

## Project Renewal, New York City



Holland House

Project Renewal, one of the early pioneers of supportive housing, converted old, deteriorating Single-Room-Occupancy hotels into safe efficiency apartments with offices where caseworkers offer tenants help with behavioral health problems and assistance with life skills and employment on an as-needed basis. Project Renewal's permanent supportive housing program provides services to formerly homeless individuals with chronic illnesses, many of whom have co-occurring substance use disorders. The PSH program offers a range of housing-plus-services options – from supportive housing in congregate settings and scattered-site Shelter-Plus-Care apartments to more supervised housing for homeless people with mental illness.

**Clinton Residence:** The Clinton Residence in Manhattan provides housing and round-the-clock comprehensive supports to 57 tenants, many of whom have spent many of their adult years in psychiatric institutions. Initially, the Clinton Residence was imagined as permanent housing, because the severity of residents' illnesses suggested they would never live any more independently. But many residents who received closely coordinated comprehensive services including psychiatric and medical care, case management and employment assistance were able to establish social networks, gradually assume more responsibility, and even pursue employment. As a result the program increased its emphasis on employment, which has improved clients' self-esteem and ability to live with greater independence. One floor of the 7-floor residence was converted into a "transitional" floor, where residents take on much greater responsibilities. As a result, since the program's inception, 73% of residents have moved into more independent housing and all continue to succeed in these new settings; and 75% of current Clinton residents are involved in some type of employment activity.

**Holland House:** In 1995, Project Renewal completely renovated the decrepit Holland Hotel, turning it into safe and attractive supportive housing for 307 men and women, making it one of the largest supportive housing complexes in the country. It was renamed the Holland House. Tenants are either formerly homeless or have a very low-income. Of those who have a history of homelessness, 40 apartments are reserved for individuals living with a mental illness, 40 for people living with HIV/AIDS, with the remainder available for other homeless individuals - including those in recovery. The award-winning project has proven a success for both tenants and the community. Tenants stabilize and don't return to homelessness; 86% have remained housed for at least a year.

**St. Nicholas House:** Project Renewal's newest affordable/supportive housing complex, which provides housing and support services to 94 formerly homeless and very-low income residents in Harlem, opened in 2004. Modeled on the Holland, the new building features a computer lab, a library and on-site recreational services in addition to comprehensive support, medical and employment services. Project Renewal worked extensively with the community and Community Board 9 to ensure that all neighborhood concerns about the project were met.



St. Nicholas House

**LeonaBlanche house:** This site includes 53 units of supportive housing in the Bronx for people living with chronic mental illness. It was opened in 2004. Less supervised than the Clinton but providing more support than the Holland, the LeonaBlanche houses people ready to live more independently, but not totally so.

**Lease on Life:** 36 apartments leased by Project Renewal to provide safe, affordable housing with some ongoing support to help formerly homeless or addicted men and women complete their recovery. The apartments are made affordable through subsidies from the state's Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services.

**In Homes Now:** In 2003, Project Renewal was awarded one of 11 Chronic Homelessness Initiative grants nationwide. The grant helped create In Homes Now, a Housing First program that identifies chronically homeless individuals whose primary disabling condition is a substance use disorder, places them in scattered site apartments, and provides comprehensive health, support, addiction, and employment services. Most services are provided onsite by project staff: a nurse, a part-time psychiatrist, maintenance and security staff, and staff who provide meals for people with AIDS. Tenants are referred to some community services: 5 primary care clinics, specialty care, and dentistry. PSH services are provided to tenants in 2 fully independent buildings. Under New York law, leases can't be terminated except for failure to pay rent or behavioral issues. Program activities are designed to promote treatment adherence for residents with mental illness.

**Important for program success:** According to Executive Director Ed Geffner, the following factors ensure the success of this and other permanent supportive housing programs:

- **Maintenance & security of buildings:** Keeping facilities clean, doing needed repairs, and protecting tenants from violence are very important. Those who deal drugs are evicted.
- **Entitlements:** Currently there is an effort in New York to get homeless people who are not receiving treatment for substance abuse into permanent supportive housing. All residents of supported housing come with SSI and public assistance; enrollment is accomplished at the referral source.
- **Case management:** Case managers contact all tenants immediately after intake; they don't compel anyone to participate in services, but try to persuade them to do so. Case managers keep up with tenants' appointments and health needs; help people with mental illness with treatment adherence (taking meds in timely manner, understanding medication side effects and benefits).
- **Psychiatric services:** stabilization and evaluation of tenants not yet evaluated (services offered, not required); crisis management for those who stop taking medications (refuse to come out of rooms or admit anyone; if these tenants won't agree to see psychiatrist, outside crisis management team is called in). Staff negotiate with tenants and do everything possible to avoid compulsory hospitalization. Titration of medications is used to minimize side effects (a common obstacle to adherence). When a tenant sees a provider outside the agency, the psychiatrist follows up with treating physician to assure integrated service plan and continuity of care.
- **Health promotion & chronic disease management:** Onsite wellness management program: diet/nutrition, exercise, symptom management (especially for mental illness), stress reduction, smoking cessation, other behavioral change to promote health. Staff work hard to persuade people to participate in these programs, to help them manage chronic disease and increase life expectancy. A nurse does basic screens and triaging, makes referrals to 5 primary care clinics, specialty care, and dentistry.
- **Substance abuse treatment:** Substance abuse is a major issue in NYC and for this population; 60-70% of tenants have a history of substance abuse. Project Renewal maintains its own detox unit and outpatient clinic for short- and long-term treatment of substance use disorders; clients also have access to rehab units. "But it's not easy to persuade tenants to utilize these services." Harm reduction is practiced, but drug trafficking in the building is not tolerated. Nonpayment of rent is usually an indicator of relapse in recovery.
- **ADL skills training:** Activities of daily living/life skills training is provided to tenants to promote stabilization.