Still Works at 40

Bronx agency offers wide variety of social services

BY TANYANIKA SAUMELS
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FOR 77-year-old Courtney Campbell, the BronxWorks' Morris Innovative Senior Center in Fordham Heights is like a second home.

"I'd be so bored if I didn't have this place," said Campbell, who lives nearby and takes computer classes, volunteers in the pantry and works out in the gym, among other activities. "I have a lot of friends here, and we laugh and have a good time together."

BronxWorks commemorated its 40th anniversary with a special ceremony at the senior center on E. 181st St. on Monday.

The agency started out as the Citizens Advice Bureau on Dec. 10, 1972 as a non-profit providing information and referrals.

In the four decades since, it has grown to serve more than 37,500 residents annually providing such services as early childhood education, immigrant assistance, HIV/AIDS programs, housing, senior citizens programs, homelessness services, job readiness and more.

The agency's programs have been credited with helping in the 71% decline in street homelessness between 2005 and 2012.

"The Bronx has undergone a tremendous transformation from a place of destruction to a vital and active community," BronxWorks Executive Director Carolyn McLaughlin said before an audience of board members, staff, partner agencies and city officials.

"There are still areas that need attention, like education, addressing health concerns, housing, high rates of unemployment. So there's still work to do," she said. "But the Bronx has a lot of energy and a lot of fantastic people working to make it the best place that it can be."

"The revival of the Bronx wouldn't have happened without BronxWorks and the work they've done here," said Seth Di- amond, city Department of Homeless Services commissioner. He then presented a proclamation by Mayor Bloomberg declaring Dec. 10 as BronxWorks Day.

Deputy Borough President Aurelia Greene heaped praise on the group.

"It is unusual for one agency to excel in so many different services and they do," she said. "The work they do is unsung."

One floor below, May Vu, 62, didn't take much notice of all the revelry overhead. She was more focused on the arts and crafts class she volunteers to lead three times a week. She specializes in origami.

"I love it here," said Vu, of Fordham, showing off a jewelry box she made from the pages of an old calendar.

She is dealing with the early stages of Parkinson's disease. Helping others at the senior center helps her as well.

"I need to move. I want to move," she smiled. "Instead of sitting at home and watching TV, I come here. It is good for me."

For Alfredo Chaucer, 40, of Norwood, his time with BronxWorks has meant a new beginning.

Chaucer started attending the Strong Fathers, Strong Families Program 10 months ago.

"I feel like my life was dramatically changed," he said. "I learned how to talk to my kids, my wife, my mother. I'm a different man now and I feel it is because of the things I learned in this program."

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