OCTOBER 2026

ACL
Association for Community Living

ACL CONNECT

Stronger Agencies. Healthier Communities. Brighter Futures.

Connecting mental health housing agencies across New York State.

AGENCY UPDATES

BEST PRACTICES

CONNECTION

ADVOCACY

A MESSAGE FROM ACL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EMIL SLANE

Dear ACL Members and Colleagues,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of ACL Connect!

One of ACL's greatest strengths has always been the knowledge, experience, and commitment of our members. Across New York State, our member agencies are doing incredible work every day to support individuals with serious mental illness in their recovery, independence, and ability to live successfully in their communities. We also know there is tremendous value in creating more opportunities for members to learn from one another and stay connected to the work happening across our statewide network.

Emil Slane
Executive Director
Association for Community Living/ACLAIMH

That is the idea behind ACL Connect. This new quarterly newsletter grew out of conversations with our members and the work of ACL's Rising Leaders Committee. Our goal is to create a resource that not only keeps you informed about ACL, but also gives members a platform to share their own work, ideas, successes, challenges, and expertise.

In each edition, we hope to highlight the people and organizations that make our association strong. You'll find updates on ACL's advocacy and activities, profiles of member organizations, promising practices from the field, workforce and professional development resources, member news, and opportunities to get involved.

Most importantly, we want ACL Connect to be shaped by you. If your organization has something worth sharing - a new program, an innovative practice, an accomplishment, a lesson learned, or simply a story that other members could benefit from - we hope you will contribute to a future edition.

I want to thank the members of the Rising Leaders Committee who volunteered and put time and thought into bringing this first edition together. I also want to thank all of the members who contributed content and helped make our inaugural issue possible.

We hope you enjoy this first edition and that ACL Connect becomes another way for our statewide community to learn from one another, celebrate the work being done across New York, and remain connected around our shared mission.

Thank you for all that you do.

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ACL UPDATES

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Member feedback is shaping ACL's training, technical assistance, and services as we enter the second year of our strategic plan.

Coming Together at the Sagamore

The 47th Annual ACLAIMH Conference takes place November 3–6, 2026, at The Sagamore Resort in Bolton Landing. Programming includes pre-conference institutes on housing development and direct care, over 40 workshops on a wide range of subjects, an OMH presentation from the Commissioner, and a trade show. ACL will also celebrate 42 honorees of the 2026 Excellence in Direct Care Awards, recognizing their contributions to residents' recovery, independence, and community living, as well as present the 2026 ACLAIMH Leadership Award to April Wojtkiewicz recognizing her distinguished career in public service and contributions to New York's community mental health system. Attendees can visit the conference website for the agenda and event information.

Our other annual statewide, in-person event, the Management Symposium, returns in Spring 2027 in Saratoga Springs, NY. Smaller and geared toward executive staff and agency leadership, this event offers learning and networking with colleagues, State officials, and business partners. Details will follow.

Member Feedback and Professional Development

ACL completed six regional listening sessions over the summer, with more scheduled for fall. Members highlighted workforce shortages, increasingly complex resident needs, and training priorities—including supervision, crisis response, and regulatory requirements. Their feedback is guiding ACL's programming and advocacy.

Our inaugural Executive Leadership Academy brings together 24 participants from member agencies across the state, who will continue their work together at the Sagamore as part of this learning community. Alongside facilitators with a wide range of expertise, the Academy will provide a rewarding experience designed to strengthen our leaders and benefit their member agencies.

ACL is also developing direct care webinars and new supervisor training workshops connected to the Spring 2027 Regional Direct-Care Conferences.

ACL Updates continued

For events, meeting information, committee participation, or suggestions, contact Laura Isabelle, Director of Policy, at laura@aclnys.org.

Regional Meetings

Regional meetings provide ACL business and statewide updates, discussion of issues affecting providers, and opportunities for questions and peer exchange.

Central: Second Thursday monthly.
Western: Second Friday monthly.
New York City: Third Wednesday monthly.
Long Island: Third Thursday in March, May, July, September, and November.
Hudson: Third Friday monthly.

Exploring Additional Supports

ACL is exploring an AmeriCorps program to provide new resources for our members to support resident wellness, recovery, and activities while creating workforce pathways. Feasibility, funding, member interest and program design are being carefully evaluated.

We applied for a Mother Cabrini Health Foundation grant to examine residents' health needs, service gaps, and best practices that could improve access to care and health outcomes.

Find Your Statewide Committee

These committees meet quarterly and offer resources, learning, and peer discussion:

Human Resources: For HR professionals and staffing leaders; covers recruitment, retention, employee engagement, training, and employment requirements.

Finance Professionals: For CFOs, finance staff, and administrators with fiscal responsibilities; covers budgeting, reimbursement, audits, and financial sustainability.

Quality Improvement & Compliance: For staff responsible for quality assurance, compliance, risk management, and oversight; shares approaches to regulatory requirements and service improvement.

Rising Leaders: For professionals at any career stage seeking professional development, career advancement, and leadership skills. Activities include peer networking, advocacy, and ACL participation through projects such as ACL Connect.

Advocacy Update: Building on Progress and Preparing for 2027

ACL's advocacy continued throughout the summer and into the fall, with a focus on implementing recent budget investments, bringing policymakers into programs, and preparing for the next State Budget.

This year's budget included a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) and a $71 million investment to increase rates, including approximately $38 million tied to scattered-site Supported Housing rates and $28.6 million for SRO programs. Members, residents, families, and partners helped secure these commitments through sustained advocacy, generating more than 277,000 e-letters.

Throughout budget season, ACL and fellow advocates were at the Capitol every day, meeting with legislators and gathering photos demonstrating support for a 4% TII. Ultimately, 138 legislators, approximately two-thirds of the Legislature, participated in the PhotoFor4% campaign. This broad, bipartisan participation kept providers' funding needs visible and reinforced the messages advocates were sending from across the state.

ACL continues to follow up with State officials on outstanding implementation issues, including updated OMH rates and contracts, so budget commitments translate into timely resources providers can use.

Bringing Policymakers into Programs

ACL's summer tour initiative connected member agencies with legislators serving on key mental health, housing, health, disabilities, and social services committees. Visits were hosted by MHA Fulton-Montgomery, Brooklyn Community Housing & Services, Postgraduate Center for Mental Health, Search for Change, WellLife Network, MHA Nassau, and BRC. These visits gave policymakers opportunities to meet residents and frontline staff and better understand the funding and workforce challenges facing programs in their districts.

ACL also brought Executive Branch officials directly into member programs. In July, OMH and Division of the Budget officials visited programs operated by Mohawk Opportunities, Rehabilitation Support Services, and Equinox. In September, Executive Chamber staff visited programs operated by Postgraduate Center for Mental Health and the Institute for Community Living.

These visits connect policy-makers to the daily work of supporting residents with increasingly complex needs, retaining staff, and maintaining safe housing. Thank you to all of the agencies, staff, and residents who made them possible.

Shaping the Next Budget Agenda

ACL's developing priorities for the 2027–28 State Budget include:

A minimum 3.4% TII and a predictable multiyear commitment. ACL is advocating for no less than 3.4%. This is a minimum inflationary adjustment, not a substitute for investments to close longstanding funding gaps or strengthen the workforce. Providers also need flexibility to address cost increases across their operations, including wages, benefits, insurance, and utilities. ACL is also working with our statewide partners to advocate for a recurring CareForce wage investment.

Closing gaps in existing housing funding. We are working to build on the SRO investment, address remaining service funding needs in scattered-site Supported Housing, and reduce disparities between older Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) contracts and newer awards.

Modernizing and expanding residential services. ACL is developing proposals for additional CR-SRO capacity and improvements that reflect current staffing needs, greater resident acuity, and aging-in-place needs.

Moving Member Concerns into Policy Work

ACL's residential discharge workgroup is examining barriers to timely, appropriate transitions from licensed programs. Members' experiences are informing a white paper and recommendations for policy fixes and better coordination among providers, OMH, and the courts. Our goals are to preserve resident protections, support safe transitions, prevent homelessness, and address delays that limit access to services.

Our legislative advocacy also includes improvements to State contracting and payment practices, measures to strengthen the behavioral health workforce, and continuity of Medicaid coverage for people leaving incarceration.

ACL's briefing books help show policymakers the programs members operate and the communities they serve, connecting statewide priorities to services in their districts. If your agency has opened or closed a program, changed its location, capacity, or housing model, or made other significant changes, please let me know so our records and briefing books remain current.

Members' data, program examples, and residents' perspectives strengthen this work. To provide updates, share an issue, discuss hosting a policymaker visit, or get involved in advocacy, please contact David Boodram at david@aclnys.org.

Section Lead: Adrienne Terry | Comunilife

The Two-Time Pioneer: How Fountain House is Revolutionizing Community Mental Health

For over 75 years, Fountain House has served as a beacon of hope and recovery for individuals living with serious mental illness. Founded in 1948 in New York City, the organization originated the revolutionary Clubhouse model of community mental health, a holistic, evidence-based approach that has since been replicated more than 370 times across nearly 40 U.S. states and 31 countries globally.

Through its direct service Clubhouse programs in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as housing, employment, national policy, advocacy, and research initiatives, Fountain House has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people. What began as a community formed by former psychiatric patients seeking connection and mutual support has grown into an organization working to expand the role of community in mental health recovery.

Today, Fountain House stands as a "two-time pioneer": first for originating the Clubhouse model, and now for helping expand its reach and exploring how those same principles can strengthen supportive housing and other community-based services.

Community as a Foundation for Recovery

At the heart of Fountain House's work is a belief that recovery requires more than traditional clinical treatment. As Ken Zimmerman, Chief Executive Officer of Fountain House, explained during a recent interview with ACL, the organization's guiding principle is that "the intentional creation of community is an evidence-based therapeutic intervention."

Unlike traditional treatment settings, Clubhouses are voluntary communities where individuals living with serious mental illness are known as members. Members and staff work alongside one another in the daily operation of the Clubhouse, building relationships, developing skills, pursuing employment and education, and contributing to a shared community. The approach allows Clubhouses to address social and community needs while complementing the work of medical and psychiatric providers.

In New York City alone, there are approximately 250,000 people living with serious mental health conditions, with many more across the state. Fountain House currently serves approximately 5,000 members and is committed to expanding access to the Clubhouse model. Through its leadership in the New York Clubhouse Coalition and New York City Clubhouse Coalition, the organization works with other providers to strengthen the movement and advocate for greater public investment in community-based mental health services.

Expanding the Clubhouse Movement

While Fountain House helped establish Clubhouse International approximately 30 years ago to support accreditation and standards for the international Clubhouse movement, its own focus remains on expanding access and strengthening the model's impact, particularly across New York State.

Fountain House has recently opened a new Clubhouse in Harlem and is providing technical assistance to other organizations interested in establishing accredited Clubhouses. The organization has also advocated for significant public investments, including New York City's citywide Clubhouse expansion initiative and the Office of Mental Health's multimillion-dollar investment to establish new Clubhouses across upstate New York.

These efforts reflect Fountain House's broader vision that every individual with a serious mental health condition who wants to access a high-quality Clubhouse should have that opportunity. But its work is not limited to expanding the number of Clubhouses. Fountain House is also exploring how the relationships and sense of belonging created through the model can be extended into other parts of the behavioral health system.

The Two-Time Pioneer

Continuing the Fountain House story

Connecting Housing and Community

Although widely recognized for originating the Clubhouse model, Fountain House is also a housing provider, operating approximately 400 housing units. Housing consistently ranks among the highest priorities identified by its members, and the organization has been working to strengthen the connection between its housing programs and Clubhouse services.

Zimmerman explained that while stable housing is essential to recovery, individuals living in supportive housing can still experience loneliness, isolation, and difficulty establishing meaningful community connections. As he put it during the interview, this "raises the question of why not do the two together?" In recent years, Fountain House has begun more intentionally integrating its housing and Clubhouse staff, encouraging stronger relationships between residents and the broader Clubhouse community. According to Zimmerman, these efforts have been associated with longer stays in supportive housing and increased participation in Clubhouse activities.

Building on this work, Fountain House has partnered with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to advance an initiative known as Community-Centered Housing. The approach explores incorporating the community-building principles of the Clubhouse model into supportive housing, helping residents develop social connections, participate in meaningful activities, and establish a greater sense of belonging.

One example is a planned development in the Bronx that will combine 235 supportive housing units with a 15,000-square-foot Clubhouse in the same building. Fountain House and CSH are also exploring how these practices might be incorporated into existing supportive housing programs, including scattered-site housing. For ACL members, the initiative offers an opportunity to consider new approaches to resident engagement, community integration, and long-term housing stability.

Creating Connections in New Ways

Fountain House is also bringing its community-based approach into unexpected places, reaching individuals who may not otherwise engage with traditional services. In collaboration with NYC Health + Hospitals, Fountain House members visit extended care units to begin building relationships with patients before discharge.

In Times Square, the Recharge Station, a blue kiosk located at 47th Street and Broadway and staffed by Fountain House members, offers free coffee and phone charging. More importantly, it serves as a low-barrier "mini-community" for people experiencing long-term homelessness, creating opportunities to build trust, establish relationships, and connect individuals with recovery services.

The organization also brings the expertise of its members into broader policy discussions. Fountain House members contribute their lived experiences to conversations about diversion programs, emergency response pathways and the development of 911 and 988 protocols. Through initiatives such as its Advocacy Academy, Fountain House also helps members develop the skills and confidence to advocate for themselves and others.

For Zimmerman, that emphasis on member leadership is central to the organization's identity. "What makes us work are our members," he said. Individuals who participate in Clubhouses are referred to as members, rather than clients or patients, reflecting their role as active partners in their recovery and in the daily operation of the community. Members help establish organizational priorities, participate in advocacy and serve in leadership roles, ensuring that their voices inform the decisions that affect them.

As Fountain House looks ahead, its goal is not simply to expand its own programs, but to help more people experience the connections, opportunities and sense of belonging that have defined its approach for more than 75 years. By bringing those principles into housing, community partnerships and public policy, Fountain House continues to build on its pioneering legacy while demonstrating that social connection is a powerful part of recovery.

FOUNTAIN HOUSE

425 West 47th St.
New York, NY 10036

Chief Executive Officer: Ken Zimmerman

Founded 1948

MISSION

To create the community, innovation, and social change needed for people most impacted by mental illness to lead connected and healthy lives.

Sixty Years of Hope: How East House Is Evolving with Behavioral Health Care

As East House celebrates its 60th anniversary, the Rochester-based behavioral health organization is reflecting on six decades of change, both within its own programs and across the broader behavioral health system.

Founded in 1966, East House is rooted in Monroe County, where it operates its OMH housing programs, while selected services also reach residents of surrounding counties. The organization provides a continuum of housing and recovery supports for adults living with mental health, substance use, and co-occurring disorders. In 2025 alone, East House served more than 1,100 people.

Over six decades, those services and the needs of the people East House supports have changed considerably. But its focus on helping people recover and live successfully in their communities has remained at the center of its work.

A Changing Approach to Recovery

Scott Vogt, Assistant Program Manager in East House's Independent Living Program, has worked at East House for more than 30 years. One of the biggest changes he has seen is the role individuals now play in directing their own recovery.
Thirty years ago, Vogt said, stability was often viewed as the primary goal. Today, recovery encompasses much more, including physical and mental health, employment and education, relationships and natural supports, and meaningful connections to the community. "Most of my clients weren't working" 30 years ago, Vogt recalled. "Now it's flipped. And most of them are working."

The needs of the people East House serves have evolved as well. The organization is supporting individuals with increasingly complex needs while also helping long-term residents navigate new stages of life as they age. For some, the relationship with East House can span decades, making the organization not simply a source of housing or services, but a consistent presence throughout different points in their recovery.

"Where You Live Is How You Live"

Housing remains at the foundation of that work. "Where you live is how you live," said Lindsay Gozzi-Theobald, President and CEO of East House. "If you don't feel good when you're home, you don't feel good. Period."

East House currently operates 423 OMH housing beds in Monroe County and approximately 674 beds across its broader housing portfolio. Its OMH housing spans a range of residential models, from treatment apartments and community residences to supportive housing and SP-SRO programs. But Gozzi-Theobald sees housing as more than a roof over someone's head. Stable, quality housing creates a foundation from which people can focus on their health, recovery, relationships and goals.

That philosophy is also shaping how East House thinks about its future. The organization is looking beyond housing alone to consider what people need to remain healthy and successful in their communities, including recovery supports, health care connections, employment opportunities, peer support, and other services. The goal is not to move away from housing, but to build around it.

Relationships That Last

East House's long-term approach is also reflected in its workforce, where some employees have spent decades with the organization. Gozzi-Theobald credits those staff and the relationships they build as an important part of East House's success. "The magic is really with our staff and how they care for our people," she said.

For Vogt, who has worked at East House for more than 30 years, that continuity can have an important impact on the people the organization serves. As individuals encounter turnover elsewhere in the behavioral health system, longtime East House staff can provide a consistent presence. People do not always have to begin again with someone new or repeatedly retell difficult parts of their lives. "We've made the journey with them," Vogt said. "We're part of their story."

One experience has stayed with Vogt for years. A longtime East House resident once told him that the birthday listed on her health insurance card was not actually her birthday. She did not know her real date of birth and had simply chosen one. Before online records were readily available, Vogt helped her contact her hometown and search for the answer. Eventually, a letter arrived confirming her actual birthday: June 28, 1944.
For Vogt, the experience represents something larger about the relationships built through East House. "It's part of our work of helping people discover and, in many times, rediscover themselves."

East House

Looking to the Next 60 Years

As East House looks ahead, its vision increasingly extends beyond the traditional boundaries of a housing provider. The organization is exploring a more comprehensive approach to whole-person and whole-family behavioral health care, including opportunities to support aging in place, expand recovery services, develop affordable housing, strengthen community partnerships and build a broader continuum of services.

"We're known as a housing provider, but we do so much more," Gozzi-Theobald said. One example is East House's growing Clubhouse work. Its donor-funded Connections Recovery Center is already operating, and a new Office of Mental Health-funded Clubhouse contract begins January 1, 2027. The expansion will provide another way for people to find community, purpose and peer support, including while they may be waiting for other services.

For Gozzi-Theobald, however, expansion itself is not the goal. East House is focused on growth that responds to community needs, improves outcomes, strengthens its mission and can be sustained over time.

Sixty years after East House first opened its doors, much about behavioral health care has changed. The organization has changed with it. But the foundation of its work remains remarkably consistent: a safe place to live, people who build lasting relationships, and support that helps individuals define what recovery and a meaningful life look like for themselves.

EAST HOUSE CORPORATION

259 Monroe Avenue, Suite 200
Rochester, NY 14607

President & Chief Executive Officer:
Lindsay Gozzi-Theobald

Founded November 4, 1966

MISSION

The Mission of East House is to empower individuals in recovery from mental health and substance use disorders to recover and to live healthy and fulfilling lives in their community.

RISING LEADER SPOTLIGHT

SECTION LEAD: KAYLA ARTURI | MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION COLUMBIA-GREENE

WHAT MAKES A GREAT LEADER?

The ability to inspire others, take on challenges, or maybe it is...a love for walks on the beach, the color green, and Bad Bunny.

In this issue, we're highlighting Jose Cotto and walks on the beach the color green and Bad Bunny are just a few of his favorite things! Jose works for Urban Pathways as their Chief Program Officer and has been with Urban Pathways since May of 2024.

Urban Pathways has been around for a little over 50 years. The agency combats homelessness through housing and support services. Programs include street outreach teams, drop-in centers, safe havens, stabilization beds, a full spectrum of housing from CR-SROs to mixed use housing, as well as a Total Wellness Program, an employment program known as Upwards and an innovative Proactive Support Team that focuses on people with high acuity needs.

While Jose now serves as Urban Pathways' Chief Program Officer, his journey in this profession started long before he stepped into a leadership role. Jose began his career by working in group homes for youth and adults in Massachusetts, including a detention center for teenage girls. After completing his master's degree, Jose relocated to New York City, where he worked at a community clinic facilitating both group and individual sessions. In September 2012, he joined ICL as a Clinical Specialist and also working as a therapist for The Child Center of NY.

Over the years, he continued to grow within ICL, working across multiple divisions and eventually serving as a Senior Vice President. While attending UCONN for graduate school, Jose originally envisioned a career in private practice and teaching. However, encouragement from others led him toward administration and leadership, ultimately shaping the career path that brought him to where he is today.

So, what does Jose enjoy most about the work he does? For him, it comes down to impact, influence, and the ability to be creative. He finds it gratifying to be part of meaningful social change and to see people's lives and circumstances improve. He also appreciates being part of an agency that prioritizes the wellness of both the people receiving care and the people delivering it. That passion for creating change has been a part of Jose's journey from the very beginning. When asked what inspired him to pursue a career in social work, he credits a therapist he saw during his undergraduate years at UMass. She helped him realize that being a social worker was not limited to child welfare or the negative associations he had once held about the profession. Instead, she helped him see the many possibilities.

JOSE COTTO, LCSW

CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER
URBAN PATHWAYS, INC.

At the time, Jose was particularly interested in changing the process surrounding child removals. The encouragement and perspective of his friend Hector also played a role in shaping his path and ultimately led him toward the career he has today.

For Jose, one of the most rewarding parts of his work is seeing an idea become real change. That was certainly the case with Changing Spaces. NY's first housing launchpad, which is one of the accomplishments he is most proud of. The program began when ICL's CEO asked Jose to design a program for people living on the street with high-acuity needs. Jose was excited by the challenge and, in his words, "went running with it." With support and buy-in from the New York State Office of Mental Health, Changing Spaces grew into a successful model that was later replicated before the program could even produce all of the outcomes he had promised.

Today, Changing Spaces has many success stories of partnering with people who were previously unhoused and helping them move into a home of their own within 30 days, with the supports they need in place.

If there's one thing Jose's career has taught him, it's that leadership is about more than having a title. For Jose, being a leader means staying connected to the pulse of an agency and the communities it serves. He believes in a "hands on the ground" approach listening, staying connected, and making sure an organization's values are reflected in how everyone is treated. Leadership, he says, also requires taking risks and having the courage to do what is right. Most importantly, it means creating space for people who are marginalized to have a voice and be part of the decision-making process.

RISING LEADER SPOTLIGHT

CONT.

Of course, you don't make it this far in a career without picking up a few lessons along the way, and Jose has a few worth sharing.

One lesson that has stayed with him came from his supervisor when he was an undergraduate resident assistant: "People write themselves up, not the other way around." The lesson has stuck with him throughout his career, reminding him to lead with coaching, support, and communication before moving toward disciplinary action.

Another lesson that came through experience was that when one door closes, another will open. Jose recalls an early-career rejection that left him discouraged at the time, but looking back, he realizes that opportunity may have limited his growth rather than advanced it.

When it comes to making changes, Jose believes in slowing down before speeding up. Take the time to connect with staff, listen, and understand what is already working. More often than not, he says, the people closest to the work already have the answers; they may simply need more resources and support.

Jose's journey has also been shaped by the people who believed in him along the way. He points to several women who have influenced his life, including his fourth-grade teacher, who inspired him to keep racial justice at the forefront; his mother, who taught him to keep fighting and never give up; and former supervisors who encouraged him to think bigger and pursue greater possibilities in both his professional and personal life.

That same sense of connection carries into his work today. Jose describes his team as a group of "strong, bright people" who are genuinely committed to the work. When it comes to the people Urban Pathways serves, he finds a personal connection, stating they are a representation of the communities he identifies with.

For those just beginning their careers or stepping into leadership, his advice is simple: find mentors, even if the relationship is informal. Build relationships with people whose roles differ from yours but connect to where you hope to go. Don't be afraid to increase your visibility both within your organization and through your professional network.

From working directly with young people and families to designing innovative housing programs and now leading at Urban Pathways, Jose's career has continued to evolve around one common thread: creating opportunities for people to move forward. His leadership journey is also reflected in his involvement with ACL, where he served as the inaugural Chair of the Rising Leaders Committee before joining ACL's Board of Directors. Judging by what he's already accomplished, there's plenty more ahead.

BEST PRACTICES

SECTION LEAD: BROOKE EVERSMAN | PROJECT REAL

Rethinking Affordable Housing: Building Communities That Support Independence

Submitted by: **Debra Oliver, Director of Strategic Communications and Engagement, WellLife Network**

Affordable housing provides a place to live, but thoughtfully designed housing can provide something more: opportunities for independence, connection, wellness, and belonging.

WellLife Network is incorporating these principles into Medford Gardens, a new 55+ affordable and supportive housing community in Medford, Suffolk County. The 66-apartment development includes landscaped outdoor areas, walking paths, fitness and wellness space, and community gathering areas designed to encourage residents to remain active, build relationships, and participate in community life.

This approach reflects a broader best practice in supportive housing: considering the physical and social environment as part of supporting resident well-being. Research has associated supportive housing and supportive social services with improved health and housing outcomes, while studies of senior and affordable housing have highlighted the potential value of social connection, shared spaces, and active-design features.

Inclusion is also central to the model. WellLife developments may include individuals receiving supportive housing services alongside other income-eligible residents, with shared access to amenities and community spaces while additional services remain available to those who need them. This creates opportunities for support without sacrificing privacy, choice, or independence.

“At WellLife Network, we believe everyone deserves a place they can truly call home, a place where they feel safe, supported and connected,” says Sherry Tucker, CEO of WellLife Network.

WellLife has incorporated these principles into a model housing guide book that considers amenities, accessibility, wellness opportunities, gathering spaces, and supportive features when planning new developments. Rather than creating identical housing communities, the goal is to develop environments responsive to the needs and preferences of the people who will call them home.

Although outcome data specific to Medford Gardens is not yet available, WellLife plans to examine how housing design, amenities, engagement, and supportive services relate to outcomes such as independence, quality of life, and housing stability.

“Affordable housing can give people something incredibly important: choice.” says Karen Gorman, Chief Operating Officer of WellLife Network. “When people have a safe and stable place to call home, they have a stronger foundation from which to focus on their health, relationships, goals and the life they want to lead.”

Best Practice Takeaway: Supportive housing can extend beyond providing safe, affordable units. Thoughtful attention to accessibility, social connection, wellness, inclusion, and resident choice can help create environments that support people in living more independently and remaining engaged in their communities.

WellLife Network

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

SECTION LEAD: ROBERT PAULY | THRIVE

DePaul

Aging in Place Grant for Edgerton Square

DePaul has been awarded a $2 million Aging in Place pilot grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health to support capital improvements at Edgerton Square in Rochester. Through this grant, DePaul will make targeted modifications that will enable residents to age safely in place and remain in the community they call home for as long as possible.

In addition, DePaul will receive approximately $275,000 in operating funding to support the hiring of one full-time nurse and two Certified Nursing Assistants who will provide enhanced care and support for 20–25 residents experiencing significant age-related challenges.

This award reflects the quality of our housing and services and reinforces DePaul's commitment to providing innovative, person-centered care that helps our residents live with dignity, stability, and support.

DePaul

Accolades for the Pan-American Square Apartments

DePaul's Pan-American Square Apartments in Buffalo were recognized with a 2026 American Institute of Architects (AIA) of New York State Excelsior & Professional Service Award for New Construction. Given to only 12 projects statewide, this award recognizes the thoughtful use of resources, meaningful impact for communities, and a lasting sense of quality in the building's design.

In addition, Pan-American Square Apartments received the Construction Specifications Institute Rochester Innovation Award, honoring forward-thinking solutions that push the boundaries of design.

And most recently, the Pan-American Square Apartments was recognized by Buffalo Business First with a Brick By Brick Award in the Multi-Residential/Affordable Housing Category.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS CONT.

Sisters of Charity Housing Network

Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation is pleased to announce the closing of Columbia Kavanagh House, a $73.5 million recapitalization of six supportive housing buildings across Manhattan totaling 238 units of affordable and supportive housing. This transaction preserves long-term affordability for some of New York City's most vulnerable residents — including formerly homeless individuals and families — while funding comprehensive capital improvements across all six sites and advancing a significant building electrification scope through HFA's Clean Energy Initiative. Columbia Kavanagh House reflects our enduring commitment to the people we serve and to the communities we call home. We look forward to seeing this work through construction and into a stronger, more sustainable future for these buildings and their residents. Key partners in the project included HFA, LISC, HPD, HRA, Rockabill Consulting, ESKW Architects and Hirschen Singer & Epstein.

Additionally, LISC honored Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation with its Deal of the Year Award at the Big Apple Gala.

STRONGER AGENCIES.
HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES.

BRIGHTER FUTURES.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS *CONT.*

THRIVE

Five Months Later: Mill & Main Continues to Thrive

Since the first ESSHI resident signed a lease on April 9, 2026, Mill & Main has quickly become more than just housing; it has become a growing community. Within the first six weeks, 13 individuals moved into the program, and as of September 16, 2026, 28 of the 31 ESSHI-designed apartments have been leased.

Residents are making progress toward personal goals, with eight tenants currently employed, two attending college, and five actively seeking work.

Just as important as housing is the sense of community that has emerged. Residents formed a Tenant Association this summer, gather for monthly meetings, and have even started a monthly community dinner where neighbors share homemade meals and build lasting connections.

Partnerships have also helped enrich resident life. Weekly visits from Cornell Cooperative Extension's North Country Fruit and Vegetable Program are well attended and THRIVE is collaborating to launch a peer-run support group open to all residents. A positive relationship with building management continues to support a welcoming and successful living environment.

As Mill & Main nears full occupancy, the building is more than a housing program. It is a vibrant community where residents are finding stability, opportunity, and connection, and where success is being measured not just in apartments leased, but in lives transformed.

Gateway Hudson Valley

Gateway Hudson Valley marked the opening of a new Pollinator Garden at its Kingston campus with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by community partners and local leaders. Developed to support local pollinators and create an accessible outdoor space, the garden reflects Gateway's commitment to community inclusion, environmental stewardship, and enhancing opportunities for the individuals we support.

Gateway is also expanding its reach through participation in a mixed-use affordable housing development in Albany, where the organization will provide supportive services for individuals 55 and older who are at risk of homelessness. In Chronogram's Readers' Choice Awards, Gateway was voted Best Affordable Housing Organization and Best Public Health Organization for the fourth consecutive year and earned second-place recognition in both the Public Health Advocate/Activist and Food Justice Organization categories. As the organization looks ahead to 2027, Gateway will proudly celebrate its 70th anniversary... marking seven decades of service, advocacy, and community impact throughout the Hudson Valley.

TRAINING & RESOURCES

SECTION LEAD: KAITLYN COLLISON | SAIL

Resources, Trainings & Helpful Links

Looking for opportunities to strengthen your skills, support your team, or stay up to date on issues affecting mental health housing? This issue's resources highlight upcoming trainings, professional development opportunities, crisis and wellness tools, and important New York State program updates. We hope these resources are helpful to ACL members and can be shared with colleagues across your agencies.

FREE NYS OMH TRAININGS FOR PROVIDERS

NYS OMH-funded training platforms offer free professional development for staff working in New York's public mental health system. Trainings are available online, in person, and through self-study and cover a wide range of topics, including trauma-informed care, suicide prevention, ACT, Wellness Self-Management, IPS, CORE, BH-HCBS, psychiatric rehabilitation, recovery-oriented services, peer support, and supervision.

Explore the OMH Training Database:
OMH Provider Trainings

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID (MHFA)

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) provides training to help participants recognize and respond to mental health and substance-use challenges. Adult MHFA covers adults age 18+ and addresses topics including anxiety, depression, psychosis, and substance use. Participants learn the ALGEE Action Plan, how to recognize signs and symptoms, how to respond to someone experiencing a mental health challenge, and how to connect people with appropriate support.

Mental Health First Aid

NY PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION TRAINING ACADEMY (NYPRTA)

NYPRTA provides statewide training and technical assistance focused on psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery-oriented services. Training options include webinars, self-paced courses, virtual office hours, communities of practice, and in-person training. Specialized offerings include Introduction to Psychiatric Rehabilitation Supervision.

NYPRTA

STAFF WELLNESS & SELF-CARE

NIH Wellness Toolkits: Your Healthiest Self
The National Institutes of Health offers free wellness toolkits covering emotional health, relationships, physical health, stress management, resilience, and healthy environments. The materials include checklists and practical strategies that can be used individually or shared with staff.

Staff Wellness

TRAINING & RESOURCES

CONT.

SNAP INFORMATION

Important for mental health providers: Exemptions may apply to individuals with a physical or mental health condition that limits their ability to work, people receiving or applying for SSI, individuals participating in substance use treatment, pregnant individuals, and others who meet specific criteria. Providers can encourage individuals who may be affected to speak with their local Department of Social Services (DSS) to determine whether they are subject to the requirements or qualify for an exemption.

Learn more: **NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance – SNAP Work Requirements**

SNAP Info

WORKPLACE WELLNESS TOOLKITS

WorkWell NYC offers a collection of free workplace wellness resources, including burnout and resilience guides, self-care activities, breathing exercises, mindfulness resources, and the Let's Talk Toolkit for supporting mental health in the workplace. A separate Manager and Supervisor Edition provides tools for leaders supporting employee well-being.

Workplace Wellness

SELF-CHECK: COMPASSION FATIGUE & BURNOUT

NASW highlights a Compassion Fatigue/Burnout Self-Assessment Questionnaire which can be used as a personal reflection tool to help professionals consider their current levels of stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout. While self-assessment tools are not diagnostic instruments, they can help professionals identify areas where additional support may be useful.

Compassion Fatigue Check In

CRISIS & WELLNESS RESOURCES

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

988 provides free, confidential, 24/7 support for individuals experiencing a mental health, substance use, or suicide-related crisis. Individuals can call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor or use the online chat. For mental health housing providers, 988 can be a helpful resource to include in resident safety plans, staff resource guides, and crisis planning.

Helpful Resources:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: **988**

NYS OMH 988 Information: **OMH & 988**

988 Partner Toolkit: **988 Toolkit**

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING GUIDELINES – OMH

OMH's Supportive Housing Guidelines provide resources and information related to Rehabilitative and Tenancy Support Services (RTS), including reporting requirements in CAIRs and technical assistance for RTS SPA implementation. OMH also hosts monthly sessions for providers of supportive housing, SP-SROs, and CR-SROs that opt to receive State Aid for Medicaid-reimbursable RTS Services. These sessions provide an open forum for providers to ask questions about services and reporting requirements, and both newly enrolled and existing participants are welcome.

Supportive Housing Guidelines

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

SECTION LEAD: AMANDA SHUFELT | MHACG

Building a Stronger Workforce

Workforce burnout and turnover continue to challenge human services organizations. A key takeaway from the McSilver Institute presentation, "Lessons Learned: Workforce Recruitment and Retention", was the importance of moving away from "getting a body in a seat" and instead focusing on finding employees who are the right fit and providing the support they need to be successful. It's not just about recruitment efforts, but retention needs to also be a focus from day one.

Building a stronger workforce starts with recruitment

Take a realistic approach to hiring practices. Review job descriptions keeping them up-to-date and site specific. Ask staff to review the job description to ensure they reflect the day-to-day reality of the job. Interview the candidates on the job site, giving you a chance to see the candidate interact with the residents as well as giving them a realistic preview of the work environment. Look into building partnerships with local schools, internship programs and community organizations to create a workforce pipeline of future employees.

Shoutout to Community Access

Community Access has trained a small group of program participants that sit in on the interview for direct service staff. This provides participants with valuable experiences while giving candidates another perspective for the environment.

How do you support a new employee once they get in the door?

Getting a candidate through the door is only the first step. The first 90 days are the most crucial in retaining an employee. Creating a mentorship or buddy program can be very valuable. Not only does it give new employees support, guidance, and connection. It also helps staff feel seen, valued, and connected. Organizations could consider offering a financial incentive for the mentors if a new staff reaches a set milestone. Schedule check-ins with new staff, ask questions like are you getting the support and training that you need? Is the job what you expected? Is there anything we could do to support you more?

Recognition Matters!

Shout out to Odyssey House for using a staff recognition platform called Awardco. They have seen a lot of benefits from utilizing this. Finding meaningful ways to recognize employees creates a workplace where employees feel appreciated.

Strong Supervision Matters

"People don't leave jobs; they leave people". Focus on supervisory training to reduce staff turnover. Supervisors and managers have a significant impact on retention. Employees need effective communication, feedback, support, and training. Consider using 360-degree evaluations to give employees opportunities to provide feedback about supervision.

Remember, recruitment gets them in the door, but support, recognition, and strong supervision help keep them there. Building a stronger workforce requires looking beyond the vacancies to fill and focusing on creating an environment where employees feel valued, supported, connected and prepared.

A letter from the Editor

Welcome to the First Edition of ACL Connect!

I hope you all enjoyed the very first edition of ACL Connect, a newsletter created to connect mental health housing agencies across New York State and share the work, ideas, and people that make our profession what it is. As the first Editor-In-Chief, I am especially excited to help bring this initiative to life and create a space where agencies can learn from one another, celebrate successes, and stay connected beyond their own programs and communities.

One of the things I value most about this profession is the dedication of the people who do this work every day. Mental health housing requires compassion and a commitment to navigating complex situations while continuing to meet the needs of the individuals we serve. The impact of this work is significant, and I want this newsletter to reflect that by highlighting what agencies are doing, sharing practical ideas, and recognizing the people who make a difference every day.

Thank you to all the agencies across New York State for the work you do and the commitment you bring to this profession. I also want to thank ACL for its continued support and advocacy for the agencies and dedicated staff who make this work possible. Having an organization that brings our voices together and supports the growth of our profession is important, and I am glad to be part of an effort that builds on that foundation.

A special thank you to the Rising Leaders Committee for the passion, ideas, and fresh perspectives you bring to our profession. Your involvement is an important part of shaping the future of mental health housing, and I am excited to see the contributions you will continue to make. This newsletter really started with you! The idea of ACL Connect started with you, wanting a way to bring together the agencies and the work we do so that we are better able to support the people we serve and the staff doing the work!

I would also like to recognize Kaitlyn Collison, Program Supervisor (SAIL); Brooke Eversman, Director of Residential Services (Project REAL); Adrienne Terry, Senior Program Director (Comunilife); Amanda Shufelt, Project Manager (MHACG), Kayla Arturi, Program Director (MHACG); Robert Pauly, Assistant Director of Quality Assurance (Thrive); David Boodram, Director of Governmental Affairs (ACL); and Laura Isabelle, Director of Policy (ACL) for the time and effort they dedicated to bringing this first edition together. Thank you for your collaboration and willingness to take on the extra work to get this initiative started.

I look forward to seeing this newsletter grow, and more importantly, to hearing from agencies across the state. Whether it is a program success, a new approach, a helpful resource, or a lesson learned, there is value in sharing what we do and learning from the experiences of others. We have a great deal of knowledge across our network, and I am excited to create more opportunities for us to tap into it.

Thank you for being part of this first edition. I am proud to help get ACL Connect started and look forward to what we can build together!

Stephanie Paterno, LMSW, MA
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