

CURRENTS

OF THE NEW YORK CITY CHAPTER

National Association of Social Workers



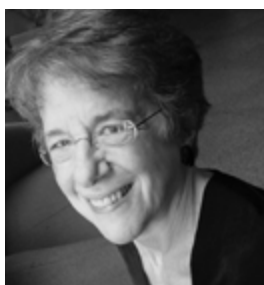
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April/May 2015 Volume 59/No.4

NASW-NYC Inaugural Conference Draws Close to 1000

NYT Columnist Charles Blow Interviewed by
Christina Wilkerson from the Chapter Staff



[Click here to read about the conference](#)



Excerpts from NASW-NYC's Poverty Toolkit **Housing, Homelessness & Poverty in the United States and NYC**

*Mimi Abramovitz, DSW
Social Welfare Policy, Silberman School
of Social Work at Hunter College*



*Frederick Shack, LMSW
Executive Director, Urban Pathways, Inc.*

[Click here to read the briefs](#)

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Over 900 Attend NASW-NYC's Inaugural Conference in New Era of CE Requirements

Chapter On Mission of Continuous Improvement And Achieving High Quality Programming Moving Forward

While the conference evaluations have yet to be collected as this issue of Currents was being completed, there was a welcome buzz both during and after the April 8th conference by the preponderance of those who attended. It would not be too much to say that there was a feeling of elation from many that we heard from. The conference was titled "Social Work in the City: Dreams and Realities of Life in New York."

Despite the size of the gathering, the conference started exactly on time with Chapter President Sandy Bernabei welcoming attendees and the first plenary speaker, Dr. Mindy Fullilove, presenting about the critical impact of one's community on well-being regardless of poverty—and what happens when community falls apart.

In the afternoon plenary, Chapter staff member, Christina Wilkerson, MSW interviewed New York Times columnist Charles Blow, drawing out his personal experiences recently published in his memoir and trends addressed in his columns, which examine current issues of racism, policing, domestic violence, bullying, and sexual identity.

The NASW-NYC Continuing Education Planning Committee and staff will be examining the evaluations from the conference and the other workshops in order to understand what has gone well, or really great, as well as what did not. The Chapter will be on a mission of continuous improvement and achieving high quality in its programming moving forward.

NASW-NYC has just opened registration for standalone workshops in the late spring and the Addictions Institute to be held on June 3. It looks like there will be another sell-out for the Institute so don't wait to register.





A New Day for Social Work in NYC Reflections on Our First CE Conference

Sandy Bernabei, LCSW

Editor's Note: The following is a message from President Bernabei to attendees at the April 8th conference, "Social Work in the City: Dreams and Realities of Life in New York." We decided to share her inspiring words with all of our Currents readers.

It took me a few days to come down a bit so I am only now gathering my thoughts and reflections on our conference.

First and foremost, I am grateful to each of you for participating in our first CE conference of the profession and to the staff and volunteers for making it all happen.

Sometimes organizing yields great things and every once in a while there is a breakthrough. Close to 1,000 social workers coming together to learn and grow was that breakthrough. For me it was a moment of convergence and coming out! I felt the freedom to express my antiracism self as a social worker. That we came together with a focus on Human Rights with a structural analysis of racism and inclusion of other oppressions is one of the most memorable experiences of my 34 years in social work practice.

I know that many of you were moved and inspired for I had the opportunity to speak with many of you throughout the day.

It is a new day for Social Work in New York City. I am more hopeful than ever that we can address the realities together, design new solutions for a stronger city and strengthen our professional association.

NASW membership means that you are "a never alone social worker." I am grateful beyond words that I have this community to journey with.

With gratitude and respect!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandy".

47th Annual NASW-NYC Addictions Institute

Marijuana and Emerging Drugs: Evolving Perceptions in Addictions

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Wednesday, June 3, 2015
Fordham University
Lincoln Center Campus



Keynote Presentation: Petros Levounis, MD, MA

Petros Levounis, MD, MA, is Chair of Psychiatry at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and Chief of Service at University Hospital in Newark, New Jersey. Dr. Levounis served at Columbia University as Director of the Addiction Institute of New York and Chief of Addiction Psychiatry at St. Luke's and Roosevelt Hospitals from 2002 to 2013.



28 Breakout Sessions

focusing on a broad range of
Addictions topics, from policy
to clinical practice and work
with communities

New York City Council Approves Transgender Legislation

NASW-NYC Testifies in Favor of Bill and On Behalf of Licensed Social Workers

On November 10th, 2014, Emily Foote, MSW, Assistant Director of NASW-NYC and Scott Kramer, LCSW, Chair of the NASW-NYC LGBT Committee testified in support of Int 0491-2014 A, a bill introduced by Chair of the New York City Council Committee on Health Corey Johnson, changing a long-standing and discriminatory birth certificate policy in New York City. Mr. Kramer testified about the often traumatizing effect on people who are transgender of carrying documentation that does not match their gender identity.

Int 0492-2014 A eliminated the surgery requirement for transgender individuals born in the five boroughs seeking to correct the sex designation on their birth certificates. Instead, it requires a licensed health care provider, *including LCSWs and LMSWs*, to affirm that an individual's true sex is not accurately recorded on their current birth certificate.

According to a statement by the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund (TLDEF), "the vast majority of transgender people have not undergone the extensive surgical procedures demanded by the city before it will change the sex designation on birth certificates. Most cannot afford these procedures, and for many, they are medically inappropriate."

The inclusion of both LCSWs and LMSWs is unprecedented. As Ms. Foote testified, "we believe both LCSWs and LMSWs should be included on the list of providers qualified to attest to the individual's gender identity. In addition to the fact that no medical diagnosis is necessary for such an attestation, inclusion of both LCSWs and LMSWs will ensure greater accessibility for these often vulnerable and certainly disenfranchised individuals."

The City Council approved the bill and Mayor DeBlasio is expected to sign it. A parallel policy change was made to the City's Health Code. TLDEF released an online guide for transgender individuals and allies to better understand the new policy: http://www.transgenderlegal.org/headline_show.php?id=580

Housing in the United States



Mimi Abramovitz, DSW
Social Welfare Policy, Silberman School
of Social Work at Hunter College

Access to adequate housing is an essential component to a decent standard of living. In addition to addressing the imperative physical need of shelter, housing fulfills the psychological need for a sense of privacy that comes from having personal space. This personal space serves as a host for family gathering thus nurturing one of the basic societal units. For some societies, the home is a site for income generation through the production of goods. Given the necessity housing plays in the life of the individual, community, and society, the United States has historically intervened in situations where individuals cannot procure housing through the channels of the private market. The U.S. has filled that gap by constructing housing and providing various rental and mortgage subsidies for those in need. However, the changing policy climate places these programs in jeopardy. The following facts help to counter the prevailing myths that fuel these cuts.

MYTH: Affordable rents are readily available to all who need housing.

FACT: Renting is out of reach for many of America's workers. "Affordable," defined as keeping your housing costs—including utilities—at no more than 30% of your income is an increasingly scarce commodity. It takes a household income of \$37,960 (nationally, on average) to afford rent for a modest, non-luxury, two-bedroom apartment—that means \$949 is considered the "average Fair Market Rate."^{1, 2}

COMMENT: A full-time worker must earn \$18.25 per hour in order to afford rent and utilities on a modest two-bedroom rental unit without spending more than 30% of household income on housing costs. By contrast, the average American renter earns just \$14.15 per hour.³ Someone earning the current federal minimum wage, working 40 hours a week, earns only \$15,080 a year.⁴

MYTH: The supply of low-cost rental housing is increasing.

FACT: One out of four renter households is now classified as extremely low income, but the supply of low-cost rental units is actually shrinking. The number of units renting for \$500 a month or less fell by one million between 2007 and 2010. Moreover, federal funding for affordable housing has been slashed. In 2012, on top of decades of prior cuts, the government cut 8% from the Public Housing Capital Funding and 38% of funding for a program that helps states and local governments create low-income housing.⁵

Housing in NYC

1 in 5

households face a severe rent burden in NYC

20%

of households in NYC live on less than \$15,000 in annual income

\$2600

is the average monthly rent in NYC, compared to a national average of just over \$1000

61%

of low-income families pay at least half their income to rent

39%

of the City's affordable housing units were lost between 2002 and 2011

Sources:
National Low-Income Housing
Coalition, Community Service Society,
NY State Comptroller's Office

COMMENT: Rents have been rising and wages stagnating such that the gap between the cost of housing and the number of Americans able to afford it continues to grow every year.⁶ For every 1000 extremely low-income renters, there are only 30 affordable and available units. These households are at high risk for becoming homeless if their incomes go down or they have unexpected expenses.⁷

MYTH: People who need government rental subsidies get them.

FACT: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has identified a category of renters that they refer to as “worst case housing needs.” These low-income renters have incomes below 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI), do not receive government housing assistance, pay more than half of their income for rent and/or live in severely inadequate conditions.⁸ These households with severe housing needs have grown by 2.57 million since 2007—a striking 43.5% increase. Severe rent burden placed the vast majority of these renters in the “worst housing case needs” group. Inadequate housing accounted for only three percent.⁹

COMMENT: All major racial and ethnic groups appear in the worst case housing needs group. However, Latino and non-Hispanic white households experienced the largest increases in the number of both very low-income renters and worst case housing since 2009. As a result, 48% of new cases of “worst-case housing needs” were found among white, 28% among Latino and 13% among black households.¹⁰

MYTH: Subsidized housing is unnecessary. Left on its own, the market will provide safe, decent and affordable housing for everyone.¹¹

FACT: Private markets fail to provide affordable housing for both renters and owners. Between 2002 and 2009, the share of *low-income households* with children that spent more than 30% of their household income on rent jumped from 67.3 to 74.5%.¹² In 2010, one in four working households spent more than half their income for housing.¹³

COMMENT: Housing is the single largest expenditure for most households. High rent burdens combined with stagnating or falling wages leave poor families with little money for food, doctor’s visits, or other necessities. Needed government subsidies that can fill the gap caused by the failure of the housing market to supply affordable housing to those in greatest need are disappearing.¹⁴ The federal government spends 2.8 times as much on tax subsidies for homeownership—more than half of which benefits households with incomes above \$100,000—as on rental assistance.¹⁵

MYTH: Public housing residents don’t pay rent.

FACT: Public housing is not free – it’s subsidized. Residents pay 30% of their income as rent, which includes all their income – even welfare. The minimum rent you can pay is \$75 a month, but most residents pay between \$300 and \$500 a month. This is cheaper than market rate housing, but it’s not free and never has been.¹⁶

COMMENT: Public housing—one of the nation’s three main rental assistance programs, along with “Section 8” vouchers and project-based rental assistance—provides affordable housing to 2.2 million low-income people in the US who cannot afford market rate costs.¹⁷ Public housing helps families to afford modest housing and avoid homelessness or other housing instability.¹⁸ Federal funding for public housing has declined steadily from \$4 billion in 1999 to \$1.53 billion in 2012.¹⁹

20

MYTH: Public housing residents do not work, mostly by choice.

FACT: About one third of public housing households report earning wages. In 2010, 88% of public housing households were elderly, had disabilities, worked, had recently worked, or were required to work through enrollment in another pro-

gram. Although most non-elderly non-disabled public housing households include an employed member, the average income for assisted households is less than \$13,000 per year.²¹

COMMENT: Public housing can help families avoid housing instability that could make it difficult to find or keep a job. Public housing leaves families with more resources for work expenses like childcare and transportation (as well as basic needs like food and medicine).

MYTH: Many people are homeless by choice.

FACT: As of 2012, about 633,782 people experience homelessness on any given night in the US; 239,403 are people in families, and 394,379 are individuals. Slightly fewer than 16% are chronically homeless and 13% of the adults are veterans.²² Most people become homeless due to social, psychological and economic reasons that are beyond their control such as long term illness, domestic violence, developmental disorders, mental illness, or the lack of preventive services, affordable housing and a living wage.^{23, 24}

COMMENT: Homelessness is rarely a choice. There are many sets of circumstances resulting in homelessness; however, the most common cause is an inability to find affordable housing. Homelessness is more prevalent in urban areas, where there is a dearth of affordable options, and citizens often struggle more to acquire or maintain housing.²⁵

MYTH: Affordable housing is not fair; only the very poor benefit.

FACT: Many people are affected by the lack of affordable housing in the United States: employers, seniors, children, poor people, immigrants, entry-level and service sector workers, and public sector professionals like teachers, firefighters, and police officers. Because of the way it affects the general functioning of neighborhoods, towns, and cities—economic development, traffic congestion, air quality, etc.—it is something that affects us *all*.

COMMENT: Effectively solving the affordable housing crisis does not mean addressing the needs of just the poor; it also means addressing the needs of the business community, working- and middle class families, and the broader population.^{26, 27}

For a list of references, please refer to the full report by clicking here.

Poverty, Housing Policy and Homelessness in NYC



Frederick Shack, LMSW
Executive Director, Urban Pathways, Inc.

Homelessness across the country decreased by 4% from 2012 to 2013.¹ However, in NYC homelessness increased by 13%; a record high, and a level not seen since the great depression.² Today over 51,000 people are living in homeless shelters and another three thousand plus are sleeping on the streets or in other places not meant for human habitation. While some of the increase in NYC can be traced to the recession, much of the upsurge can be traced to local housing markets and national housing policy.

In the early 1960s, poverty in the United States was calculated based on the supposition that families typically spent one third of their household budget on food.³ Therefore determining the cost of food required to provide the minimum nutritional standards for a family of four and multiplying that cost by three resulted in the line below which families were deemed to be living in poverty. Officially, only cash and certain non-cash benefits are counted when calculating household income, thus disregarding other non-cash benefits like food stamps and housing assistance, both of which are important in lifting families out of poverty.

Today estimates are that American households spend less than 14% of their pre-taxed income on food.⁴ In NYC as in other part of the United States, housing represents a significantly larger portion of all household budgets but especially for households at the lower end of in economic ladder. The other major shortcoming of the 1963 poverty measure is the fact that it is a national number and therefore does not account for the wide variances in the cost of living in communities across the country. In 1995 the National Academy of Science offered a modified measure of poverty, expanded to include the cost of things required for basic survival, food, clothing, and housing including utilities. In addition, the proposed NAS measure factors in regional cost differences and includes income from in-kind benefits when calculating resources.

Approximately 62% of NYC households lease apartments that are subsidized. Of that number, 8.2% live in public housing, 45.4% live in rent stabilized apartments, and an additional 8.4% live in units benefiting from other local, State or Federal housing subsidies.⁵ It is important to note that only 1 in 4 low income households (80% or less of Area Medium) who are eligible for federal housing subsidies (Section 8) receive these subsidies (Henry Cisneros-keynote New York State Housing conference on 12/5/13).

Housing affordability is defined as spending less than thirty percent (30%)

Total Shelter Census

Adults 29,041

Children 22,041

Total Individuals 51,082

Single adults

Men 7,308

Women 2,703

Families with children

10,561

~

People Living on the Streets

On January 28, 2013, NYC's

Hope Count found

approximately 3,180

people living on the streets

Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

of one's gross household income on housing. Households who spend between 30 and 49% of their income toward housing are considered to be rent burdened; those who spend 50% or more of their income toward housing are severely rent burdened. In 2011 approximately 31% of NYC renters were severely rent burdened, an increase of 4% since 2007. (FS page 27) Seventy Eight percent of NYC renter households are rent burdened which represent one of the highest rates in the country.⁶ It is estimated that nationally over 21 million households, a record high, are rent burdened.⁷

With housing taking up a larger percentage of household budgets, it's easy to understand how increased housing costs and decreased household incomes result in higher levels of homelessness. Since the Great Recession, median rents have continued to rise while household incomes have fallen. These trends have had a devastating impact on low income families in urban centers like NYC. Rent has continued to increase at rates significantly faster than household incomes for the poor. In 2011, there were 11.8 million households with incomes less than 30% of the area median income, which qualifies them as an extremely low-income household. However, during that same period, there were only 6.9 million rental units that would be considered affordable to those households, a gap of almost 5 million units. The number of extremely low-income households continues to grow; however the number of units affordable to this population remained unchanged and is beginning to shrink. Today, 47% of low-income New Yorkers have a severe rent burden, spending more than 50% of their household income on housing.⁸

The area median income (AMI) in NYC is \$63,000 for a family of four. Nationally, poverty for a family of four stands at income levels at or below \$23,492. Based on the AMI for NYC, a family with an income meeting the national poverty standard would be considered very-low income. In New York City, that family living at the national poverty level would be required to spend 75% of their pre-taxed income on housing if they were to rent a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent of \$1,474 per month.

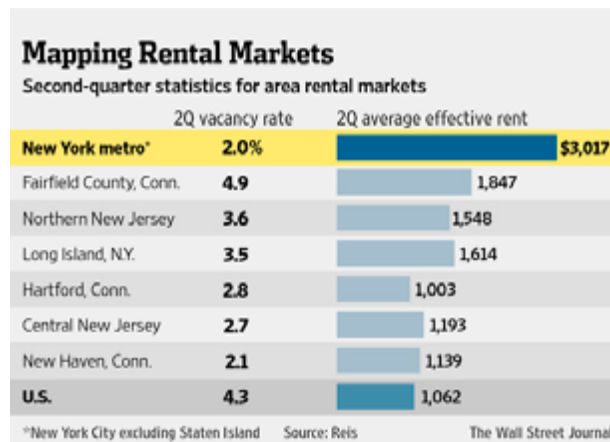
Our ability to reduce and ultimately prevent homelessness lies in our recognition of the disconnect between the supply of and demand for affordable housing for middle and lower income households. Only 1 in 4 income-eligible households receive access to the single most effective homeless prevention program, Section 8. Absent the political will to fully fund Section 8, alternative models for combating housing affordability must be implemented. We should start by moving to fully fund the National Low Income Housing Trust Fund.

Additional Data:

The number of individuals and families with children in the NYC shelter system has risen steadily since 2008. In November, 2008, there were 7,843 families and 6,771 unaccompanied single adults in shelters; on December 24, 2013, there were 10,578 families and 10,110 unaccompanied single adults in shelters.

For apartments renting at less than \$800, the vacancy rate in 2011 was 1.1% (Source: "2013 Income and Affordability Study," New York City Rent Guidelines Board; April 4, 2013). More general/broad vacancy rates for New York City: Results from the 2011 Housing and Vacancy Survey showed that the vacancy rate for New York City was 3.12%. Rent stabilized units in NYC had a vacancy rate of 2.63%.

As reported in the Wall Street Journal on July 8, 2013, while the national vacancy rate for rental units stood at 4.3%, the vacancy rate in NYC was 2% and the average rent in NYC rose to \$3,017 as reflected in the chart below:



For a list of references, please refer to the full report by clicking [here](#).

NASW-NYC Board of Directors Elections

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR THE 2015 SPRING ELECTION

This is an important election, determining the direction of NASW-NYC for the next several years.

[Click here to read the candidates' platform statements](#)

[Click here to go to the electronic ballot](#)

President

1. **Candida Brooks-Harrison, LCSW**, Lecturer, Brooklyn College-CUNY; Student Teach Field Coordinator, The Village Enrichment
2. **Roy Kearse, LCSW, CASAC**, VP of Residential Treatment, Samaritan Village

Members at Large

(six to be elected)

1. **Nancy Andino, LCSW**, Associate Director of Chemical Dependence Services, Harlem Hospital
2. **Daisy Arriaga, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Lehman College; MSW Intern, Puerto Rican Family Institute Bx MH
3. **Abria J. Bonner, LMSW**, MST-Psychiatric Therapist, The New York Foundling
4. **Tiffany Engesser, LCSW, ACSW**, Director of Social Work, North Shore LIJ Zucker Hillside Hospital
5. **Kate Feiner, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Fordham University School of Social Work; Student Intern, Lehman College Counseling Center
6. **Shira Felberbaum, LMSW, MS**, Community Outreach Social Worker, JBFCS
7. **Marcie S. Gitlin, LMSW**, Social Worker, Jewish Home Lifecare
8. **Mark D. Goodwin, LCSW**, Program Coordinator, Bronx Lebanon Hospital
9. **Ricardo Guzmán Erazo, LMSW**, Treatment Coordinator, YAI Center for Special Therapy
10. **Chana Kaiman, LCSW**, Clinical Supervisor, YVY
11. **Brian Romero, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College; Social Work Intern, Robert N. Davoren Center at Rikers Island
12. **Scott W. Stern, LCSW-R**, Empowering Psychotherapy and Corporate Services

13. **Amy Stricoff, LMSW**, Case Planner, Jewish Childcare Association
14. **Carmen C. Valentin, LMSW, CASAC**, Social Worker/Case Manager, Mount Sinai Health Home
15. **Emely D. Velez, LMSW**, Mental Health Clinician, YAI
16. **Leigh Wolfsthal, LCSW**, Clinical Social Worker, Self Employed

MSW Members at Large

1. **Amy Hendershot, MSW Student**, Columbia University
2. **Christine Vyshedsky, MSW Student**, WSSY, Family Service Specialist, YAI

BSW Student Member at Large (one to be elected)

1. **Coralie Batista, BSW Student**, Lehman College; Pantry Assistant and Receptionist, Part of the Solution
2. **Priscilla Borkor, BSW Student**, Medgar Evers College/CUNY; DOE Educator, CEO/Facilitator, Beautiful (a female empowerment group)
3. **Joshua Cancel, BSW Student**, Lehman College; Care Associate in Ambulatory Surgery, Mount Sinai Hospital

Nominations Committee (six to be elected, this slate is still being completed*)

1. **Fernando De La Garza, MSW**, Executive Office Manager, Partners Health Plan
2. **Mark Laster, RLCSW, ACSW**, Winston Services LLC; placed at Montefiore Medical Center, Temporary Manager of Clinical Services, Inpatient Psychiatric Unit
3. **James McBride, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Silberman School of Social Work
4. **Stephen McGowan, MSW**, Admissions Associate, Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service; Recording Secretary for the NASW-NYC PACE Executive Committee
5. **Rev. Julie Novas, Esq., LMSW**, Mental Health Coordinator, HOTT Program; Callen Lorde Community Health Center
6. **Chelsea Ozeri, LMSW**, Case Manager, Coalition for the Homeless Client Advocacy Program
7. **Aashlesha Patel, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Hunter College; Social Work Intern, LGBT Center & Hunter College Counseling
8. **Betty Voltaire, MSW**, Social Worker, JCCA

Delegate Assembly
(ten to be elected)

1. **Nancy Andino, LCSW**, Associate Director of Chemical Dependence Services, Harlem Hospital
2. **Marianne Ardito, ACSW, LCSW**, Assistant Director, YAI
3. **Aditi Bhattacharya, LMSW**, Manager of Sexual Assault Services, New York Asian Women's Center
4. **Derek Brian Brown, PhD, LMSW**, Assistant Dean/Director of Admissions, Graduate School of Social Service, Fordham University
5. **Shira Felberbaum, LMSW, MS, JBFCS**, Community Outreach Social Worker
6. **Rob Fierstein, LCSW-R**, Psychotherapist, Self-Employed
7. **William R. Fletcher, LCSW**, Deputy Commissioner, NYC ACS Division of Child Protection
8. **Alicia Fry, LMSW**, Clinical Director of Case Management, Services Now for Adult Persons; Gerontological Social Work Practice Fellow; NASW-NYC Board of Directors; 2014 Delegate Assembly
9. **Lorraine Gonzalez-Camastra, LCSW**, Director, Health Policy; Children's Defense Fund
10. **Chana Kaiman, LCSW**, Clinical Supervisor, YVY
11. **Kenton Kirby, LMSW**, Empowerment Coordinator, Court Innovation
12. **Susan Mason, LCSW, PhD**, Professor, Director of PhD Program, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University
13. **Gerri Matusewitch, LMSW**, Clinical Support Social Worker, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, Choice
14. **James McBride, MSW Student** (Expected Graduation 2015), Silberman School of Social Work
15. **Veera Mookerjee, PhD**, Director: Family Support & Education, South Asian Council for Human Services
16. **Vanessa Pizarro, LMSW**, Social Worker and Care Coordinator, HIV Programs at the Family Health Center of Harlem, Institute for Family Health
17. **Benjamin R. Sher, MA, LMSW**, Director of Best Practice Training & Implementation Support, ICL, Inc.

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Instructor: Judith Jordan, LCSW, CASAC

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Instructor: Janet Pearlman, LCSW

(\$250 - 11 Clock hours, includes registration fee. CEUs pending)

Classes are held at 80 Fifth Avenue, (5th ave at 14th street, NYC) For more information, please visit <http://www.ppsc.org/apat/> or call 212-633-9162



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OPEN HOUSE:

Thursday, May 14, 2015 at 7:30 pm

For more information please contact Nicole Dintenfass, PhD, Director of Academic Affairs at 212-744-9681

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