Serving the Community

Lunch, Pantry Programs and Nutrition Education

Our Food and Nutrition Department strives to improve the health and quality of life of individuals living with chronic illness through health education and the provision of healthy foods.

Iris House has been offering food and nutrition services since 1994 to our HIV+ clients, but did you know that we’ve offered meals and pantry bags to the general community for over a decade? In fact, starting in November, our food and nutrition programs for the community are getting more robust!

In addition to lunches provided four days a week, Iris House is improving its community pantry program to a robust client choice pantry and providing nutrition education workshops. Community members will come into our new workshops and be given a list of pantry options for the week, from which they may select foods from a range of food groups (e.g., vegetables, protein, grain, dairy.) While they learn about topics ranging from Food Safety to Cardiovascular Health to Preparing Foods on a Budget, members of our team will take their “shopping lists” into our pantry and prepare their personalized pantry bags. These bags will contain ingredients for twelve meals, and families of five or more will receive two bags. Community clients are eligible to participate in this program once a month after a referral from a partner agency, which can be obtained via the NYC Hunger Hotline (866-888-8777).

“This new program,” said program director Jon Diamond, “Will really allow us to take a three-pronged approach consisting of Prevention, by improving the health of our community and their families by serving more nutrient dense food items in pantry bags, Interacting with our clients throughout the process to continuously build a strong rapport and trustworthiness, and Educating, increasing nutrition awareness through informative workshops and healthy recipe handouts.”

This program follows a model that Iris House has used for several years with our HIV+ client population and is made possible through a grant from New York State’s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP).

For more information on this program, please contact our Nutrition Program Assistant, Laa-Iqa Jones at (646) 548-0100 x204.
A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ingrid Floyd, Executive Director

Iris House is entering our 25th year of services to the community. This is a really exciting time as we continue to provide critical support services to persons who are HIV+, people who are unaware of how to prevent HIV infection, those who are living with other chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension, persons who are food insecure and those who face chronic homelessness. Our services have continued to evolve as we focus on the needs of women, men and families in communities hard hit by various socio-economic disparities. In order to evolve we continue to implement new programs, like our new client choice community pantry and education program and our new housing program for persons diagnosed with mental health or substance use disorders. We are excited that our HIV Prevention and Education services have expanded nationally through a new grant from ViiV Healthcare to support Love Your Life, a program to connect women living with HIV across the country to resources in their local communities and online. Our Board of Directors continues to evolve by adding new members, such as Vanessa Johnson, a fierce HIV advocate for women and we continue to look for others to join our dynamic board. Our staff evolve by learning new interventions that can better educate those they serve and our leadership team stands ready to take the organization into its next phase.

I have been at Iris House for over 12 years and I have seen the tremendous work the organization does in New York and New Jersey and the amazing work at the national level on various committees. I hear countless stories from clients who say that Iris House has saved their life, whether it be a woman who was using street drugs for many years and had nowhere else to turn once she learned of her HIV diagnosis or young men who come for i-Zone, our weekly group for LGBTQ men, because it’s the only place they feel safe and supported. Recently a client just walked up to me and hugged me and simply said “Thank You” and a staff member who was out on medical leave text “I really miss you guys”. As we think about 25 years of serving our community and what the future holds for Iris House, it’s this community of people that helps me to know it’s worth it and the work we do really does save lives!

40 New Apartments!

Since 1996, Iris House has been providing supportive housing programs for people living with HIV. Hundreds of individuals have moved from homelessness to independent living since our program began, and we are pleased to announce that starting this fall, we will be managing 40 new scatter site apartments specifically targeted at individuals living with mental health and/or substance abuse challenges. Secure housing is a proven way to help in our efforts to end the HIV Epidemic, and we are pleased to be offering this service for people who live in some of the highest risk categories for new HIV transmissions.

For more information, please call (646) 548-0100 to speak with our Housing Program Manager, Nathalie Menard.
A Farewell to “The Voice” of Iris House

Iris House staffers were shocked on August 15 to hear the news of the sudden death of our friend and colleague Jerry Sheldon, who collapsed while visiting family in Atlanta. Jerry was the manager of our front desk, but also frequent performer and emcee at Iris House events, and one of the electric spirits of our family. We said farewell to him in a service on August 22 at Bethel Gospel Assembly, where friends and family alike came together to celebrate his legacy through stories, songs and even dance. He was a legend in the NYC cabaret community, and is now one in our hearts.

We miss you, Jerry.

Meet Diva: Iris House’s New Mobile Testing Unit

In September, the staff of Iris House were proud to welcome a new member to our family: Diva! She’s our brand new mobile testing unit and is all decked out and ready to provide HIV Testing, Outreach and Prevention Services to the communities we serve in Irvington and Essex County, New Jersey. We were excited to have former Mayor of Irvington Wayne Smith, at whose invitation we first started our work in that city five years ago, join us at Wally’s Barbershop on 18th Avenue, and very honored that current Mayor Tony Vauss was on hand to make some remarks and to cut the ribbon and launch Diva into use. (We even tested more than a dozen people that day!)

Also joining us with remarks and greetings were Marsha Atkind, Executive Director and Marcy Felsenfeld, Senior Program Officer from the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey. HFNJ provided the capital funds to purchase Diva and support some of her important work during her first year of operation.

If you are in Essex County, NJ and you or your organization would like Diva to come visit, bringing with her a complement of staff to provide free onsite HIV testing or connection to community resources, please contact our program manager, Charla Cousar at (908) 561-5057!

Wally Pierre, Charla Cousar, Ingrid Floyd, Irvington Mayor Tony Vauss and HFNJ Executive Director Marsha Atkind cut the ribbon on Diva, our new HIV Testing and Outreach van!
IRIS HOUSE WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER  
VANESSA JOHNSON, J.D.

Vanessa Johnson is the co-owner of the Washington, DC-based Ribbon Consultant Group (Ribbon). Ribbon is a minority women owned business specializing in organizational growth and development, health-related programming and services, and civic and community engagement. Vanessa also serves as the National Training and Leadership Development Director for the Positive Women’s Network USA (PWN-USA).

Her career accomplishments include 34 years of creating and scaling up responsive community and public health services (i.e. HIV testing), interventions (i.e. trauma-informed and vocational development), and activities (i.e. learning institutes and trainings). In this pursuit, Vanessa dedicated 20 years to developing and providing capacity building assistance in the area of HIV with a special emphasis on women living with HIV. She is an experienced facilitator and nationally certified trainer with a focus on leadership development, community mobilization and the delivery of public health education and interventions. Vanessa is a graduate of Temple University School of Law.

Coming Up at Iris House

Thanksgiving Luncheon  
Thursday, November 16th

Kids Holiday Party  
Wednesday, December 20th

Holiday Luncheon  
Thursday, December 21st

To donate or volunteer, call Kim at  
(646) 548-0100 x221

SOCIAL MEDIA and IRIS HOUSE

Come see what all the fuss is about and get daily news in your feed about what we’re up to!

On the Web:  www.irishouse.org
Facebook:  Iris House
Iris House: New Jersey
Twitter:  @IrisHouse
Instagram:  Iris_House_ IrisHouse_NJ
YouTube:  IrisHouse2010

Main Office
2348 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.  
(between 137 & 138th Sts.)  
New York, NY 10030  
Phone: 646 548-0100

East Side Office
2271 Second Avenue  
(between 116 & 117 Sts.)  
New York, NY 10035  
212-423-9049

Central New Jersey Office
630 East Front Street  
Plainfield, NJ 07060  
908-561-5057

Please visit our website (www.irishouse.org) to learn about upcoming events and new programs.

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