

Creating Space for Healing and Hope

Walking into Rising Ground's Trauma Recovery Center (TRC) on bustling Church Avenue in East Flatbush, Brooklyn there is an immediate vibe shift.

The walls of the space are painted with soothing and inviting colors, and the reception area is decorated with scenes from nature, accentuated by a trickling water feature. This calmness extends into the therapy rooms that are similarly decorated with beach scenes and soft coral colors. A vibrant children's playroom holds an array of enticing toys and books.

It feels warm. It feels welcoming. It feels safe.

All of this is deliberate and an integral part of the TRC which blends comprehensive care, advocacy, and outreach for survivors of trauma, violence, and loss. The TRC helps those who have experienced violent crimes overcome barriers to accessing mental health treatment, health care, and legal resources in the acute aftermath of trauma. It supports recent victims of violent crime, including survivors of physical assault, sexual assault, gun violence, stabbings, domestic violence, and human trafficking.

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The children's space and members of the TRC team on opening day.



The Yard team and members of the community visiting the space on opening day.

A New Home for Community & Connection

Rising Ground expanded our presence in Brooklyn in March with the grand opening of The Yard – East Flatbush Family Enrichment Center's vibrant new space. Located at 3521 Church Avenue (adjacent to the Trauma Recovery Center) it includes a community meeting space, a children's play area and library, access to computers and printers, a food pantry provided by The Goldburg Family Foundation, a kitchen, laundry facilities, and a community closet for donated clothing. Everything about the Family Enrichment Center (FEC) – including the name, the physical layout, and the offerings it provides – is co-designed with families and community members. Participation in activities and events is open to all community members. At the center, families and children can connect with neighbors, volunteer their time, and connect to the resources and support they need to thrive. Community members are invited to take part in bimonthly virtual town hall meetings to express their ideas about what offerings and services they want to see at the FEC.

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Rising Ground's TRC was launched in August 2023 providing services virtually and in the community until the physical space opened. To date it has supported over 160 survivors of trauma, defined as "a severe traumatic event that resulted in a death of a loved one or severe change in daily life that is unsustainable." The new space at 3521 Church Avenue opened in March and allows the TRC to expand its reach deeper into the community and provide onsite care. TRC staff includes therapists, a community support coordinator, and a holistic healer. Services are available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. The TRC provides onsite childcare for clients in session. Survivors of trauma are accepted for free services regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, citizenship status, religion/spirituality, nationality, socioeconomic status, and insurance status.

Rising Ground's TRC was established with New York City Council funding for recovery support in communities underserved by traditional victim services but most affected by violence. The TRC's model of care was developed in 2001 at the University of California San Francisco that has been proven to improve the economic, health, and social outcomes of those who receive services. They improve public safety by interrupting cycles of violence and increasing participation in the legal process.

the positive transformation it catalyzes within the lives of individuals facing complex challenges of the community. We are excited to expand this work with the opening of our new location and encourage people needing help to contact us."

The physical location enables Rising Ground's TRC staff to act quickly when a traumatic incident occurs in the community. Just a month after moving into the new space, children at the nearby Cortelyou Academy witnessed an accident when a school bus struck a mother and her child. They survived but were severely injured and the whole school community was left shaken.

"We went into the classrooms and held workshops to help the kids process what they had seen. We taught them coping strategies, we gave them some stress balls and we had them do art activities to express their emotions. We wanted them to have outlets to process that something scary had happened, that they survived it, and that we can talk about it," says Cadet Mareus.

In another example, TRC staff stepped in following a fire in a well-known local pizza shop where many onlookers had gathered in the street. Staff went to the site to provide assistance to the owners of the building and to community members.

The core of the TRC's work is with survivors of severe trauma through the free therapy sessions it offers. Services often begin with case management support to address practical needs. This may include connecting them to resources for safer or more stable housing or to alleviate food insecurity, connecting them to legal assistance, helping them to return to work, or assisting with access to victim compensation programs. Without these concrete interventions, the survivor may face a heightened risk of long-term instability and further victimization, deepening the cycle of trauma and hardship.

Cadet Mareus says offering these services, particularly resources for housing and financial assistance, has surprised some of the people they support and has been much welcomed. It is then in therapy that the work on emotional well-being begins.



L-R: ENDGBV Commissioner Saloni Sethi, Rising Ground CEO Alan Mucatel, and New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams. Photo: John McCarten/NYC Council Media Unit.

"The outcomes of the TRC's efforts are profound and directly impact the community we serve," says Director Gerardine Cadet Mareus. "We've already observed that clients experience a decrease in psychological and medical symptoms and an overall improvement in the quality of life. The TRC's success is not just measured in numbers but in

"There's a change in someone's body as a result of being exposed to a really stressful incident," she says. "In the case of a fire, it could translate into difficulty sleeping or intrusive thoughts about what had happened. They could have visions of it in the middle of working. There could be a deep sadness, anxiety, rage and anger: 'Why did this happen to me?' Trauma impacts everybody differently but there is a clear differentiation between how they were functioning before the incident and afterwards. We want to provide a space where we can gently help people start to feel and experience the trauma and to process these emotions."

She says sessions involve psychoeducation – guiding people receiving help in understanding why they may feel or act a certain way.

"If someone has been physically abused there can be a lot of anger. When they come into therapy, they may say 'I'm so angry all the time, there's something wrong with me,' or 'I don't know why I always want to fight somebody.' They may think they've become a violent person. They don't realize it's because something happened to them. We help them see that it is not who they are but who they have become as a result of an experience, which is helpful to many people."

Rising Ground TRC staff also provide holistic services that help to build a high level of trust with the people they support. They are themselves supported with regular clinical supervision, group meetings, and training. As a member of the National Alliance of Trauma Recovery Centers (NATRC),

they have access to information on best practices and data drawn from the 59 programs around the country. A NATRC survey of New York State clients included the following testimonial, illustrating that the TRC space is indeed empowering healing and embracing hope: "I do not usually feel safe, respected, or understood in the community, but [the TRC] is the one place where I feel the most like me. I feel like I can come here to find peace and relaxation, without worrying about being brushed off. I am very grateful for the fact that this space exists; I would not have been able to handle everything the way that I have if it were not for you all. I am very grateful for the way you have all supported me and my family in a very open and honest way." ★



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Walk-ins welcome

Rising Hope: Anti-Human Trafficking

Rising Hope is a new Rising Ground initiative that addresses human trafficking and the associated harms it causes. Overseen by Coordinator, Jennifer Hammer, Rising Hope's efforts specifically target vulnerable youth. With a two-year grant from the New York Community Trust, Rising Hope increases support available to young people who have been trafficked, expands staff knowledge of human trafficking through trainings and assistance, and mitigates the criminalization of those impacted by trafficking through training, assessments, interventions, mentoring, counseling, outreach, and collaborations. In addition to working with Rising Ground programs, Jennifer will train providers at government agencies and other nonprofits.

