

Long Island Business NEWS

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NONPROFITS

Our area's neediest residents get some help

By **KENNETH R. CERINI**

Last year alone, Options for Community Living Inc. assisted over 1,000 adults and children in need on Long Island. However, this not-for-profit agency goes above and beyond supplying housing. Options also provides support services to some of Long Island's neediest people: families and individuals who are homeless, working their way out of crisis, or faced with debilitating medical conditions or mental illness.

"It's a wonderful feeling to offer a family or an individual housing on Long Island," said Diana Antos Arens, co-founder and executive director of Options. "Not only are we helping to provide great housing opportunities, but we're helping individuals start school, find jobs, and reach their goals."

What type of programs and services does Options offer? We serve individuals challenged by chronic mental illness, homeless families in long-term poverty or crisis situations, and individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS who have very low incomes. Our residential and support services prepare participants for the demands and responsibilities of community life and promote housing permanency, health, safety and welfare.

How did Options choose to work with the HIV/AIDS population? Long Island has more AIDS cases than any other suburban community in the U.S. We began providing case management and housing to these individuals in the early '90s and today we serve more than 500 affected individuals and families annually.

How does Options help individuals achieve independence? For residents of Suffolk County diagnosed with mental ill-



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ness, we provide a range of homelike residential situations matched to individual capabilities. In each case, goals are jointly set and regularly reviewed, so participants learn to live with increasing independence. We also have six group homes, where participants live as a family group, sharing meals and planning social activities. In addition, we have single-family homes, for those who are prepared to live more independently. We have 84 houses, each serving residents of the same gender, and residents are encouraged to explore and plan for more independent living.

Options
for Community Living, Inc.



Over the last 10 years, what is a challenge that Options has overcome? We own and operate a thrift shop in Lake Ronkonkoma, which was destroyed in a fire in 2007. The thrift shop provides Options' program participants with disabilities a volunteer opportunity where they learn retail skills in a supportive environment, such as operating a cash register, designing displays and interacting with customers. The shop is also a valuable resource for individuals and families in need of low-cost, gently used clothing, books, toys and household items. We are excited to announce that the thrift shop will be reopening this fall.

What new initiatives is Options currently focusing on? One of our major undertakings over the last year or so has been green development. We are currently installing solar panels and central air conditioning, and we're conducting weatherization upgrades to our homes. Options has well over 100 houses throughout Nassau and Suffolk, and this project has truly shown us that by upgrading our housing to be more green, the savings on utilities alone is vast. We're constantly looking for new ways to help the community ... whether we're providing our programs and services, helping those in need find housing or taking part in the green effort, Options will continue to serve the needs of Long Islanders.

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Phone (631) 361-9020
Website www.optionscl.org
Founded 1982
Paid staff 167
Annual budget \$14 million
Fundraised budget \$82,000
Program services 87 percent