

Rising

Issue 5
WINTER 2021

drawing success

In his free time, Gerald, 26, likes to draw. Recently, he has been replicating comic books, replacing the characters with the faces of his friends — John, Dosario, and others. Before the pandemic, he joined those friends — others supported in our programs for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) — at a weekly arts program at a NYC Parks & Recreation Center in the Bronx. As he looks to the future, Gerald hopes to expand on his passion and pursue art courses. He is working with staff to identify potential programs of study.

During five years living in Rising Ground IDD residences, Gerald has achieved many successes. He has become quite independent. He comes and goes from his residence in the Bronx's Co-Op City, visiting his father and a few select friends these days, always social distancing and using appropriate precautions. Before the pandemic, he often went to the movies — another of his passions — and attended Rising Ground programs for adults with IDD. Now, these programs are held virtually.

To help Gerald progress despite challenges presented by his disability, he received various supports since childhood. Since moving into Rising Ground IDD residences, he takes part in our day habilitation, pre-vocational, and recreation programs. In all these settings, our staff work with him to develop both life skills and specific skills that will allow him to work and pursue his dreams. Recognizing his passion for art, staff eagerly praise Gerald's work and make sure he has supplies.

Gerald's personal successes demonstrate the impact of your support for our work to create environments and systems of support that allow adults with IDD to live the most independent lives possible.

[Read more inside](#) ►



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“Rising Ground changed my life,” says Gerald. “They helped me a lot. I thank them for a better future, and I am thankful I’m living in a good environment.”

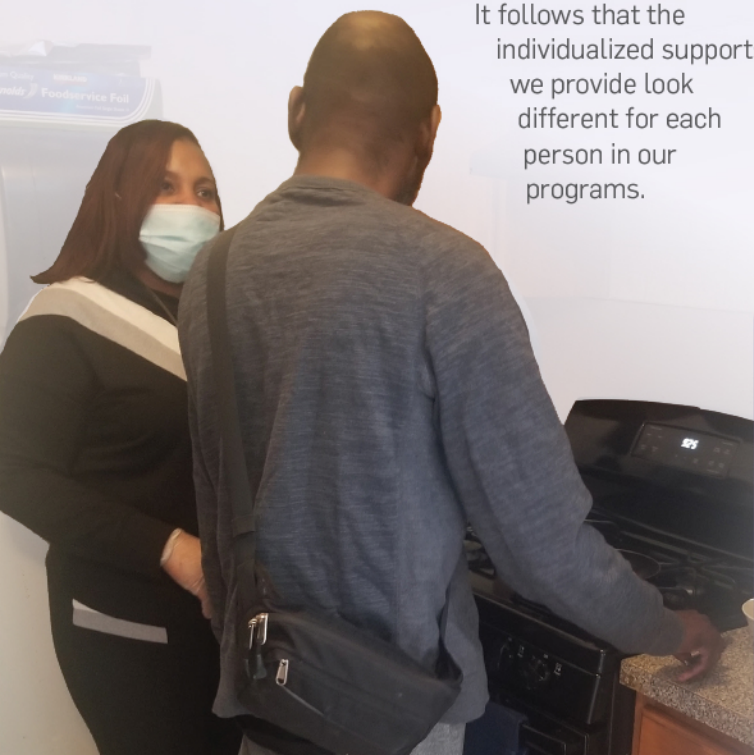
Like with Gerald, each path forward is unique for the nearly 300 people we support through 23 residences across the city and in our community and center-based programs.

Our programs for individuals with IDD help children and adults on the autism spectrum, with traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, and other cognitive disabilities to achieve their own meaningful goals, understanding that each person comes to Rising Ground facing specific challenges presented by their disability. “Everybody has capacity to learn and grow. We try to maximize that capacity for every single person and understand how to work best with each individual to make that happen,” explains Ryan Garofalo, Senior Vice President for IDD Services.

“It is a person-centered, collaborative effort that very much includes the person and their family in the process to determine what his or her desires or goals are,” Garofalo says. “Then, we figure out from that starting point how to reach them. Our work is really to support those dreams.”

Success looks different for each person. “For some people, that could mean living on their own and being employed. For other people, success may mean that they can communicate more effectively than they used to,” says Garofalo. “For example, one young man who came to us with no spoken language now expresses himself with a few dozen words. That’s a success! That is a huge change in his quality of life.”

It follows that the individualized supports we provide look different for each person in our programs.



Some live in our residences, while for others, our team supports them and their families at home in the community. Some join us for day habilitation services, pre-vocational programs, and recreation. These services promote a wide range of skills and expose participants to new experiences. For example, our travel training program helps people with a higher level of independence to travel freely within the community. At Rising Ground, any skill that would increase someone's independence and quality of life is on the table.

Continuing progress amid trying times

For many in our IDD programs, the key to success is consistency. Creating routines re-enforces skills learned in the home and in programs. When the Covid-19 pandemic started, continuing this work was vital even when those routines were upended. Our staff jumped in and worked to calm fears and help those we support to understand the new world in which we all found ourselves. “At the beginning, almost everybody had difficulty adjusting. They didn’t understand what was going on,” explains Claudia Harrison (*below*), a Direct Support Professional and Medical Coordinator for the four residences at Co-Op City. “Once they started understanding what was going on, it got easier. It was hard with mask wearing and hand washing, but that has become the norm now. They’ve gotten used to this new way of life.”

With 25 years of experience working with adults with IDD, Harrison understands the needs of the people she supports. “It has taught me a lot of patience. You have to be caring. You have to be understanding,” she explains. Patience and compassion are the keystones of her work helping residents to achieve their goals. Whether it is Gerald’s interest in art or another resident’s desire to get a job at a movie theater, she identifies the steps needed to achieve those goals, works with a team and the individual to make progress, and celebrates each success along the way.

“It is the reward in seeing how I can make others happy,” Harrison says. “Once you show love and encouragement, you can see them feel motivated to continue progressing. Whatever we can do to make it happen, we will go the extra mile. There is truly a world of difference that can be made.”

Donation allows progress despite pandemic

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, various center-based programs for people with IDD were not able to continue in person. Our team met the challenge by adapting to virtual activities, skill building, and other programs. To ensure continued progress, we got help from several of our individual and corporate donors. This includes Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, who provided us with a \$10,000 grant to provide laptops for individuals in our Day Habilitation program to fully participate in virtual-based activities.

See more inside about how foundation support helps to meet specific needs and foster innovation!

Your support is vital as we continue creating hope and opportunity!

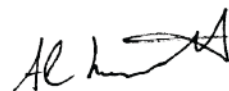
Dear friends,

The last year has been an unprecedented and uncertain time for all of us. The way all of us live and operate has changed drastically, and this has been no less true of Rising Ground. We have continued to provide vital supports and resources to New Yorkers in need — children, adults, and families who faced various forms of adversity that was only compounded by the hardships of a global health crisis and its economic impacts.

To meet the needs during this trying time has required an additional amount of resilience, innovation, and dedication. In this newsletter, we feature our services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The staff who work in our residences have been exceptional and essential through the pandemic, as always. Our team has continued to show up and provide unwavering dedication to those we support, making certain they are safe, informed, comforted, and growing.

To continue our life-affirming work has required the steadfast support and generosity of donors and friends like you. As you will see in these pages, it is only through the support of individuals, corporations, foundations, government partners, and volunteers that our work is possible. As you will read, we even launched several initiatives during this challenging time.

Thank you for your commitment to our work and to the 25,000 New Yorkers whose lives we positively touch each and every day!



Alan Mucatel
Chief Executive Officer



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RISING NEWSLETTER

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DONORS

Adapting to the times, you continued to support Rising Ground events

A global pandemic could not stop you, our generous donors, from coming together (so to speak) to celebrate our work on behalf of New Yorkers in need and raise vital funds in support of our 55 programs. In September, we held our **Annual Gala** and Life-Changer Service Auction online. In a fitting tribute, we honored Rising Ground's essential workers with the *Champion for Children Award* and presented longtime supporter BNY Mellon with the *Thelma Stackhouse Award*. You can still view the Virtual Gala online at www.RisingGround.org/VirtualGala2020. In November, our Associate Board exhibited their generosity and ingenuity by hosting a virtual fitness series, **Fit For Families**, raising funds to contribute to our 2020 Holiday Gift Card Drive. **Without you, we would not be able to help as many of our neighbors as we do. Thank you!**

Guests raise a glass during our 2020 Virtual Gala with emcee Chuck Nice on screen.



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer mentors go virtual, continue to connect with youth amid pandemic

We rely on hundreds of volunteers to mentor youth, create connections with children, and facilitate community events. The Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to in-person volunteering this past year, as we social distanced for everyone's safety. But that did not mean your commitment to help stopped.

Many committed volunteers continued to have a positive impact on the lives of the young people we support throughout this uncertain time.



For example, members of the **New York Junior League** (left) continued the LIFT (Lead Inspire Focus Thrive) mentoring program with young women in our Residential Treatment Center and Transitional Independent Living programs. Through monthly virtual meetings, the mentors held activities to build youths' confidence as they gained life skills and insights from these professionals.

Another example is the volunteers from **Pinterest** who continued a mentorship program with youth from the Biondi Education Center. In this effort, students explore jobs in marketing and obtain general professional skills. Through virtual meetings, the mentors and mentees discuss careers and work together to create a plan to brand and market a product.

You helped make the holidays brighter for our youth and families!

HOLIDAY GIFT CARD DRIVE

With the help of our friends, Rising Ground ensures the holidays are joyous and cheerful for the thousands of youth and children we support. For some, a gift from Rising Ground will be the only one they receive. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, many families are facing even greater financial hardship and uncertainty. This year, we were not able to gather and deliver gifts throughout the city, but not even these exceptional times could stop our holiday supporters from spreading joy. This year, we shifted to giving out gift cards to make it easier and safer. Thanks to you, our many generous donors and partners, we were able to provide gifts to more than 2,500 young people and families. Our holiday donors contributed more than \$25,000 to make sure no child went without a holiday present this year. In addition to hundreds of individual and corporate donors, we also benefited from generous efforts by several organizations. These included Toys For Tots, 9 Hugs, United Nations Federal Credit Union, United Way of Westchester and Putnam, FFWA, and the Asbury United Methodist Church.

Left: Some of the gift cards Rising Ground was able to distribute to youth and families this holiday season with your support. Right: Starbucks Community Store Manager Camille McIntosh, herself a former foster and adoptive parent with Rising Ground, drops off a donation of toys gathered through a Starbucks holiday drive to support children in our family stabilization programs.



PROGRAM UPDATES

New program partners with NYC to address systemic gender bias

At the intersection of systemic racism and gender bias, young women of color — particularly those who identify across the LGBTQ+ spectrum — face staggering levels of state surveillance and criminalization. In response to this mass criminalization, Rising Ground is partnering with Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) to launch *JustUs*, New York City's first-ever gender-responsive diversion program for girls and other gender-nonconforming young people who are involved with or at risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. *JustUs* is a three-year demonstration initiative funded by New York City and inspired by years of work by the Task Force on Ending Girls Incarceration in New York City. "We begin with a holistic process to understand who each human is, where they are coming from, what they need, what they want, and how we can best support them so that they can thrive," says Helianis Quijada Salazar, Director of *JustUs*. "We then draw up a plan for what each girl needs to make that a reality."



New foster care initiative brings staff with lived experience into process

In 2020, Rising Ground was selected as one of two nonprofits to partner with the New York City Administration for Children's Services to launch the **Parents Supporting Parents** program. Through this initiative, we will engage four Parent Advocates — parents who themselves have been involved in the foster care system. They have experienced the anger, resentment, frustration, and sorrow that families often feel when a child is removed from their home. "Parent Advocates have lived experience that, to parents who have a child in foster care with Rising Ground, make them inherently less threatening and more approachable than other staff," explains Rising Ground CEO Alan Mucatel. "Parents are more likely to open up to someone who has experienced foster care personally." This initiative is the fourth Rising Ground program to introduce "credible messengers" — people who have overcome the challenges faced by the persons they support — into the care we provide. We employ credible messengers in our work with survivors of intimate partner violence, non-custodial fathers, and youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Foundation partnerships foster innovation in work with children and families

Rising Ground relies on many sources of funding in our efforts to help New York City children, adults, and families find positive paths forward. While government contracts provide the financial backbone of many of our 55 programs, it is private sources of income that allow us to add staff, resources, and enhancements that make our work more impactful. In addition to individual and corporate supporters, foundations provide critical funding to our work.

Rising Ground is proud to have a diverse array of foundation partners with whom we share a mission of helping children, adults, and families rise above adversity. We are pleased to be able to demonstrate outcomes and the impact of their investment in our work. However, the value we place on our supportive partnerships can never be adequately measured.

Recent examples of our foundation support include:

The **Redlich Horowitz Foundation** provided a \$200,000 two-year grant in support of *Co-Parenting*, a transformation of the traditional role of foster parents from simply caregiver of children to also being a partner with parents. The initiative is intended to reunite families more quickly and successfully.

The **Stella & Charles Guttman Foundation** provides \$100,000 annually for ParentChild+, an early literacy program where Early Learning Specialists typically visit the home twice a week. They bring books and educational toys (right) to advance young children's literacy and support parents' role as the child's first teacher. During the pandemic, this work has continued virtually.

The **Thomas & Agnes Carvel Foundation** granted us \$15,000 in support of tutoring and STEM Club activities at our Residential Treatment Center. The Club provides science and math tutoring to students after school.

See a full list of foundation and other supporters in our Annual Report online at www.RisingGround.org.



Join us in commemorating our 190th anniversary!

On March 7, 1831, the Leake & Watts Orphan House opened its doors in lower Manhattan. Over the next century, the orphanage would move uptown to Washington Heights and then to a 40-acre campus in Yonkers along the Hudson River.

As society and the needs of children and families have evolved, so has Rising Ground. From our earliest experience meeting the needs of children in the most crucial time in their lives, in their greatest moments of need, we have grown into a leading nonprofit human services organization with 55 programs all across New York City. Today, we provide children, adults, and families with the skills and resources to overcome various forms of adversity and find positive paths forward.



Join the celebration!

Beginning with a kickoff anniversary celebration in March 2021 and culminating in a celebratory Gala in March 2022, we will host a year of special events commemorating 190 years of helping New Yorkers in need. These events will celebrate our mission and explore our impact on the lives of New Yorkers since 1831. Our yearlong celebration will include a lecture series, the premiere of a video showcasing our rich history, and more. We hope you'll join us in celebrating this milestone in our long history of providing hope and opportunity for New York.

Learn more at

www.RisingGround.org/190

Swing into action!

Rising Ground Giving Day

MONDAY, MARCH 8

Join us in celebrating 190 years of helping New York City children, adults, and families find positive paths forward! Support Rising Ground's life-affirming work at www.RisingGround.org/GivingDay



Driven by the belief that each of us can thrive when life has hope and opportunity, Rising Ground provides caring support and proven paths to positive change, helping New York City area children, adults, and families rise above adversity. Founded as an orphanage in 1831, Rising Ground is a leading nonprofit human services organization that has been at the forefront of evolving community needs and is a leader in utilizing results-driven, evidence-based practices. Today, the organization's work is a positive force in the lives of more than 25,000 individuals annually across more than 55 programs at more than 50 sites.

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