

Connections

SPRING 2007

The Shield Institute Educates and Supports New Yorkers with Developmental Disabilities

A Hundred People, A Hundred Interests

In just eight months, The Shield Manhattan Center has rapidly advanced an ambitious strategy to help its consumers develop their individual interests and actively pursue them in the community.

On a recent weekday, Ramon Blanco enjoyed a bus trip to HorseAbility in Melville, N.Y., for a therapeutic horseback riding lesson on his favorite horse, Henry. Ramon, a man who loves animals and enjoys nature, is one of 97 adults at the Manhattan Center who has identified his unique interests with the help of staff members.

"Our efforts to understand what makes a day interesting for the people we serve has really helped us change the way we think about our place in the community," said Jason Cornwell, program director at the Manhattan Center. "What had once been one-time special outings now has individuals developing lasting relationships as customers, patrons and friends."

Diana Valle likes to bask in the social atmosphere at Dimensions Beauty Salon. Since August 2006, she has regularly visited the salon with a staff member for a day of pampering. Passing the lively stores and quaint little shops of Spanish Harlem while she greets acquaintances on her way to the beauty salon is equally exciting to Diana as getting her hair and nails done.

"One of the most important challenges facing all of us is to create real opportunities for people to

Courtesy of The Shield Manhattan Center



Riley Pfeffer shows his affection for this young collie, an important friendship that recreation therapist Jason Worrell enjoys supporting at The Shield Manhattan Center.

successfully relate to others in the community," explains Cornwell. "How we accomplish this has everything to do with listening to the wants and needs of the people we serve, then responding to them in kind."

Cornwell points out that among all the things The Shield does, none is more important than strengthening and expanding community relationships for people so they can lead more meaningful and independent lives. ♥

Finding Joy in the Saddle

Ramon Blanco, a man in his 30s who attends The Shield Manhattan Center, was one of the first to receive support in developing his interests. In the fall of 2003, he fulfilled his wish to ride horses by taking therapeutic horseback lessons at HorseAbility, a nonprofit organization that offers horse-related programs to help people with special needs promote their overall well-being.

Blanco, who lives with his



Ramon Blanco enjoys his time in the saddle with HorseAbility volunteers.

Shield Photo

Three New Yorkers to Receive Pure Visionary Awards

Photo by Joseph Gordon



Judith Brammertz (standing at left) and Penelope Anderson refine event plans at the Marlborough Gallery entrance on West 57th Street.

The Shield Institute will honor three people for their vision and leadership on June 14 at *Pure Vision Arts at Marlborough Gallery*, a benefit art auction and exhibition.

Pure Visionary Awards will be presented during a ceremony focusing on the contributions of New Yorkers who make life better for people with autism and other developmental disabilities.

The gala evening at the renowned Marlborough Gallery on West 57th Street celebrates the contributions of gifted artists from The Shield's Pure

Vision Arts studio. This year's award recipients are Evelyn Ain, founder of the first national magazine for parents of children with autism and developmental disabilities; Valerie Paradiz, an innovative educator and author working in the field of autism; and Alan Siskind, a longstanding community mental health leader who heads the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

For information about the event and tickets call (212) 366-4263 ext. 4224 or visit www.shield.org. ♥

Honoring Visionary Leaders

SUSAN PROVENZANO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A businesswoman and mother of a young child with autism wanted to make it easier for parents of other special children to share information and become better advocates for their families, so she used her gifts as a communications entrepreneur to create a unique magazine to help them. Her name is Evelyn Ain.

A writer with a Ph.D. in literature whose teenager has Asperger's knew how important it was for her son and his peers to have a very different kind of school to meet their needs, so she helped to found one. Her name is Dr. Valerie Paradiz.

A social worker with expertise in community mental health who saw the need to create high-quality, affordable and culturally responsive services for children and families devoted his career to building them. Dr. Alan Siskind has also had an important role in strengthening The Shield.

Evelyn Ain, Valerie Paradiz and Alan Siskind have each used their intelligence, kindness, sensitivity and enormous determination to make life better for people with developmental disabilities. They have encouraged others to move beyond arbitrary limits and boundaries while continuing to envision and work at realizing greater possibilities.

On June 14, we will honor them with our *Pure Visionary Awards* as we celebrate the cultural contributions of artists with autism and other developmental disabilities at *Pure Vision Arts at Marlborough Gallery*. Please join us. ♥



Dr. Susan Provenzano

Photo by Amy Stein

Ramon Blanco

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mother in The Bronx, makes the trip to HorseAbility in Melville on Long Island two to three times a month. The experience of riding and grooming the horses is therapeutic for him and has greatly enhanced his well-being by deepening his relationships with people. Blanco is among many people with disabling conditions who are benefiting from therapeutic horseback riding in the New York area.

Based on Blanco's successful experience, more Shield consumers will be participating in the program, either on horseback or as animal groomers. For some, just walking alongside the horses offers a great deal of pleasure.

"Henry is my favorite horse and he likes when I feed him carrots," said Blanco on a recent outing to the 33-acre facility.

To find out more about this program, visit www.horseability.org or call (631) 367-1646. ♥

The Shield's ACT Center: Giving Voice, Expanding Choice

Using his knee to activate his communication device, Faiz Fadra commanded his talking computer to exchange jokes with his therapist Cari Mutnick as they played an adapted version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

Fadra, who is 15 years old and lives with his family in Floral Park, depends on his device as his only method of communication.

The Shield Institute's Augmentative Communication and Technology (ACT) Center provides diagnostic and therapeutic services to children and adults with a wide range of speech and communication challenges. Its expert staff includes highly trained speech-language profes-

sionals who are dedicated to helping people reach their full potential as communicators.

"Assistive technology offers the potential to expand worlds and increase independence," explains the Center's Coordinator Susannah Weinbaum.

Ralph Johnson, who received his first electronic communication device five years ago, recently shared photographs of his family with his friend Eric Maddox as his device played descriptions of his pictures. As the staff reevaluates Johnson's communication and environmental support needs, he is hoping to get a device that will allow him to turn

Photo by Cari Mutnick



Ralph Johnson (at right) enjoys sharing pictures with friend Eric Maddox at the Shield's ACT Center in Flushing.

on lights, make a phone call and listen to a recorded book.

Visit www.shield.org for more information about the Center's services. ♥

LET'S IMPROVE THE LIVES OF NEW YORKERS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
Yes, I'd like to support The Shield's important educational and support services for children and adults.

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Advocate Leslie Epstein Pearson Wears Three Hats

Shield Board Member Leslie Epstein Pearson, a social worker, family therapist by training and parent of two teenagers, one of whom has special needs, stands out as a true advocate for people with developmental disabilities. Leslie's experience as a parent and co-director of the Learning Resource Network (LRN) at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services make her invaluable to the many New York families, professionals and organizations who look to her for information and guidance.

In what ways does The Shield's work hold special meaning for you?

When I joined The Shield six years ago it was because of my interest in special needs children with developmental disabilities. My son Jacob, who is classified as learning disabled but has many complicated cognitive challenges, was only 10 then. I was a family therapist at the time with a part-time private practice but I was

beginning to think about other life experiences I wanted to have. I went to visit The Shield on the recommendation of a friend to see if it might interest me. It did, and within a year of joining The Shield board, I was offered a position at the Jewish Board running Learning Resource Network. This marriage of all my interests – academic, professional and personal – gave my life a new dimension.

What concerns you most about the conditions in which families in this city are struggling to raise their children?

Well, for one thing, we continue to have too few resources for families, especially those with limited financial means who are struggling to find the kind of services their children urgently need. Because parents are overwhelmed raising children with special needs they need people who can listen and understand their concerns and not only provide them with information, but coach them

through the experience. Empowering parents in this way enables them to be better advocates for all their children – both mainstream and special needs.

Is this why the work of the Jewish Board's Learning Resource Network is so important to you?

Yes, and that's because support for families is not as extensive as it should be. In 2007, too many people lack the resources they need to support their children and advocate for their learning and development needs. They need a safe place where they can think things through and come up with strategies. And we can do this because LRN has no vested interests or biases other than helping parents advocate for their children and secure the services they need. This means a lot to me because as a mom, family advocate and Shield board member I have found a place where it's possible to do all I can for families struggling with these realities.



Photo by Craig Kuperman

Leslie Epstein Pearson together with son Jacob and daughter Emily at JBFC's volunteer recognition event.

You and your husband Alan are strong supporters of The Shield's Pure Vision Arts studio's artists. Why is the studio so important to you?

The beauty of art is that it's a medium with its own language which connects us all in a way that very few other forms of human communication can. Pure Vision Arts powerfully demonstrates that the developmentally disabled can make important contributions to any community. This is what I love about PVA. It is an innovative program that is so very deserving of our support. ♥

Jewish Board Helps Shield Look to the Future

When real estate and financial experts Ron Jacobs, David Kleger and Keith Stein joined The Shield's board of directors last summer, they felt motivated by the opportunity to help an important 85-year-old community service agency prepare for the future.

All three men are also board members of The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFC), the longstanding and highly regarded nonprofit that acts as The Shield's governing parent organization. The JBFC is one of the nation's largest nonprofit mental health and social service agencies with 185 community-based programs that serve some 65,000 New Yorkers.

The Jewish Board supports The Shield in many ways by sharing a wide array of resources. These include sharing the expert-



Photo by Jorge Canva

Bronx Assemblyman Luis M. Diaz stands with Carmen Collado (left) of the Jewish Board and Dr. Susan Provenzano during their recent meeting. Assemblyman Diaz is exploring ways to help The Shield generate greater public support for its Bronx Early Learning Center.

ise of talented volunteer leaders like Jacobs, president of Bankruptcy Services; Kleger, president of Kellogg Properties; and Stein, managing partner at Crestwalk Capital Advisors. Each has offices in Manhattan where the headquarters of the Jewish Board is also located.

"Over the past year, drawing on their experience as real estate and finance professionals, they have helped The Shield explore possible ways of financing

improvements to our facilities, some of which date back to the 1960s and before," explained Dr. Karen Birnbaum, The Shield's associate executive director. Birnbaum has worked at The Shield since 1978 when the Flushing facility was considered new.

"Fortunately, although The Shield's Flushing and Bronx facilities are aging, they happen to be located in prospering communities," Stein pointed out. Jacobs added that higher land values

benefit the agency by opening up new opportunities for The Shield to finance future improvements.

Our board members with backgrounds in many fields provide a level of expertise that is invaluable to the agency as we work to meet critical community needs, explained Dr. Susan Provenzano. "The same holds true for our staff colleagues at the Jewish Board," she added. "We all share a professional interest in developing innovative services for people whose complex needs require highly specialized support."

Jacobs, Stein and Kleger say they enjoy the time they spend working on behalf of The Shield. "We're all here to help make sure that The Shield's good deeds keep benefiting the community," said Kleger. ♥

Susan Provenzano, Executive Director
Karen Birnbaum, Associate Executive Director
Eileen Egan, Assistant Executive Director

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European and American Painters Share City Visions

This January, The Shield welcomed a group of artists from the Netherlands traveling to New York City to see their work on view at its Pure Vision Arts (PVA) studio in Manhattan.

The PVA artists exhibited their work alongside the Dutch artists from the cities Rotterdam and Leiden before an appreciative audience at the Pure Vision Arts exhibition *Urban Visionaries*.

Urban Visionaries, the first exhibition collaboration between the Dutch studios Atelier Herenplaats, Kunst & Vliegwerk and Pure Vision Arts, included a wide array of drawings and paintings reflecting the artists' experiences as city dwellers. Several hundred guests from the community celebrated the artists at a benefit preview and community opening held on January 23 and 24. The gallery was buzzing with live jazz, vivid paintings and artists proudly showing their work to friends and family members. The Dutch Consul General in New York Cora Minderhoud, whose government provided support for the event, congratulated the artists and expressed appreciation for the exhibition's high quality.

The benefit preview of *Urban Visionaries*

Photo by Bryant Yarborough



PVA supporter Leith Termeulen (at right) enjoys artist Jayson Valles' explanation of his work during the Urban Visionaries exhibition.

raised nearly \$8,000 in scholarships to PVA. Oscar Azmitia, who has a scholarship to the studio, made his first sale at the exhibition. "PVA is a beautiful place where I can show my true colors through art," said Azmitia.

The event received generous backing from the community. The Rocking Horse Café and Murray's Cheese served freshly prepared Mexican specialties and delicious gourmet cheeses. Cheryl Rivers of the PVA advisory committee, Shield board members Laura Weinkam and Louise Young provided crucial volunteer support, and graphic designer Laura Tolkow contributed the design of the beautiful event poster card. ♥

Save the Date

Join us for a benefit art auction and exhibition featuring remarkable art by artists with autism and other developmental disabilities

THE SHIELD INSTITUTE PRESENTS

Pure Vision Arts
at Marlborough Gallery

June 14, 2007

6-8:30 pm

This special gala evening will feature visionary artists from the Pure Vision Arts studio and honor leaders who are creating hope and opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities

Marlborough Gallery
40 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.shield.org or call (212) 366-4263 ext. 4224.