

# Bloom - The Iris House Newsletter

Spring 2020

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## IN THIS ISSUE

COVID-19 is not a lie, 1  
From the Exec Director, 2  
Iris House Services, 3  
Volunteer Spotlight, 4

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## COVID-19 is not a lie! Just ask our client.



Photo by LA Times, April 17, 2020

Oliver (**name changed for confidentiality**), an Iris House housing client, has been living with HIV for over 20 years. Oliver is originally from Colombia, but has been in the United States for 20 years. After visiting with his family in Colombia in March, Oliver returned home. On March 26, Oliver visited Harlem Hospital as he was not feeling well for over a week. He had a

fever for several days, loss of appetite and no energy. Oliver thought he might have COVID-19 and expressed his concerns to the hospital staff but no one offered him a test. A chest x-ray was done and it was clear so Oliver was sent home with some Tylenol and told to drink plenty of fluids.

The next day Oliver was still feeling terrible so he went to his primary care doctor. Unfortunately it was closed due to COVID-19. He traveled to another clinic in Brooklyn and was told his tests results were not good so an ambulance was called and he was taken to NYU Medical Center. The hospital was reluctant to admit Oliver but did so because his blood pressure was very low. It was at this hospital that Oliver was officially diagnosed with coronavirus. Another chest x-ray was done and this time it showed fluid in the lungs. Oliver was admitted to intensive care and given antibiotics. After, 7 days Oliver was released from the hospital.

Oliver's housing case manager, Leah, and his friends dropped off groceries to ensure he had what he needed. Sadly, after self-isolating for 16 days, Oliver felt worse and had to go back to the hospital. He was tested again, and this time it showed COVID-19 and pneumonia. Oliver was admitted to the hospital for a second time this time needing a blood transfusion due to extreme anemia. One week later Oliver was released from the hospital and told to self isolate again for 14 days. Oliver now feels good and hopes everything with his follow-up visit will be better but wants people to know COVID-19 is not a lie.

This is just one of the many horror stories we read about with COVID-19. Despite its deadly nature, Iris House is still providing much needed services to our clients and community members. Our hours may be limited, but our hearts are on a full-time schedule. At Iris House we save lives.

You can read more about Iris House's available services on page 3.

**A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

With the panic surrounding COVID-19, a novel coronavirus, we are existing in an unprecedented time. In the world of HIV and AIDS, it can be an alarming and uncertain place. The good news is that the prognosis for a vaccine is first-rate and experts believe we could have one within 12-18 months. In the meantime, we should all follow the guidelines for proper hygiene and social distancing in order to limit the spread and flatten the curve.

At the present time, there is no specific information about difference in risk of COVID-19 in people with HIV but we do know that the risk is greatest in those who have a low CD4 cell count, not on anti-retroviral treatment and those with underlying medical conditions or based on age. So remain vigilant.

With so many experiencing illness and loss, I want to emphasize the critical nature of self-care at this particular time. Some things that you may consistently do for practice includes taking breaks (from the news, from work, or anything overwhelming); laughing; exercising; eating well; talking to a friend or relative; meditation. Iris House has been providing our staff with weekly therapeutic group sessions with a licensed counselor as we know many staff feel the same anxiety as many of you.

As we begin to focus and hope for a sense of normalcy in the foreseeable future, Iris House is gearing up for its 15th Annual Women as the Face of AIDS Summit, being held for the first time in the fall with a virtual component. The Summit will provide educational and networking opportunities for people living with HIV and AIDS, providers and professionals working in AIDS service organizations, as well as community-based organizations, government and medical facilities.

Our 2020 Summit theme is **"Across the Lifespan: From Prevention to Aging"**. The summit will address innovative prevention strategies and issues facing aging with HIV. We can see from this current pandemic the similarities to the HIV pandemic especially in communities of color. The summit will allow us time to explore these similarities in greater details.

The doors at Iris House remain open as our lines for lunch and pantry have continued to grow each week. We are here for you and will continue to be a service to those in need. We continue to encourage our clients to stay home but remember you are never alone. Stay safe and stay healthy.

**THANK YOU!**

We have lines out the door for our lunch program every day, and on

Thursdays, the line for pantry bags can extend around the corner. Food insecurity is a huge problem in our community, particularly for people impacted by HIV / AIDS and during this COVID-19 pandemic. We're doing our part to help.

*We deeply appreciate the support of*



You can support Iris House's Food & Nutrition program too with a donation today! Help us ensure that no one goes hungry.

Visit [www.irishouse.org](http://www.irishouse.org)



SAVE THE DATE: OCT. 5, 2020

**ACROSS THE LIFESPAN  
FROM PREVENTION  
TO AGING**



15TH ANNUAL WOMEN AS THE FACE OF AIDS SUMMIT

## COVID-19 Does not stop Iris House from serving our clients and the Community!

Iris House is open Monday—Friday from 9am—5pm. Clients are visiting the office by appointment and staff are making home visits when necessary.

**Grab and Go bagged lunch** is available Tuesday—Friday from noon—1:30pm. Pantry bags are available every Thursday from 1pm—2pm.

**Virtual cooking classes** is open to the public, register and receive a \$25 Foodtown gift card to purchase groceries. Beginning Tuesdays, 6/2, 6/9, 6/16, 6/23 and 6/30. Contact Serge Jean at 646-548-0100 Ext. 202 for more information.



Want to get a free HIV Test?

To have a HIV test kit and condoms mailed to your home contact Mr. Ken Dejesus at 646-548-0100 ext. 611 or [kdejessus@irishouse.org](mailto:kdejessus@irishouse.org). Iris House staff will restart on site HIV testing by appointment in the coming weeks. Call today to schedule.

Want to talk with someone? Project 1329 is offering free counseling services over the phone for ages 13-29. Participants can receive up to \$70 in gift cards.

**Our adult clients' emotional wellness groups are now virtual.**

Tuesday & Thursday 12:30pm-1:30pm— Iris House Women's Group  
Facilitator: Fatima Rainey, [frainey@irishouse.org](mailto:frainey@irishouse.org)

Wednesday, 10:00am-11:00am— Iris House Let's Talk Group  
Facilitator: Sheri Cruz, [scruc@irishouse.org](mailto:scruc@irishouse.org)

Wednesday, 11:00am-12:00pm— Iris House Men's Group  
Facilitator: Hilton Webb, [hwebb@irishouse.org](mailto:hwebb@irishouse.org)

Thursday, 11:00am-12:00pm—Iris House Spanish-Speaking Group  
Facilitator: Ofelia Barrios, [obarrios@irishouse.org](mailto:obarrios@irishouse.org)

Love Your Life National Virtual Groups: The English-speaking groups are every other Thursday (twice a month) from 7:00pm-8:00pm. Registration is required to participate. Contact Veronica Karp at 203-300-4363; [vkarp@irishouse.org](mailto:vkarp@irishouse.org) to register.





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

**Name:** Joe Mannetti

**Hometown:** Ann Arbor, Michigan

**Time with Iris House:** 3-4 years

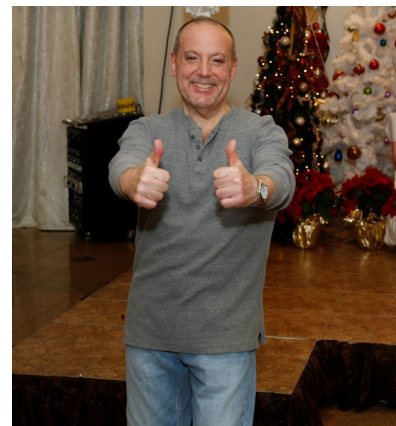
**How did you come to know Iris House?** I previously worked as an HIV testing counselor for an affiliate organization, and came to be impressed with the agency's focus on supporting women and people of color.

**Favorite Song:** "Let Me Entertain You"

**What "feeds" you most about your work with Iris house?** When I originally moved back to NY, I wanted to support effective HIV/AIDS programs and outreach. I knew program funding was being cut and also, AIDS is no longer the "big thing" that it was. I actually enjoy the grassroots and personal approach at Iris House, which is an extremely family-oriented agency, with a focus on underserved populations. When I volunteer, I feel the love, the warmth, and the welcome here.

**Hobbies:** Writing, weight lifting, and volunteering at my favorite organizations.

**Quote:** "The thing that makes you exceptional, if you are at all, is inevitably that which must also make you lonely." -Lorraine Hansberry



Mr. Joe Mannetti

## 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!

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