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## NEWS

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### Staff Spotlight: John McMasters

With a whopping 35 years under his belt at PCMH, Executive Assistant John McMasters has been with the organization longer than any other staff member. And thanks to his impressive tenure, McMasters is not only an indispensable member of the team, but also an invaluable source of knowledge and history of PCMH, having borne witness to the agency's growth and transformation through the decades.

Mr. McMasters, a Nebraska native, clearly remembers the turn of events that led him to the organization that would become his life's work. He arrived in New York after attending college at Northwestern and graduate school at the University of Nebraska, but found himself ambivalent about whether the Big Apple was the city for him. Thus he decided to apply to temp agencies, to see if he would like working in the hustle and bustle of Manhattan. One agency took a shine to him, and sent him to PCMH, telling him, presciently, "they will keep you busy." His first day on the job was Wednesday, September 7, 1977...and the rest, as they say, is history.



*John McMasters has witnessed PCMH's evolution during his 35 years with the organization.*

As Mr. McMasters recalls, there were only four people in charge back then, including PCMH founder and psychoanalysis pioneer, Dr. Lewis Wolberg, and his wife, Arlene. "They liked my demeanor," he remembers, and he began his career typing for Mrs. Wolberg. PCMH had just opened its second building, the West Side Rehabilitation Center on 36<sup>th</sup> Street, the month before, and as a result, the agency was in a state of flux as it reorganized. The training registrar also resigned that first week, so Mr. McMasters found himself working in the training department, where he met all the directors and quickly learned the ropes in a

very busy week's time—a true baptism by fire. Eventually he moved to the administrative office, where he helped with an array of tasks ranging from personnel to facilities management to purchasing.

“From that point forward, I jumped in wherever I was needed—the work stayed interesting so I was never bored,” Mr. McMasters says.

He also found the work consistently gratifying. Mr. McMasters remembers the sense of satisfaction that came from helping to write the grant proposal for PCMH's very first residence, on 50<sup>th</sup> Street. And no matter what he was doing, the agency's mission always resonated with him. “It was wonderful to see how PCMH could help people,” he says.

Mr. McMasters also fondly recalls the annual fundraising galas PCMH used to hold from 1983 to the early 90's. Organized in part by Broadway legends Marty Richards and Bob Fosse (a former PCMH board member), they honored such Great White Way luminaries as Kander and Ebb and Jule Styne. “I once held Liza Minnelli's dog while she rehearsed a Kander and Ebb song,” he laughs. “It was really fun to meet all these fabulous people.”

These days, Mr. McMasters continues to thrive on the variety of responsibilities presented by his work at PCMH. Over the years he's worn many hats, including serving as managing editor of the journal that the agency used to publish, running its former continuing education program, and quarterbacking the responsibilities of the training department. He's happy he's lasted long enough to see PCMH thrive under the leadership of CEO Jacob Barak. “There was a period when the agency was really struggling. Jacob has done a wonderful job focusing on residential development and strengthening clinical services -- and making sure PCMH is stable,” Mr. McMasters says.

An avowed film music buff—“a niche within a niche,” he laughs—Mr. McMasters is also a fan of fantasy and science fiction books in his free time. But his passion for PCMH brings him back to the townhouse on 35<sup>th</sup> Street each morning. As he explains, “Every day brings a different challenge—there's always something new to figure out.”

## **Program Spotlight: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)**

Clients of PCMH who live in Brooklyn and have been unsuccessful in outpatient programs have another option: Assertive Community Treatment, or ACT. Headquartered in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, the program is a beacon of hope for individuals diagnosed with conditions such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and bipolar disorder, who have difficulty attending traditional outpatient mental health programs. Says Rosemarie Guidice, LCSW-R, ACT's program director, “Instead of expecting these clients to participate in a prescribed treatment program, we bring the treatment to them and individualize it.”

Founded in 2004, ACT is a Brooklyn-focused program whose clients live mostly in the central and north parts of the borough. According to Ms. Guidice, the 11 members of the ACT team aim to work with ACT's 68 current clients (the program maximum) to help arm them with recovery-focused ideas and increase their insight into their mental illness, thus assisting them in

formulating and achieving self-designed goals so that they can eventually return to more traditional outpatient care. Another goal of the program is to help clients reduce their frequency of hospitalizations (in order to be eligible for ACT, clients must have four hospitalizations in a calendar year). It is paid for exclusively by Medicaid, though ACT also serves clients who are not Medicaid-eligible. Individuals are referred to ACT through Single Point of Access (SPOA), a NYC-based housing and data collection project that helps connect specially identified applicants to the most appropriate residences and services.

The ACT team is responsible for engaging clients assigned to the program and bringing them into treatment. “Wherever clients are, we find them—that’s the ‘Assertive’ part,” explains Ms. Guidice, who has been the program director since 2006, and whose passion for the program and helping its clients is clear. “We will go out every day to find the client if we have to. ACT is very client-focused—we interest them by talking to them about their goals, and then we tailor our treatment to fit those goals.”

Ms. Guidice also notes that nowhere is off-limits when it comes to locating clients and bringing them into treatment. “The ACT team goes to places that most providers and clinicians don’t want to go—such as homes in crime-ridden neighborhoods. You have to be cautious, but you can’t be fearful.” Ms. Guidice personally screens all of ACT’s incoming clients.

Clients are seen by all members of the staff, who work with them to address all their issues—such as environmental stresses beyond their mental illness, including homelessness, substance abuse, and other health problems. ACT clients also see a psychiatrist or nurse practitioner once a month for medication management. The program offers a range of groups in which clients can participate, including a harm reduction group (focused on substance abuse treatment), a wellness/transition management group, a Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) group, a vocational group, a family psycho-education group, and a medication-management group.

“For the most part, when clients come to ACT, they have consistently tried to ‘run away’ from their diagnosis, because they don’t want to face having an illness,” says Ms. Guidice. “We’re really trying to help clients ‘get it’—to understand they have a mental illness, destigmatize it, and manage it,” she explains. “We strive to help our clients understand their diagnosis so that they can take responsibility for their illness and treat it accordingly.”

Ultimately, the goal of an ACT client is “graduation” and “recovery,” which means diagnosing the mental illness, treating the illness with support, and still maintaining a life where the client can do what he or she enjoys, have goals, and reach them. “We have clients who come to us homeless and chronically in and out of hospital, who are now living in supported housing, getting ready for graduation from the program,” says Ms. Guidice. “That’s really what we shoot for.”



*Rosemarie Guidice has been program director at ACT in Brooklyn since 2006.*

## Client Close-Up: Brenda Cozart



*Brenda Cozart is an ACT success story who has embraced the program since 2008.*

Brenda Cozart is a shining example of the kind of success clients in the PCMH-ACT program can achieve. Ms. Cozart, who lives in Brooklyn and has a warm, gregarious manner, worked for many years for the New York Board of Education until her mental illness, which didn't begin to afflict her until later in her life, made it difficult for her to continue.

Because she was hospitalized multiple times in 2008, her inpatient psychiatrist requested ACT services; the case was assigned to PCMH-ACT. Rosemarie Guidice, the program director, met with her. "I was in the hospital and Rosemarie came to see me," Ms. Cozart remembers. "She visited me and talked to me."

Once Brenda was enrolled in ACT in December 2008, the ACT team would visit her twice a week to assist in recovery efforts, which included making sure she was taking her medication and managing in the community. The ACT staff also spent a lot of time helping Ms. Cozart to apply for the Social Security Disability benefits for which she was eligible, given her extensive work history, which eventually resulted in a substantial monthly claim. The ACT team also helped Ms. Cozart to find an apartment, where she now lives with a roommate.

"Ever since I've been in the ACT program, I've never gone back to the hospital," Ms. Cozart says proudly. "The program has helped me a lot."

As her mental health improved, Ms. Cozart began coming to the ACT office at 443 39<sup>th</sup> Street in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, more and more. These days, she's in the office three days a week, where she's an enthusiastic participant in ACT's many client groups, including WRAP, Wellness/Transition Management, the harm-reduction group, and the vocational group. "I'm very involved in all the groups," she says. "They're my favorite part of the ACT program."

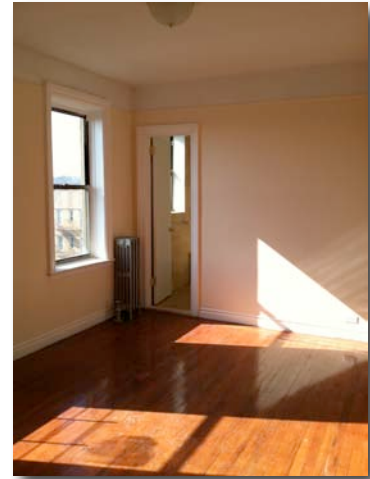
Now Ms. Cozart, who's gotten used to coming to an office for her mental health treatment and is filling her own medications at her local pharmacy, is poised for "graduation" from the program, which means she will transition to a more traditional outpatient mental health program close to home. Given that Ms. Cozart enjoys an active recovery, a referral will be made to a PROS program where she will have the opportunity to participate in groups as well as meet with the staff individually, including the psychiatrist. For 90 days, the ACT team will be in contact with the PROS program and Ms. Cozart to monitor her acclimation to the transfer and provide support as needed. While this next step in her recovery will entail some adjustments, in

light of the great strides Ms. Cozart has made with ACT's help and her positive attitude, all signs point to her ability to continue to move forward in her recovery.

## **Residential Profile: Scattered Site Program**

The Scattered Site program is the most independent level of supported housing under the PCMH umbrella. Scattered Site apartments are located in residential buildings in all of the city's boroughs except Staten Island, with the bulk of the residences located in Brooklyn and the Bronx. "One of the goals of Scattered Site is to integrate our mental health population into the community," says Cara Turner, a co-director of the program, along with Bill Chidsey. "It's a great program for clients who are independent and receive some support, but who may be sensitive to the stigma of living in a PCMH residence."

Clients who live in Scattered Site apartments require minimal supervision, and are visited in their homes by case managers twice a month on average—some more, some less, depending on their needs. Residents pay 30% of their monthly income (from employment or SSI/SSD benefits) toward rent.



*Scattered Site clients live independently in their own apartments.*



*Scattered Site apartments are located in residential buildings throughout New York City.*

Ms. Turner, Mr. Chidsey, and two intake workers screen potential Scattered Site tenants during weekly intake appointments to ensure that applicants are equipped to live independently. "We've seen PCMH clients graduate into Scattered Site housing who have maintained stability and done well in other PCMH programs," says Ms. Turner. Tenants are encouraged to come to the program's administrative offices on West 36<sup>th</sup> Street to receive services and participate in programs such as Making Healthy Choices, an innovative wellness program, and the Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS) program. Scattered Site clients also enjoy the benefit of being able to have family members come and stay overnight with them, a level of flexibility that isn't available to clients in other residential programs.

The Scattered Site program, which until recently counted 350 units under management, in January was awarded two new residential contracts, which will add 110 additional units—70 in Brooklyn, 20 in Queens, and 20 in the Bronx—for a total of 460 apartments.

## New Faces at PCMH

### **Laura Baker, Quality Improvement Coordinator**

Hire Date: 10/9/12

Laura Baker is the Quality Improvement Coordinator. She is responsible for monitoring and executing quality improvement activities for clinical, residential, and rehabilitation services. Laura Baker completed her M.A. in Psychological Counseling at Columbia University's Teachers College, and received an M. Ed in Psychological Counseling with a specialization in Mental Health Counseling.

Laura is also a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of New York.



### **Martin Bruner, PROS Coordinator**

Hire Date: 9/17/12

Martin Bruner is the PROS Coordinator. He comes to PCMH with over twelve years of experience in social work. Martin is responsible for the supervision of staff and providing rehabilitative services to adults with serious mental illness in the PROS program. Martin received his Masters in Social Work from Hunter Graduate School of Social Work and is a licensed Clinical Social Worker.

### **Miriam Denmark, Family Social Worker**

Hire Date: 10/9/12

Miriam Denmark is the Family Social Worker at Hull Avenue. Miriam assesses individuals and families to provide services and make referrals for services.

Miriam holds a Masters of Social Work from Hunter College and is a Licensed Social Worker. She brings over four years of family social work experience with her to PCMH.





**Wanda Ellis, Program Director**

Hire Date: 12/3/12

Wanda Ellis is the Program Director at the Teller Avenue Residence. She oversees all social/clinical services and building operations. Wanda joins PCMH after spending the past decade working in psychiatric services at Brookdale Hospital. Wanda received her BA from City College and Masters of Social Work from Fordham University.

**Rene Gonzalez, Case Manager**

Hire Date: 11/26/12

Rene Gonzalez is a Case Manager in the ACT Team. As a Case Manager, Rene provides extensive home visits serving adults with serious mental illness. Rene received his M.S. in Counseling from Southern Methodist University.

