

CLUSTER provides services in four major program areas:

- ◆ Mental Health Residential Services
- ◆ Westchester & Rockland County Mediation Centers
- ◆ Youth and Family Programs
- ◆ Housing Resource Center

Susan R. Thaler

President,
CLUSTER Board of Directors

Toni Volchok

Executive Director

Diana M. Campos

Newsletter Editor

CLUSTER's Mission is "to provide services and programs that assist residents in Yonkers and Westchester & Rockland Counties to build a better future for themselves and their communities."



20 South Broadway, Suite 501, Yonkers, NY 10701 ◆ 914-963-6440 ◆ www.clusterinc.org



CLUSTER turns 40!

This year CLUSTER proudly celebrates its 40th Anniversary. Founded in 1975 by a group of Episcopalian congregations, CLUSTER (Congregations Linked in Urban Strategy to Effect Renewal) was established as a non-sectarian social service agency that would serve the community of Southwest Yonkers providing programs for children and families as well as individuals with chronic mental illness.

Over the past 40 years, CLUSTER has grown, to provide services throughout the City of Yonkers, Westchester County and in Rockland County. Our services have grown to include Mental Health Residential Services, a full spectrum of Mediation Services, After School programming for children and teens, Summer Day Camp, and Housing Advocacy programs.

CLUSTER's goal then as it is now is to offer services that make a difference in people's lives and in the community. Our mission remains "to provide services and programs that assist resident in Yonkers, Westchester and Rockland County to build a better future for themselves and their communities." The focus of all our programs is the empowerment of individuals, families and communities to fulfill their dreams and potential.

"I am proud to lead the celebration of our 40th Anniversary. CLUSTER is a vital resource in the community and a critical safety net for those who need it." –Toni Volchok, Executive Director

Back to Work

Brenda Costner loves to talk about the "Back to Work" Program that she coordinates as part of CLUSTER's Mental Health Residential Services Program. Brenda has over 20 years' experience in the Mental Health and Employment fields. The Back to Work program has been a special project she has led for the past several years.

Brenda works with a group of between five to eight residents, to help them develop and/or improve their employment "soft-skills", such as resume writing, interviewing skills, communications, and money management. The group meets weekly to discuss issues such as what kind of job they feel would be a good match for them, how to handle life outside the workplace and appropriate workplace behavior. Sometimes the client gets an actual job; sometimes the first step may be a volunteer position. CLUSTER is fortunate to have many local employers who are supportive of the program, such as the Yonkers Public Library, K-Mart and ShopRite. For all the participants, being back in the workforce helps them to reclaim their lost roles in the community and with their families. "Sometimes we forget that many of our residents, were employed, holding big jobs, with lots of responsibilities, with families, before their life changed due to their illness" stated Brenda.

CLUSTER has many success stories of individuals re-entering the work force and being very successful and stable. If you would like to know more about CLUSTER's Back to Work Program, please contact Brenda Costner at 914-963-6440.

Letter from the President



Dear Friends and
CLUSTER Supporters,

It's hard to believe that CLUSTER is
turning 40!

The year was 1975. Muhammad Ali beat Joe Frazier in the Thrilla in Manila. Saturday Night Live, The Jeffersons, Welcome Back, Kotter and Wheel of Fortune had their television premieres. Angelina Jolie, Tiger Woods, Drew Barrymore and Bradley Cooper were born. And in Yonkers, a group of Episcopalian congregations came together to form a non-sectarian social service agency with the aim of providing a safety net and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable members of the community.

In the intervening 40 years, CLUSTER has accomplished so much—providing housing and rehabilitative services for people living with mental illness; running outstanding cost-effective programs for children and teens from low-income families; offering mediation training and conflict resolution services throughout Westchester and Rockland Counties; and helping families and individuals avoid homelessness. But none of this could have happened without the dedication and support of a lot of people—an extraordinary staff and countless volunteers, donors and advocates who believe passionately in CLUSTER's mission.

When you think about it, at 40, CLUSTER is still quite young. John Glenn became the first American to orbit the earth at age 40 and Julia Child wrote her first cookbook at 49. There's so much important work still ahead. Working together, we can make sure that CLUSTER and the people it serves have a bright future. Here's to the next 40 years!

Susan Thaler
President

Study Buddy Challenge

The Study Buddy Program was facing elimination due to a funding cut from Westchester County. Fortunately a supporter, Greg Werlinich, stepped in with a challenge grant. CLUSTER's Board and Advisory Council, met that challenge raising \$15,000, which will help us to raise \$45,000.

This program has helped almost 1,000 high school students prepare for college and the workforce. Over the past 7 years, 100% of the students who completed the program have graduated high school and gone on to colleges such as Bucknell, NYU, Northeastern, SUNY Binghamton, SUNY Albany, Westchester Community College, and many more.

If you would like to donate to help CLUSTER meet the challenge, please go to www.clusterinc.org and click on the **DONATE** button. Your generosity and caring is greatly appreciated.



CLUSTER would like to acknowledge and express our appreciation to the many in 2014. Your support has made a difference in the lives of many. Thank you for your

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omitted your name, please let us know immediately. We are extremely grateful for



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Every effort to ensure that this list is complete and correct. If we have inadvertently omitted any name, please contact us. Every gift and every donor large and small. Thank you.



Dear Friends of
CLUSTER,

CLUSTER has been
changing lives for 40
years. The people
who work on our staff

today are filled with the same hope and passion as the people who founded this organization 40 years ago. The mission of our founders was to provide a better life for individuals and families and to ensure that every child reached their full potential. And, this is what our staff still tries to do every day.

When we face difficult challenges that organizations like ours struggle with, I often hear the voices of the founders in my head. During tough times, I remind myself that CLUSTER is made up of the strength of conviction and dedication of many people. Our staff and volunteers, who work tirelessly every day, and truly care about the people that we serve, our Board members who volunteer their time because they believe the work we are doing is important, all of our supporters who want to be sure that those less fortunate can get the help they need, and those we serve – a young person who is thriving and doing well in school, families that can stay together because their home has been preserved, someone with a serious mental illness who has embraced recovery, and so many others.

40 years is a long time! Those that started CLUSTER are no longer with us – but many have followed in their footsteps continuing the good work that they started. I believe that CLUSTER's success and endurance is powered by all of the kindness and generosity that has been carried out over these past 40 years! We are grateful for the opportunity to do this good work and grateful to all of you for helping us do it. Let's celebrate together! Please hold the date of October 21st – we are planning a wonderful Event in honor of this occasion. I hope to see you there so I can thank you in person.

Sincerely,
Toni Volchok
Executive Director



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CURRENT OCCUPANT

CLUSTER Receives a Grant from Westchester Community Foundation

CLUSTER is pleased to announce that we recently received funding from the Westchester Community Foundation to implement a Restorative Practices Program at the new Summit Academy in Peekskill.

The objective of the Summit Academy is to help these students who are at high risk of failing in their educational endeavors to have a fresh start and an opportunity to reintegrate themselves in the High School environment in a more successful manner; or to complete their education in an alternative environment which is designed to support their growth, both intellectually and emotionally, and to give them a greater sense of connection with a school community. CLUSTER's Westchester/Rockland Mediation Center has a long history of working with the Peekskill School District, and was pleased to be invited to implement a Restorative Practices program at the new Summit Academy which opened this past September. The Restorative Practices curriculum is an effort to help reverse the downward spiral of student success and to bring a new outlook for young people who are at risk for school drop-out. The project which, serves approximately 80 students, a teaching staff of five and a support staff of six, is built on a three pronged approach and designed to include the whole school. The focus of all three components is building community by empowering all individuals to be active and collaborative.

The Westchester Community Foundation's mission is to develop and manage philanthropic resources, and to distribute them in a way that is responsive to donor interest and community needs. The Foundation actively promotes charitable giving on behalf of the area's nonprofit organizations. Westchester Community Foundation is a division of The New York Community Trust, one of the largest community foundations in the country with assets of approximately \$2.4 billion.



Ilyana Campos, Mediation Coordinator working with students in a restorative practice circle