

SELF ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, BE ABOUT IT

YAI ARTISTS SHOWCASE THEIR WORK

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

The flyer/poster said it all: “Friday, March 1, 2019 from 4pm to 8pm at 460 West 34th Street, New York, NY 1st Floor Art Studio.” Same building where YAI (Youth Adult Institute are located). Come and meet artists, listen to live music, and buy some art for your walls.

For many artists and staff people there it was not only a joy to promote their work, it was an accomplishment for both and for more positive things to come. Hear the artists from their own words.

Jimmy Tucker—“It feels great to show my work here it’s the perfect place and I get fine support from the staff.”

Brian Dyer—“I love Japanese Animation, it was my calling. I like art and I put 2 and 2 together and started my own Anime characters.”

Luis J Morgado—“I feel like I’ve accomplished so much when I present my artwork!”

Michelle Weismann—“It’s a joy! It’s an accomplishment!”

Jennifer Quinones added “It’s not an accomplishment it shows the world despite our disabilities we can do it with pride.”

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Rosita Ramos sits at a table with her art work displayed

Staff at YAI who were working at the event Anna Schechter stated, "Seeing their work is so impressive, they're so happy." Quimetta Perle who works in the Arts and Culture program was asked, "Do you see their work in Arts Museums in New York City, and beyond? Perle answered Yes!

"It feels great to show my work here it's the perfect place and I get fine support from the staff."

To add, one saw images of Famed Artist Frida Kahlo, who had a disability, on clothing. She most likely looking down saying ADELANTE—meaning "go forward with pride!"

"I feel like I've accomplished so much when I present my artwork!"



YAI artist Luis Morgado showcases his favorite bands and television characters through his art

CHAT WITH CAR'MELO

INTERVIEW WITH SANDRA FEINBLUM

What is your educational background?

I have a Bachelor's degree from Baruch College (1975) and a Master of Social Work degree from Hunter College (1978). City universities all the way. I also spent several years studying at a Psychoanalytic Institute.

Who recommended you to work for YAI?

I knew a lot about YAI as a great agency from my colleague at the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), Raymond Jacobs and of course my sister, Bobra Fyne. In a strange twist of fate, when Raymond died, Bobra took over his position as AIDS educator and Sexuality Trainer.

What kind of work did you do?

I have worn many different hats throughout my career. I was a sales manager both domestically and internationally for the first data communications company in the United States and the oldest national firm in Rome, Italy. I have had a private psychotherapy practice for 40 years and a management consulting practice to Architect and Design firms since 1986. My prior volunteer work was with the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) where I began as a volunteer in 1983 and then went on staff in 1984 supervising programs of over 2000 volunteers. I also am a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator and helped manage volunteers at the first dedicated Wildlife Hospital in NYC.

What is your major role in YAI?

I am the Volunteer Coordinator for YAI. My major role is to recruit, interview, onboard and place volunteers throughout all of YAI and our affiliate agencies, I'm a matchmaker! It is a great job because I get to interact with so many people and staff throughout the agency. I also supervise and mentor undergraduate and high-school interns.

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What do you bring to the table in volunteerism at YAI?

I was hired by YAI to start the Volunteer Program and I have managed many start-ups in my career. I am very passionate about volunteerism. Not just for the service volunteers provide but how it helps build self-esteem when people feel they are making a contribution to the world.



Sandra Feinblum and Car'melo Grau

My favorite times are when volunteers express to me that they never knew how much they could offer and see themselves differently because of their experiences here. All of my background in business, as a psychotherapist, in volunteer management, and consulting apply to my current role.

How do you feel about the R word in relating for people with I/DD?

Inaccurate and abhorrent. The inappropriateness and hurtfulness of the R word should be taught in school and over the media until it no longer exists.

What role did your sister Bobra Fyne play in your life and in YAI?

Bobra and I really developed our friendship in our 50's. We discovered we had a great deal in common and over time became very close. She is super talented as a professional and as a crafts artist, Bobra is a great inspiration to everyone that knows her. We had a wonderful year working together at YAI before she married, retired and moved to Belfast, Ireland. I was very fortunate that the great goodwill that everyone felt for her was automatically offered to me at YAI. In the last couple of years, Bobra has fought cancer and won! She is a true warrior and I love her to the moon and back. She has been in Ireland for 3 years now and everyday people at YAI ask me to send her their love. I'm a very grateful and lucky sister.

Bobra did so much at YAI during her 23-year tenure and I am very proud of her. She was very active in the organization and ongoing Self-Advocate group, she began the truly groundbreaking Friday night dating social which continues today.

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As a terrific trainer and sexual advocate, she helped many people we support and the staff change attitudes about disability and sexuality and to grow professionally. She handed out condoms like candy. There is so much more she accomplished - too much for this article. While I visit her when I can and she visits New York when she is able to, I still miss her every day.

Can Self Advocates volunteer in any events, projects or any type of work?

I already consider Self Advocates volunteers. The hard work you all do on behalf of YAI as a whole is remarkable and has helped bring much-needed change to all sectors of the community-at-large and government. Of course, Self Advocates can volunteer in other areas within YAI. Shoot me an email (sandra.feinblum@yai.org) and fill out a volunteer application at yai.org/volunteer and the process will roll out as it does for all that apply.

QCDD SPEECH

BY MICHAEL HOWARD



Michael Howard gives his speech at QCDD

Here is the speech I gave at The Queens Council of Developmental Disabilities (QCDD). It was on Friday, March 8, 2019. This speech is about important policies and is aimed at Governor Cuomo in particular. It would be great if this problem got media attention.

My name is Michael J. Howard (Mike or M.J.). I reside in Queens all my life: born on March 8th 1982 in St. Albans, raised in Jamaica Estates for 6 months and Woodside for almost 22 years and now currently live in Far Rockaway nearly 6 years.

bfair2directcare: I'm excited that the \$15 minimum wage had started since New Years Eve. I just hope that any staff who works with people with disabilities like myself deserves a pay increase or whatever. Green New Deal from a US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from congressional district 14 would be a perfect solution for multiple jobs.

Affordable housing: I just hope that the real estate developers and landlords will take people with disabilities as they take people without disabilities who may have children in by giving them a place to live. This need to be called for justice.

Transportation: Standard Transportation Manufacturing Corporation buses need to be eliminated and replaced by low-floored buses with digital navigation boxes in case some of us may not have a smartphone. Most subway stations need to be accessible by 2024 or 2029 through MTA President Andy Byford's Fast Forward agenda.

People with disabilities are human beings, deserves to be heard: We are your constituents, we're activists, we're part of the community, we're not pawns. Fighting for us is fighting for everyone.

FAMED AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INSPIRATION TO ALL

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

February was African American History Month and March was Women's History Month. As the country celebrates, we remember many who despite their obstacles of their disability continue to be an inspiration to all. We have done many profiles in the past on Abolitionist Harriet Tubman, who has a statue dedicated to her and it's been reported that her face will be on a dollar bill.

Here are some more African Americans that were highlighted and taken from respectability.org in honor of Black History Month.

Haben Girma became the first deaf/blind person to graduate from law school when she earned her degree from Harvard Law School in 2013. She is a Civil Rights Attorney who advocates for disability rights and travels the country changing people's perceptions of the disability community.

Maya Angelou was an award-winning author, poet, civil rights activist, college professor, and screen writer. Angelou had selective mutism due to physical and psychological trauma she endured. In the five-year span that she experienced this, her listening, observing, and memorizing skills improved and her love of books expanded.

Diana Elizabeth Jordan, an award-winning actress, writer, producer and director, is an important figure in the conversation about the inclusivity or lack thereof of people with disabilities in Hollywood. Jordan has cerebral palsy and the first actor with a disability to obtain a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from California State University Long Beach.

Haben Girma became the first deaf/blind person to graduate from law school when she earned her degree from Harvard Law School in 2013

Simone Biles is known widely as the Olympic champion who dominated the sport of gymnastics during the 2016 Rio Olympics. Biles has won four consecutive all around titles and is the first female to do so since the 1970's. At a young age, Biles was diagnosed with Attention Deficient Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Since being vocal regarding her ADHD, many have classified her as a hero, especially those who have endured stigma from the disability.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977) was a civil rights activist who was important in efforts to help African Americans register to vote. She suffered kidney damage and had polio. During her activism, she was subject to being beaten various times, yet that didn't stop her. She was stated proudly, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Wilma Rudolph (1940–1994) survived premature birth but endured several early-childhood illnesses. At one point, she had infantile paralysis and a loss of strength to her left leg. In the 1960 Olympics, she won three gold medals.

I would like to say thank you for becoming an inspiration to all.

INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA PRESEDO, FROM FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

Editor's note: Jessica is the author's niece

How did you get started at the Food Bank For New York City?

I got started at Food Bank For New York City after transitioning from another non-profit organization working with volunteers. At Food Bank, I work with groups of volunteers from corporations, mainly based in New York City, to engage their employees in volunteer work. Food Bank's volunteer projects focus on ending hunger in New York City.

What kind of projects do you do for the Food Bank? And where?

I work on a volunteer project called Food Bank 2 Go in which we bring the Food Bank warehouse to a corporate office. We truck in pallets of food and conduct an in-office volunteer project for the employees of the sponsor company. The projects generally occur in Manhattan, but we can go to any site in the five boroughs.

I also recruit and place volunteer groups to support our programs at our Hunts Point Distribution Warehouse and our West Harlem Community Kitchen and Pantry. Alongside many other team members, I help to plan our annual MLK Day of Service which engaged over 600 volunteers this year!

How did you get involved with the New York City Wine and Food Festival?

Food Bank For New York City is a benefiting charity of the annual New York City Wine and Food Festival. The Food Bank team recruits and engages over 2,000 volunteers throughout the multi-day festival to ensure that all parts of the festival are seamless for guests. Volunteers help to set up booths, greet festival guests, and if the volunteer is a trained chef, they can assist some of the celebrity chefs to prepare food.

When you travel to the place where your project is do you take someone with you?

I generally travel independently when going to project locations. Food Bank For New York City has four office sites, so it is important to be confident traveling on public transit to get to our sites. Most of our locations are located steps away from a subway station, and our warehouse is on a bus line.

If you had a chance to travel abroad to do a huge event would you do it?

I absolutely love to travel, and would be thrilled to plan a project abroad. When I lived in Madrid, Spain I volunteered for an organization that took children with special needs on excursions to interesting places in Madrid. We met up on Saturdays and would have a sports day in the park or take a tour of a museum. It was a great way to see the city and connect with some other people living in Madrid.

Do you see yourself at the same job? Or do something else?

The best part of my job is being able to connect volunteers to service opportunities. Oftentimes people do not realize how they can help others, and it is fantastic to give volunteers the chance to connect with other people and causes they really care about. I plan to continue on in my career working with volunteers.

How do you feel about erasing the R word?

I am a supporter of erasing the R word. After attending a Self Advocacy meeting last year, I saw how hard all of the self advocates are working to spread awareness and educate the public on the hurtful nature of the R word. I proudly wear my "Erase the R Word" button, and I encourage my social network to also not use any type of derogatory language.



Jessica Presedo

JUAN'S GOODBYE

BY ALLAN FRASER

His name is Juan Ferman. He is very nice and he's polite. We're going to miss him at Bragg Street. He said he'll come and visit us once he leaves. We're throwing a surprise party for his goodbye. We're cooking for Juan. My girlfriend is going to make fried plantains and I am making Spanish rice and beans. We're going to find out what kind of cake Juan likes. We're going to decorate the downstairs with balloons and banners saying "Good Luck" with fancy tablecloth. I am going to DJ the party at Bragg Street and play Spanish music. I am the main one planning the party.

Juans going to the new residence in Flatbush in April. He is leaving soon. I'm going to miss his jokes. He's a great Supervisor.



Juan Ferman

I HAVE A DISABILITY, BUT I AM LEARNING TO COOK FOR MYSELF

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD



We will have Sunday dinner after church at my house. We have fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, collared greens, ham, lasagna, cornbread, and mashed potatoes with gravy.

I am learning to cook the fried chicken, rice-a-roni, macaroni and cheese, and cake. I read the recipes for dinner after church. I'm also learning how to set the dinner table.

I take small bites with help from my fork when I eat dinner. I used my napkin to wipe my hands and lips when I was finished.

Next Sunday dinner with my family, I will learn how to make banana pudding.

AN EVENING AT THE IHOPE ART EXHIBIT

BY CAR'MELO GRAU-PUIG

On March 20th, 2019 at the iHOPE Art Exhibit took place at the Mutual of America which graciously donated the space for this wonderful event in New York City, NY. This was their 1st fundraiser in benefiting for their school and raising such a wonderful cause celebrating the accomplishments of children who have traumatic brain injury as well as having the auctions and raffling tickets to win big and all the money goes back to their programs. Also, let me tell all of you these children have the gift of art and painting and it looked so amazing it made me want to go back into painting and do something that comes from the heart and soul. Everyday these kids continue to inspire everybody of what they can accomplish by using the proper tools to get where they're at and it's such a blessing for me to show my support in looking at these beautiful creations of drawings, art and paintings. These staff had worked very hard around the clock in everyday lives in being there for the students and having these kids use the technology to communicate in what they need to accomplish their goals.



Car'melo Grau

There were a lot of familiar faces that were at the fundraiser whom I used to work with in the past like **Karen Tumulty**, who is now the principal of iHOPE; **Megan Wenzel**, iHOPE's Director of Speech Language and Hearing and a few other people that were there at the event and it was such an amazing evening beyond what I expected and in my opinion these kids deserve what they accomplished and having their voices to be heard. It reminds me of this quote:

These kids now have the opportunity to communicate, to learn language, and to learn the kinds of concepts that other children are learning.

Dr. Janice C. Light Professor - The Hintz Family Endowed Chair in Children's Communicative Competence (Penn State – College of Health & Human Development)

MY TRIP TO ALBANY

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

On February 11, I went to Albany to lobby for more money. I lobbied for YAI can keep their programs open so people who have disabilities can get their services and so care coordinators can keep their jobs. As President of the YAI Self Advocate group, I represent that all people who have disabilities need support for the services they need. I am glad that I got to speak on their behalf. I am willing to go back to Albany again in 2020.



Janice (second from left) and other YAI representatives at the State Capitol

YOUNG BOWLER

BY ALLAN FRASER



Tony Kujawa, bowler

He has a disability, but he played a 300 score when bowling. Tony Kujawa is his name. He's 34 years old and he's a good bowler. He plays with a partner and the partner bowls from a wheelchair. His parents were very, very happy of him bowling and of how passionate he is. I saw it on Channel 7 news and I said "wow, he's good at bowling! He should be joining us at Special Olympics." I'm

part of a league for Special Olympics bowling. I feel happy when I bowl with a disability and with the other leagues.

NELLIE BLY AND THE HISTORY OF BLACKWELL ISLAND

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ



Nellie Bly

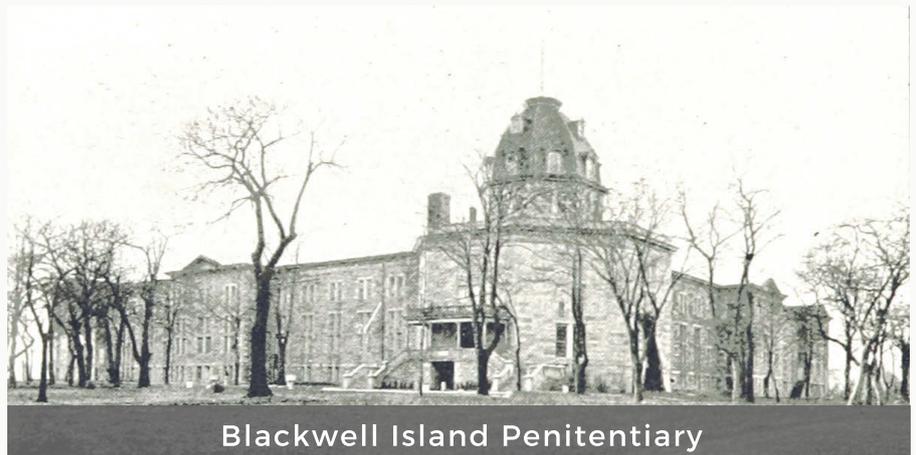
Long before Roosevelt Island became an island where people lived with businesses and a tramway taking a person from A to Z, there was Blackwell Island. An article by Politico magazine quoted, “Accordingly, 1829 saw one of the first institutions constructed on the island, Blackwell’s Island Penitentiary—a building that was continually expanded for decades, growing in tandem with New York’s ever-increasing number of felons. Though originating as a single, solitary unit, by century’s end the mammoth penitentiary would stretch over a quarter mile of the south end of the island. Blackwell’s Penitentiary was a massive stone structure with slits for windows and 6 by 8 foot cells. The building’s many wings reeked of humanity, grew freezing in the winter and became unbearably stifling in the summer. Prisoners here were put to work.”

It was here where a reporter, known as Nellie Bly, put investigative reporting on the map. She went undercover to expose the dangers and atrocities, which were taking place at the now mental asylum. While reporting for the newspaper New York World in 1887, she did something no reporter ever dared to do. She went undercover, describing herself as mentally ill, and got herself committed to the asylum.

While she was there, she noticed a lot. Women walking in the cold halls, women stripped naked by staff when entering bathrooms, and the nasty sleeping arrangements with rodents present. She stated, “Most of the doctors there were careless in their diagnosis.” She said in her book *Ten Days in a Madhouse*, “For once I did look insane.”

Her reporting helped expose the exploitation of human rights and atrocities that took place there. It also increased investigations of other mental institutions hospitals.

So before we talk about Willowbrook, let’s remember Nellie Bly and the history of Blackwell Island.



Blackwell Island Penitentiary