

In our own words:

'Today, my mind is stronger and healthier, my emotions deeper and richer'

Submitted by Miguel

I joined The Bridge PROS program in New York City at the start of 2017. Since then, the program has improved, becoming more sophisticated and up-to-date. Even before the introduction of Zoom in the COVID-era, I had witnessed groups evolving, challenging PROS members to think more deeply and creatively, and in some cases, to work on assignments.

Undoubtedly, I have directly benefited from attending groups in this changing environment, as it has had a health-sustaining and stabilizing impact on my personal development, affecting every level of my life. Moreover, I have come to understand The Bridge as more than just a program delivering services to those with needs like my own, but it exists as a unique community in its own right. Today, I feel integrated into that community, and into a larger one, as well.

As someone who has previously benefited from a college education, you might assume I have achieved all I'm capable of intellectually. In fact, I have no intention of pursuing more advanced academic degrees. Psychologically, I seek to build on my character strengths and increase the scope of available coping skills at my disposal by being an agent of my own change.

From my perspective, such strengths and skills can be invested into the broader community of the city where I grew up and continue to live. Volunteering continues to provide an avenue for that kind of participation.

Even before the pandemic, I was an active member of New York Cares, and a mentor of a high-school student. Working with young people, particularly, has brought me great satisfaction.



In the future, I don't see what could prevent me from volunteering in similar ways.

Currently, I'm taking four, 45-minute, online (via Zoom) groups per week at The Bridge.

- *Stress Less Through Art*, a low-key variation on the traditional art class, focuses on releasing stress through creative expression. Exercises on "how to make a Zentangle" and "making a free-hand drawing with closed eyes" are just a few of the many explorations done in this group.
- *Coping with Depression Through Creative Expression* is another type of art group, similar to the first, which can include creative writing.
- *Book Club*, my favorite of the four, is a traditional book club where members vote from a pre-selected list of books, read a chosen book over a period of many weeks, and use the weekly group meetings to discuss and comment on the readings.
- Lastly, *Coping with Grief and Loss* provides members an opportunity to express and share some of their more disappointing life experiences in a supportive environment.

Once the pandemic has finally turned a corner, and the world returns to some kind of normalcy, I suspect my discomfort with certain social situations and general social anxiety will be tested again.

These tendencies have in the past debilitated my efforts to confront whatever challenges lay ahead.

Assistance to accessing technology: Two options

This past year, the gap in access to technology, and the need to find more affordable options for many has been spotlighted. “How can I access low-cost internet and where can I buy lower-priced computers” is **a question many providers have been asking.**

At the end of February 2021, the Federal Communications Commission released the “Emergency Broadband Benefit.” It is an [FCC program](#) to help households struggling to pay for internet service during the pandemic. This new benefit will connect eligible households to jobs, critical healthcare services, and virtual classrooms.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month toward broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute \$10 to \$50 toward the purchase price. **The program has been authorized by the FCC, but the start date has not yet been established. The FCC is working to make the benefit available as quickly as possible. Please continue to check [this page](#) for program updates.**

Another potential source of assistance is PCs for People, a national leader in digital inclusion. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization formed in 1998, every project, program, and initiative at PCs for People is centered on getting low-cost computers and affordable broadband internet into the homes of low-income individuals.

PCs for People helps people access low-cost mobile internet through a Sprint network Hot Spot. Using this device will reduce the need to use telephone minutes. Income eligible people (or families) can purchase a monthly internet connection for \$15. In order to access this monthly service, a one-time purchase of the hot-spot device is required (\$80).

Once the hot-spot device is purchased, the internet connection is mobile and can be accessed by anyone in the household. This means a PROS participant could access telehealth services while their child is also connected to remote learning, all for \$15 per month. A non-profit can work with PCs for People to get a uniquely identified link to help promote this opportunity to its clients through the [Bridging the Gap](#) program or refer individuals directly to the website.

PCs for People also sells refurbished computers. Eligible people can purchase these desktops and laptop computers directly. Eligible nonprofit organizations can purchase computers and mobile internet from PCs for People. Their low-cost technology can be used for any relevant purpose such as furnishing offices or opening client-focused computer labs.

If you’re writing a grant, their staff offers guidance – they can help identify the proper terminology and details on what type of technology to request, along with budgetary information. (Note: PCs for People does not give grants.) On its site, you’ll find a network coverage map by ZIP code, as well as see the income eligibility guideline: www.pcsforpeople.org. To learn more: call PCs for People at (651) 345-2552, or e-mail partner@pcsforpeople.org.

In our own words: *Continued from the front page.*

However, the groups I have mentioned are a few of the many which in the last four years are preparing me to overcome some of the hurdles barring my way forward. Today, my mind is stronger and healthier, my emotions deeper and richer – none of which would have happened without ‘active’ participation in each group.

Naturally, as an artist, I must mention a preference for groups with a creative edge, which should explain the emphasis on art and literature. But, even if I had chosen a different list of groups, the fact is The Bridge PROS program develops each “individual” according to their own needs and capacities. If I had learned something new in one group, most likely it would have had a residual effect in my development in another group, and so on, in a circuitous web of learning and re-learning. Ultimately, this re-learning process re-enforces mental and emotional health, and readies each individual for the next step.

Editor’s Note: *Thank you to Miguel for sharing his experience of continuing his recovery journey during the pandemic and the conversion to telehealth services. Keeping our hearts and minds resilient through our connections to community is essential for everyone!*

Community networking helps everyone

Staying at home as much as we have been can surely be a challenge for anyone – and for those with additional challenges, it can be especially hard. PROS staff frequently make efforts to be attentive for signs of hardship –on the lookout for signs of an escalation of depression or anxiety brought on by a lack of socialization.

PROS staff can literally be a lifeline if someone is in a domestic relationship that is abusive, to a young adult living with a family who rejects them if they express their true gender or sexual identity, or an older participant who is not near family. PROS staff are typically incredibly resourceful and willing to offer whatever will help. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that everyone can benefit by networking and not feel as if they must have all the answers.

Here are some community resources that may be helpful for staff who find themselves involved in a situation outside the scope of helping someone deal with their mental health challenges:

- [NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#) - Learn a virtual signal for help: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUJV-9wvdB8>.
- [National LGBT Help Center](#) - with a directory by ZIP code for local community resources.
- [NY Connects](#) - A directory of local community resources to assist elderly and people with disabilities in need.
- [NYS Problem Gambling Resource Centers](#) - funded by the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports - can help with gaming and gambling problems.

Deconstructing the Gender Binary in Mental Health Services

A one-hour SAMHSA grant funded archived [training](#) produced by SMI Advisor and presented by **Lisa Razzano, PhD, CPRP**. Available through April 17, 2021.

This presentation focuses on concepts of non-binary gender and the context for mental health services among gender non-binary and transgender individuals. Whole health and wellness include living a fulfilled life, which encompasses gender identity and expression. These personal choices are essential components of well-being and self-determination. There are, however, barriers preventing individuals from expressing their gender identity in safe, inclusive mental health settings.

Some practitioners and service providers can be unsure or uneasy discussing gender identity. Highlighted in this discussion are health issues relevant to individuals who express diverse gender identities, community challenges, the effects of social determinants such as stigma, interpersonal violence, and healthcare access, and successful evidence-informed interventions mindful of the needs of non-binary individuals. Information and resources to improve workforce competencies and practices area are also described.

NY Project Hope Emotional Support Helpline (844) 863-9314 – 7 days a week, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For staff, participants, friends, family, and neighbors. Help spread the word about New York Project Hope - a FEMA - funded, OMH-supported, community resource created to respond to stress created by the COVID pandemic.



SCAN ME

According to the **2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health**, in 2019 an estimated 13.1 million adults had experienced SMI in the past year. This corresponds to 5.2 percent of adults.

Here is a breakdown of SMI in specific age groups:

- Age 18 to 25 = 2.9 million (8.6 percent of people in this age group)
- Age 26 to 49 = 6.8 million (6.8 percent)
- Age 50 or older = 3.4 million (2.9 percent)

Check out a [new series of infographics](#) from SMI Advisor that highlights the latest data on SMI in the U.S. They include statistics on prevalence, economic impacts, barriers to treatment, and more.

Resources



OMH has updated its **Consolidated Telemental Health Guidance** for OMH licensed, funded, or approved programs and agencies. Revisions include information on the new streamlined process to permanently add telemental health services, as well as guidance on balancing in-person and telemental health services. The updated guidance can be found [here on the OMH website](#).

A brief training module covering the introduction to key concepts in telehealth program development and management practices has been developed by the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center. Access here: <https://nytelehealth.netrc.org/home.php>.

Mindfulness Guide: A Young Adult's Guide to Meditation

Developed by NYAPRS partner **Ruth Colón-Wagner**, the Mindfulness Guide is interactive and includes 23 meditation exercises, each narrated, to support the person's practice.

<https://ctacny.org/mindfulness-guide>.

Managed Care Technical Assistance Center Offers (MCTAC) Practical, User-Friendly and Accessible Tools for Billing Staff

Please note this guidance only applies to Behavioral Health outpatient/ambulatory services billing Medicaid Managed Care.

- [Got Denied Claims?](#) - A compilation of the most common denial reasons so that providers can safeguard against these errors and resolve denials as needed.
- Check out the [MCTAC Billing tool](#) - it is an interactive UB-04 form that walks through the components required to submit a clean claim. Whether you are new to the process or just want to quickly check one field, the billing tool is the ideal reference. This tool will tell you what information is required for each field and will note specific plan requirements.
- [Revenue Cycle Best Practices](#) - Maps-out key Revenue Cycle Management practices at various stages in service provision, gives advice for how to accomplish these tasks and notes how these practices might relate to claim fields and/or denial codes.

The CPI Academy at the Center for Practice Innovations at Columbia Psychiatry New York State Psychiatric Institute recently released a new certificate program, *LGBTQ Issues*. Continuing education credits are available for social work, mental health counseling, CASAC/ CPP/CS, and CME. The program consists of five modules. To access the CPI Academy and register for and complete its curriculum programs:

- Log into the Learning Community using your username and password at: <https://rfmh.csod.com/client/rfmh/default.aspx>.
- Click on "CPI Academy, Curriculum Programs."
- Staff who do not already have an account may request one by e-mailing: cpihelp@nyspi.columbia.edu.

PROS Newsletter Archive

PROS Newsletter began in Fall 2016. To check previous editions, you can view the entire PROS Newsletter collection on the NYAPRS Clearinghouse: <http://pros.nyaprs.org/resources>.



Office of
Mental Health

This newsletter is written by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and Care Coordination at the New York State Office of Mental Health.

Please distribute to all PROS staff.