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## LONG-AWAITED MENTAL-ILL HOME OPENS

by Jennifer Procaro



After more than a decade of planning, 24 men and women with mental illness or related medical conditions — 16 of whom were chronically homeless or came out of shelters — will finally have a home equipped with the specialized services they need.

On Friday, October 12, The Bridge — a community-based organization serving New Yorkers in need — marked the grand opening of its second residence in the Bronx at 1413 Sheridan Avenue in Tremont.

Sheridan Hill House is a first-of-its-kind supportive housing program in New York City .

Residents are free to come and go as they please and live alone in 24 Class-A studio apartments. Residents also enjoy a multi-purpose dining and recreation room on the main floor, on-site laundry and a backyard sitting area.

The five-story building has six studios on each floor between the second and fifth, with common quarters on the main level. Each apartment has a kitchen, bathroom and living space.

The Bridge received initial funding in 1995 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Construction started during the fall of 1998 but after taking a few years to reach completion, uncontrollable incidents delayed its opening.

In 2003, much of the building was ruined when vandals broke in. Bridge administrators immediately put the contractor in default since he was supposed to have been providing security at the site. In January 2005, work started again. Last March, Sheridan Hill House's first group of residents began moving in.

"We're amazed and delighted that the program is finally open and providing services for 24 very high-need men and women," said Dr. Peter Beitchman, executive director of The Bridge.

Sheridan Hill House provides some very unique services, including on-site case management and crisis intervention, 24/7 desk coverage and evening meals prepared by an on-site cook.

In collaboration with the Jewish Home and Hospital's Lifecare Community Services Division, an on-site licensed nurse practitioner will provide medical services twice a week.

Another exclusive feature is intergenerational programming. In concert with the Bronx High School for Medical Science, located across the street, student interns will accompany elderly residents during shopping trips, medical appointments and recreational activities.

Presently, residents range in age from 39 to 78 years old and kick in 30% of their income, which comes to an average of \$215 a month. The remaining rent is funded through Section 8, while the Office of Mental Health provides funding for services.

Capital funding was provided by HUD, the City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, OMH and the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York .

"It's been a really interesting journey and I watched it from the ground up," said Claudette Stubbs, program director.

Stubbs emphasized the supreme convenience for residents, living near the Grand Concourse, a multitude of stores and nearby Bronx Lebanon Hospital .

"This is just an amazing story," said Cynthia Wainwright, president of The Bridge. "It took 11 years and we didn't give up."

The Bridge's goal is to enable residents to remain in the community in a cost-efficient way, by avoiding nursing homes, adult homes and hospitalization.

The Bridge's first Bronx location is around the corner at 1347 Morris Avenue.