

DELIBERATIONS

NATHANIEL CELEBRATES SIX YEARS OF SUCCESS

When the Nathaniel Project began operations, its small staff stretched to provide an alternative sentence for eight mentally ill, felony-level offenders. Six years later, the now seven-member Nathaniel Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week and serves nearly 70 active clients. The ACT team provides core services that include a full range of clinical treatment, psychosocial rehabilitation, integrated treatment for substance abuse, crisis intervention, and community support services targeting daily activities, education, empowerment and self-help, family life, health, housing, medication, problem solving, social relationships, and training and work opportunities.

“We’re like a mobile outpatient clinic,” Bradley Jacobs, ACT Team Leader, said. “The goal is to provide 80 percent of our services in the community. There’s less room for clients to fall through the cracks because we go to them.”

Since 2000, Nathaniel has provided an alternative sentence for more than 189 offenders with severe mental illness. Of clients eligible to complete the two-year program, 65% have been successful. Despite this high comple-

tion rate, the program had never held a formal graduation until this past May when current and past graduates were honored in a ceremony at Pace University themed *We Rise*.

“Our primary motive in planning the [graduation] was to celebrate both our current clients and all of our clients over the past six years who have gotten their lives together and built a life in the community,” said Ann-Marie Louison, CASES’ Director of Mental Health Programs.

The ceremony included acknowledgment of agencies, funders, and individuals who have supported

Nathaniel since its inception. Honorees included Mary Beth Anderson of the Legal Aid Society, Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget Brennan, the van Ameringen Foundation, and Pathways to Housing. Speakers included John Feinblatt, the Criminal Justice Coordinator of New York City, and Dr. Hank Steadman, President of Policy Research Associates and Director of the National GAINS Center. Dr. Steadman, who works with communities nationwide to design jail-diversion programs for court-involved persons with mental illness, called Nathaniel graduates “heroes.”



Graduates of the Nathaniel Project celebrate at *We Rise*, a May 19th ceremony held at Pace University.

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“They have overcome such huge life challenges and have been willing to work so hard,” Dr. Steadman said. “As someone working with programs across the U.S., I was happy to provide recognition for the participants and [the Nathaniel Project]. This is a very accomplished program.”

Of course, for participants, completion of Nathaniel does not mean an end to mental illness. Nathaniel graduate Sandra M. spoke to this point in the ceremony’s opening remarks.

“Gone are the days when mental illness was something to be ashamed of,” Sandra said. “We acknowledge that we have a mental illness, which there is no cure for, only treatment—treatment that we have received and are still receiving. This day didn’t come without inner demons, without medication denial and refusal, wanting to leave,

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CASES EXPANDS EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

CASES has expanded educational services to better address the academic needs of the young people in our alternative-to-incarceration programs. Most of these youth are over-age and under-credited, older and with fewer credits than typical for their respective grade levels. The expansion of our educational services includes the implementation of new curriculum in CASES’ in-house education classes, enhanced academic services (including individual tutoring), and the creation of remedial, post-GED, and arts courses. The expansion both broadens and individualizes educational services at CASES. It also has capitalized on the momentum begun with last year’s certification of CASES as an official GED testing site.

“Before the new programs, for most of our teenagers, getting their diploma or their GED was not a tangible goal,” said Gabriel Dattatreyan,

Coordinator of On-Site Educational Services at CASES. “We needed to focus more on building [participants’] literacy skills.”

To better assess the skill levels of the young people in CASES, the Education Unit now administers the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) Assessment to all participants during orientation. STAR is a thorough assessment of reading and math levels and assesses appropriate class placement. Once assessed, students are placed in either the *Pre-GED* or *GED Prep* class taught in-house at CASES. In an effort to enable students to build connections across class curriculum, CASES instructors have developed social studies and science lessons linked to reading assignments (including *X-Men* comic books and *Macbeth*) and to thematic units centered around cultural exploration. With a goal of

engaging participants who do not attend traditional schools, these classes are offered Monday through Thursday in the mornings and afternoons and are also open to CEP alumni.

The new educational programming also includes remedial and small group instruction. These small classes combined with expanded individual tutoring provide individualized services to best address our participants’ varying academic needs. The new *Enrichment* class serves young people who have recently enrolled in an educational placement at CASES or at a school or community-based education program. *Enrichment* is designed as a remedial, skill-building class and is limited to eight students. CASES participants can also take advantage of expanded tutoring services twice a week in hour-long, individual sessions with CASES instructors.

“With the support of the new small

group classes we’re able to serve many additional kids,” said Mary Parr, an instructor in the Educational Unit.

In addition to the new courses targeting GED preparation, CASES is also in the process of implementing post-GED and arts courses. This summer, the unit will launch the pilot class, *Next Steps*. *Next Steps* will be offered to students who have already obtained their GED or high school diploma and will focus on academic skills, essay writing and research. Participants will receive assistance in applying for college. The Education Unit has also begun offering a series of arts courses that includes *Drawing and Portraiture*, *Photography*, and *Dance*—courses that enable youth at CASES who are not attending traditional schools to engage in elective-like classes they might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. **Q**

FOR THE RECORD: COMMUNITY PREP PRESENTS ART SHOW

On May 23, nearly 150 people crowded into the PCOG Gallery in Harlem for the opening of *For the Record*. The show displayed work created by student artists at Community Prep High School, CASES' transitional school for young people leaving incarceration and returning to the community.

"I got to express myself in a positive way through my artwork and creativity," one student artist said. "[*For the Record*] helped people understand it's not just about what I've done but what I can do."

The show was a mix of personal and political expression and showcased work created in the Arts classes and art therapy sessions at Community Prep.

"The art is a way for our students to express their pain and trauma and their hopes," said Liz Delli Carpini, the school's art therapist. "Displaying their art, having people see it, and then having to talk about the more vulnerable feelings that often underlie acting

out—the opening was a powerful moment for the kids."

The opening event, which included a spoken word performance, was the culmination of more than two months of planning. In early March, Lauren Adelman, *Arts and Economics* instructor at Community Prep, solicited student applications for paid curator positions. Of the ten applicants interviewed, Lauren along with School Director Ana Bermúdez selected a committee of five. These students received coaching on job etiquette and the necessity of committing fully to the project.

"From the beginning," Ana said, "the show was student-driven. They had a voice in everything."

Given responsibility, the students

produced. One student curator made the initial connection with Paula Coleman, owner of the PCOG Gallery. As a group, the curators chose the show's theme of breaking free from stereotypes about troubled young people. With Lauren's guidance, the committee also held auditions for the spoken word performance, promoted the show on local radio, made t-shirts and raffle tickets to sell at the opening, and met continually with CASES staff.

"The students learned responsibility and follow through," Lauren said. "They showed that they could do something very positive, and ultimately got to take that and do it in their neighborhood."

Ms. Coleman said many members of her community knew about

CASES, either because of their own experience or the experience of a relative or friend.

"The show was a great way of having a dialogue with the youth in the neighborhood," Ms. Coleman said. "For the youth in the program, it was one of their first introductions to actually doing something in the real world and being respected for doing it. I think they grew up."

After the show, the learning continued. A representative of M&T Bank met with students who had earned money working as curators or from selling their art. Nine of the students opened savings accounts, a final lesson in a project that emphasized learning by doing. According to Ana, *For the Record* demonstrated the value of alternative approaches to educating at risk young people and marked a seminal moment for Community Prep.

"It's a sign of maturity for the school," she said. "The students are beginning to experience a level of success in school they haven't experienced before, and they have developed the ability to effectively make their voices heard."

Mark Ryan, the school's Department of Education Principal, echoed Ana's sentiments, saying, "The art show was a joyous expression of our students' limitless potential for the positive." **C**



For the Record opens May 23rd at the PCOG Gallery in Harlem.

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drugs calling our names, old people, places and things . . . not wanting to wait for this day or believe that we would make it. Because we waited, because we endured—We Rise."

After the celebration, ACT Team members talked about the challenges facing Nathaniel as it moves into its seventh year. In particular, securing permanent housing remains a significant challenge for many program participants.

"It's hard for [clients] to engage in treatment if they don't have stable housing," Bradley said. "It reduces a lot of anxiety and stress if you have a place to live and you know you're not going to lose it."

Currently, with the support of the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, CASES is operating temporary housing in Brooklyn for a limited number of Nathaniel clients. Proposals have also been submitted to fund permanent housing in Brooklyn and the addition of a Housing Specialist to the ACT Team.

"You could say this is just your job," Bradley said, "but there's a feeling that you're putting yourself on the line by allowing people the space to really change themselves in the community as opposed to just locking them up. Our clients—by completing the program and convincing the courts that they no longer need to worry about them—they're accomplishing something quite large." **C**

PROGRAM UPDATES

CEP Honors Graduates

On May 31, CASES celebrated the most recent graduates of the Court Employment Project, our alternative-to-incarceration program for court-involved young people. Joe McLaughlin, Director of CEP, stated that graduation is "one of the most uplifting things we do here." The 150 graduates received certificates marking completion of CEP. Two participants, Glenn S. (see "Graduate Reflects" on page 3) and Curtis E., were recipients of the Ralph Daniels Scholarship Award. This award includes \$500 in college tuition for each scholarship winner. Speakers included Deputy Director of Case Coordination and Clinical Services, an instructor from the Education Unit, and CEP case managers. "This was a tough task," Joe said in addressing the graduates. "I'm proud that you completed it." We are all truly proud of our CEP graduates.



Linda Guzzo, Deputy Director of Case Coordination and Clinical Services, presents award to CEP graduate.

EXIT Concludes

CASES recently concluded operation of the EXIT Program, a demonstration project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and coordinated with the Mayor's office. EXIT provided low-level offenders with mental illness an alternative sentence consisting of a mandatory treatment assessment followed by a voluntary six months of services designed to reconnect clients to treatment and services in the community. During the course of the project, judges assigned 89% of eligible offenders to EXIT—demonstrating judicial recognition of the need for EXIT-like programs. Of participants who completed the treatment assessment, 71% maintained voluntary contact with program staff. A high level of engagement in the program was linked to decreased recidivism amongst clients. Based on EXIT outcomes, CASES is currently working with the Mayor's office to create a report of recommendations for serving low-level offenders with mental illness.

Day Custody Starts Strong

In the previous issue of *Deliberations*, we reported the launch of the Day Custody Program, an alternative to incarceration for repeat misdemeanor offenders. The three-day program includes community service, treatment readiness counseling, and referrals to community-based services and treatment programs. Through ten months of operation, Day Custody has served 400 participants, provided 375 service referrals, and had a completion rate of 80%.

GRADUATE REFLECTS ON TIME AT CASES

Transcript from CEP Graduation Speech by Glenn S.

In August of 2005, I ran into a bad experience. Through the grace of God and the compassion of a judge, instead of going to jail I was sent to CASES. On my first week of CASES, I came in with a negative attitude because I didn't want to be here. In my mind I was going to do these six months in CASES and go back to doing what I was doing before. I didn't want to make any friends. I just wanted to get CASES over with. One of my first encounters was with Jennifer [Scarborough, a CEP Case Management Team Leader]. Every time I saw Jennifer she was asking me questions. I tried so hard to stay away because I felt she was always trying to get into my business. After a while I began to feel that she wasn't trying to be nosy, she was just being concerned.

Jennifer introduced me to my case manager Greg [Wise] when I first got here. Me and Greg didn't kick it off good at first. Everyday I came in CASES Greg wouldn't let me leave until he sat me down, looked at me and asked me questions about my life. Also he would put me in different [CEP programs] to occupy my free time. One specific day I went to get my program for the week and I saw something that said, "Career Ex Interview." When I went to Greg, he told me it was an internship at a workplace and that they would pay me every week to work for ten weeks. I didn't want to do it because I felt it was a waste of time. Greg said, "Glenn, give it a try, you are a good candidate for it."

I went to the interview and met Andy [Fenwick, Senior Career Exploration Coordinator]. Andy was real cool when he interviewed me. He made me feel interested in the program and he was funny too. He told me that in order to get into the program I had to write two essays. I went home that very day and wrote both. A few weeks later I got the news that I was a part of the Career Ex Project. When I got there I met a lot of different peers who were cool and I found myself enjoying being around them. It got to

the point where I didn't really have time to hang out in my neighborhood because I was either working or coming to CASES to hang with Andy and my Career Ex classmates. In Career Ex we learned about how to dress up for interviews and speak to employers, but what was a surprise was that we learned we could all have fun without doing negative things.

While doing Career Ex I got a job at the Innocence Project where their job is to get prisoners that were wrongly convicted of a crime out of jail. When I first got there I was so nervous. At the Innocence Project there are people from every different type of background but they all work as a team. I kind of stayed to myself at first because I didn't know really what to speak about with them. I noticed when I first got there that people would come up to me and have conversations with me about everything. I started to get invitations to lunch and karaoke parties. I began to open up and it was such a great experience.

While attending CASES, I learned a lot about the decisions I make and about the people I affect when I make decisions. I now feel differently about life. I feel like everything is for a reason and even though I came to CASES for a bad reason, the outcome was good.

Right now I am currently finishing my third semester at [a CUNY college] where I plan on getting a degree in Computer Information Systems and one day becoming a computer technician. I want to thank my family for sticking by me through hard times, Jennifer and Greg for pushing me to do things that benefited me, Andy for being hard on me and funny at the same time, Sylvia [Plater-Thomas, Hall Monitor] and Neal [Pena, Hall Monitor] for making me laugh when I came through the door with my attitude and last but not least my fellow Career Ex classmates for also pushing me and making me realize how important teamwork is. **C**

CASES NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

Your contribution is vital to the work of CASES. Help us to address the root causes of criminal justice involvement and bring new opportunities to individuals with multiple barriers to success. Send a check to CASES, Attn: Development, 346 Broadway, 3rd Floor West, New York, New York 10013.

If you are interested in learning more about CASES' programs, please consult our website: WWW.CASES.ORG.

To make a donation, please contact Loyal Miles at (212) 553-6335 or send an e-mail to lmiles@cases.org.

LETTER FROM THE CEO

As I celebrated graduation season with our program participants, their relatives, and their friends, I was reminded of what it means to graduate from a CASES program. In order to graduate, our clients must "fulfill their court obligations." Fulfilling court obligations of course means reporting regularly to our caseworkers, staying off drugs, and staying out of trouble. At the same time, fulfilling court obligations at CASES also means engaging in the comprehensive support services we provide as an essential part of truly effective alternative-to-incarceration programming.

Consider the youth in the Court Employment Project (CEP). In serving the youngest of these participants, our goal remains to solidify their connection to and progress in school. This approach, however, may not best serve our older participants who are "over-age" and "under-credited"—young people who are too old and with too few credits for their respective grade levels. Often already 17 or 18, to many of these youth, attaining a high school diploma seems impossible.

For many of these older youth, the GED is a more tangible goal, and the GED opens doors to jobs, training programs, and two- and four-year colleges. CEP offers GED-prep classes that help our older participants address their specific educational needs (either in pursuit of their GED or to ease the transition for those who do want to return to school). For our participants, it matters that these services are here and that they can take the GED onsite. The potential impact of the GED for over-age, under-credited students is why I am especially pleased that CASES is partnering with the City's Department of Education in the implementation of a Learning-to-Work/GED Program to be operated this coming year during after-school hours at Community Prep High School (our school for youth returning from incarceration). This new initiative will be available to CPHS students, CEP participants, and other young people from around the City.

CASES' Nathaniel ACT Team also provides comprehensive services. ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) is a state-licensed, mobile program. Team members go to all of the boroughs to serve the program's adult participants, all of whom have a diagnosed mental illness, but each of whom has vastly different service needs. Their needs range from substance abuse to homelessness to unemployment to serious family conflict. Our specialists work at different levels with each individual client as needed, and from the beginning the client has a primary voice in defining his or her treatment goals.

The high level of participant input in Nathaniel services exemplifies the belief that court-involved individuals are best served through treatment and services that promote self-empowerment. As one CASES staff member recently told me, "We're punishing people with services!" It's an approach that prompts many of our graduates to view CASES as not simply an alternative to incarceration but as a provider of powerful services able to help them achieve real change in their lives.

JOEL COPPERMAN