumping into former residents on a city bus, at an event or just on the street," says BFL President/CEO Paul Feuerstein. "The universal feedback I have gotten is that their time at Barrier Free Living was transformational and made a tremendous difference in their quality of life. That made all of the struggles of keeping our program open and viable worthwhile."

(Read Paul's complete letter and details about the closing <https://www.bflnyc.org/the-end-of-an-era-barrier-free-livings-transitional-housing-closes/>) Yet, this ending lends itself to a new beginning.

2018 saw our other programs (Freedom House domestic violence shelter, Secret Garden community based domestic violence program, and BFL Apartments supportive housing program) continue to thrive and grow.

BFL's Freedom House created a virtual tour film which increased outreach to survivors of domestic violence and their families. View the virtual tour film [here](#).

BFL's Secret Garden also expanded its outreach with the formation of a new [deaf services team](#) which includes deaf, ASL

fluent social workers and case managers.

In 2018, our newest vision, BFL Apartments, was the recipient of a \$50,000 grant from the Assurant Foundation to create a financial literacy/scholarship program for tenants. The grant, part of Assurant Foundation's sustainable living mission, funded a 12-week financial literacy workshop that culminated in career-oriented scholarship awards.

Additionally, work on the agency's next project continued as JCJ Architecture announced details about our 65,000 square foot facility (at the site of the former transition housing program) which will provide permanent housing services and support for survivors of domestic violence with disabilities. The \$30 million project is anticipated to break ground in fall of 2019 with completion planned for January 2021. It will include 74 apartments, administrative offices, a rear garden, an elevated outdoor recreation area, and community and support spaces.

Read JCJ's announcement [here](#).

BFL continued its growth internally as well. This year we welcomed Cynthia Amodeo, Chief Program Officer, Yueqin Li,

Chief Fiscal Officer, and LeShan Gaulman, Chief Operating Officer, to the leadership team. Cynthia, Yueqin and LeShan's passion, intelligence, and experience are a welcome addition to the team, and their leadership will be key as we enter this new era.

Please take time to reflect upon our great successes, as well as the greater unmet needs of our constituents. Thanks to all who make our mission possible and our goals achievable – thanks to all the wonderful partners that we have in New York State and City government, our superlative and dedicated staff, the members of the BFL boards of trustees, the community at large who house and support our programs, and most of all to our deserving clientele. We invite you to read our Annual Report to learn more, make a donation (financial or in-kind) and to find out how you, too, can join our long-standing tradition of supporting our disabled community.

Please see our website, <http://www.bflnyc.org>, for more details about the BFL team and its programs. This is a very special and impactful organization. Thank you for helping to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



The End of an Era

After 28 years of operation, Barrier Free Living's Transitional Housing program closed its doors on April 30, 2018. Barrier Free Living Founder, President/CEO Paul Feuerstein reflects on this ground-breaking program's successes and challenges working with people with disabilities in New York City.

Read Paul's letter here. <https://www.bflnyc.org/the-end-of-an-era-barrier-free-livings-transitional-housing-closes/>



Leadership Changes

Barrier Free Living saw leadership changes in 2018.

Cynthia Amodeo took on the role of Chief Program Officer and LeShan Gaulman became the agency's Chief Operating Officer. Yueqin Li was named Barrier Free Living's Chief Fiscal Officer and Paul Feuerstein continued in his role and President/CEO.

Read about the new team here.

<https://www.bflnyc.org/about-us/leadership/>



Deaf Services Team

Barrier Free Living's Deaf Services team continued to expand its outreach efforts in 2018.

The team, created in 2017, works with survivors of domestic violence at Secret Garden, our community based domestic violence program and Freedom House, our domestic violence crisis shelter.

The Deaf Services team includes deaf, ASL fluent social workers and case managers. All services are free and confidential for women and men ages 16 and over who have experienced emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse.

Services include counseling, case management, advocacy, and referrals to legal, medical and emergency resources including food, clothing and vocational services.

For more information, please call the Barrier Free Living Deaf Services at 646-807-4013.



Volunteering

Volunteers continue to be a strong part of Barrier Free Living's mission, bringing creativity and support to our programs and the people we serve.

Student Tutors from Stuyvesant High School and Bronx Science High School worked closely with both children and adults in 2018 at Barrier Free Living apartments, a complex in the Bronx offering permanent homes to survivors of domestic violence with disabilities.

The tutors met weekly with elementary school kids, offering one on one work in areas like math and science. They also worked with adults who are pursuing their high school equivalency test, known as the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC). The tutors planned a science fair as a special summer event for the kids.

View a BFLMinute film about the Tutors here <https://vimeo.com/295828867>



Freedom House Virtual Tour Film Launched

Barrier Free Living's Freedom House program debuted a virtual tour of the program in 2018. The film gives potential new residents a close-up look at what the program offers, its accessibility features and full range of services.

View the film (our most-viewed film to date!) here. <https://vimeo.com/273345045>



Financial Literacy

Barrier Free Living (BFL) was awarded a \$50,000 grant by the Assurant Foundation to create a financial literacy program and scholarship for tenants of BFL's supportive housing complex in the Bronx.

BFL Apartments offers 120 units of permanent housing to survivors of domestic violence with disabilities and their families, as well as veterans with disabilities.

The grant, part of Assurant Foundation's sustainable living mission, funded a 12-week financial literacy workshop that culminated in career-oriented scholarships for eligible participants.

"The grant offers an incredible opportunity to our tenants, many whose career goals were halted due to domestic violence situations," says Scott Hess, BFL Director of Communications.

"The program will allow tenants to move forward and pursue new opportunities and, at the same time, learn valuable skills related to financial literacy. Financial abuse can be part of domestic violence and financial literacy can be a key component of safety, stability, health and empowerment.

The scholarship program rolled out in 2018 and culminated with a graduation ceremony for attendees.

Our Stories

Barrier Free Living shared several stories of hope in 2018, including Olivia's story below. The agency also began posting regular Staff Spotlights, and a monthly Staff Enewsletter to inform and unify teams at all three programs.

Olivia

Last summer, after a domestic violence incident, Olivia was feeling emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually unsafe. She needed to find a way up and out for herself and her children.

"The (domestic violence) incident that took place on June 5th turned everything upside down for me," says Olivia. "I needed to get away from this abusive relationship with my children's father. (Barrier Free Living's) Freedom House (domestic violence shelter) has been the catalyst to me gaining complete freedom from my abuser and my toxic past."

It was during the process of filing a police report related to the domestic violence, that Olivia learned about her options for safe shelter. And she had to make some difficult choices.

"I had to stop working at my job; I had to take my sons out of their daycare; I even lost the apartment that was

being renovated for my sons and I to move into," she says. "I lost everything because I had to relocate. I needed to get away from this abusive relationship with my children's father. I needed a real change. I needed to implement "no-contact."

Olivia was guided to Freedom House (watch a virtual tour film of Freedom House <https://vimeo.com/273345045>).

During her first week at Freedom House, after moving her family into their new safe living space, she was assigned a social worker, a family coordinator, a housing specialist, and met with the on-site nurse and the occupational therapy (OT) team.

"I loved everything...I was able to navigate through the different resources that were offered at Freedom House," she says. "I immediately connected with my social worker and was grateful that she, among other staff, were very supportive of my family. I loved that Freedom House offered activities for all residents, including the children. I loved that there was childcare so that I can freely attend classes such as anger group, DV support group, and OT."

Working with the various teams, Olivia began to research her options moving forward, and decided to pursue her goal of being a nurse and of someday owning a home. She is currently studying nursing at Monroe

College, a path that she set in motion with the support of the Freedom House team.

"During my time at Freedom House I have gained the most strength, encouragement, independence, courage, and focus that I could have ever developed on my own." says Olivia. "This is the first time since my relationship with my children's father that I have successfully maintained no-contact. It has been a liberating process where I have learned that I am a strong, smart, and worthy woman."

When asked what she would say to people facing a situation similar to her, Olivia offers: "never lose hope."



Letter from the CEO



Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO

Founder, President/CEO Paul Feuerstein <https://www.bflnyc.org/about-us/leadership/#paul> reflects on 2018 and the agency's rich history, as Barrier Free Living moves toward its 40th anniversary.

A staff member recently came to my office and asked about my story. How did we come to develop the programs that Barrier Free Living (BFL) <https://www.bflnyc.org/> presently operates with <https://www.bflnyc.org/about-us/>

I explained that it all began with my experience as Associate Director of Project Outward Bound. That federally funded research and demonstration program was the seed from which Barrier Free Living grew.

Once the federal funding ended, I led a group of staff and consumer volunteers to form Barrier Free Living in 1981. The

counseling and advocacy that we did for newly disabled New Yorkers led me to approach the Department of Mental Health to open a mental health clinic to serve disabled New Yorkers. In 1983, we began to work as a satellite clinic of a local neighborhood house. In 1985, we graduated into becoming a mental health clinic of our own.

During that incubation period, people with disabilities began to roll into our Avenue A storefront looking for a place to stay. They had been discharged from the hospital and found no place to go. One of their numbers signed on as a volunteer advocate and began the process of searching through the city system to find a resource.

The then Mayor's Office for the Handicapped sent us to the Human Resources Administration. The Human Resources Administration sent us to the Emergency Intervention Services. Emergency Intervention Services then sent us back to the Mayor's Office for the Handicapped.

Project Outward Bound had collaborated with the Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York (CID NY) to start the New York City Coalition on Housing for People with Disabilities. The coalition met with HRA for two years advocating for accessible

shelter in the city's homeless system.

In 1985, Mayor Koch established the Capital Homeless Housing Project, setting aside \$56 million for the construction of shelters and other housing options for New York's homeless population. We found an abandoned school building on Second Street and made the case for developing that building into transitional housing for Activity of Daily Living dependent individuals (the group of folks who had rolled into our storefront looking for help).

In November 1990, we opened the first not-for-profit singles' shelter in the city's homeless system. It was recognized by the US State Department and HUD as one of 100 model programs in the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

During that period of development, BFL expanded its mental health services to serve individuals who are deaf. In 1986, I interviewed a deaf woman who had just graduated from NYU's Deafness Rehabilitation Program. In the interview, she told me that she had 13 years experience working with disabled victims of domestic violence.

With over eight years experience working with people with disabilities, I had never thought about a link between

disability and domestic violence. I hired her and she taught us the questions we needed to ask.

We learned that a lot of the people we were serving had experienced domestic violence, but hadn't felt free to talk about. I learned about national studies that showed that domestic abuse was the number one issue of women with disabilities. I learned that people with disabilities have four times the rate of abuse of the general population.

From that point on, domestic violence intervention became actively engaged in working with The New York City Task Force on Domestic Violence. We made the case for the need for accessible services. When the city issued an RFP for nonresidential domestic violence programs, one of two citywide programs was designated for victims with disabilities.

That was the beginning of the Secret Garden, our community-based program. We named it Secret Garden <https://www.bflnyc.org/programs-services/#secret-garden> because it was a confidential location. It was all too easy for staff to refer to programs by their street location. There was actually a private garden located behind our office space which

inspired the name.

It became clear as we expanded our domestic violence program that there was need for a totally accessible shelter in the domestic violence emergency system. It took us years of searching for a site and multiple applications to make Freedom House <https://www.bflnyc.org/programs-services/#freedom-house> a reality. View our virtual tour film of freedom house here – <https://vimeo.com/273345045>

In 2005, Freedom House opened its doors to all victims of domestic violence. What we found in serving residents at Freedom House was that there was need for supportive housing for some of our residents. This led us to begin a process for finding land for the development of family housing for families whose head of household had a disabling medical condition.

An eight-year journey led us to open 50 units of family housing and an additional 70 units of studio housing predominantly for survivors of domestic violence in 2015 <https://www.bflnyc.org/programs-services/#bfl-apartments> .

The city's system did not work well for domestic violence providers. We have proposed 74 units of housing

for survivors of domestic violence and seniors transitioning out of nursing homes. We are in process of demolishing our old Second Street building to prepare for the construction of this new project.

At the same time, our work with domestic violence victims led us to the realization that there was a great deal of bias in the child welfare system against parents with disabilities. The National Council on Disability published Rocking the Cradle, <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2012/Sep272012> a report on this national trend.

BFL is preparing to compete for a prevention contract to provide appropriate supports to parents with disabilities so they won't unnecessarily lose custody of their children. We have been funded to provide auxiliary work by a staff lawyer who will work with residents of Freedom House as well as the people we serve at Secret Garden.

Domestic Violence remains the number one priority of women with disabilities. As long as those Power and Control dynamics exist, we will be in the forefront of protecting the safety, freedom and rights of the people with disabilities we serve.

Financial Health

The data below is a consolidated balance sheet. Details on BFL's financial statements are available at bflnyc.org/about-us/leadership/

Assets

\$4,611,313

current assets

\$4,434,799

deferred charge

\$4,242,628

property and equipment

\$13,288,740

Total Assets

Liabilities

\$1,043,005

current liabilities

\$8,406,039

notes payable

\$3,839,696

net assets

\$13,288,740

Total liabilities and net assets

Board of Directors

Barrier Free Living Holding Inc. (Board List 2019)

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