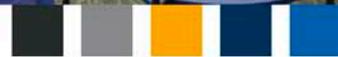




Recognizing Excellence Fall 2016



Every day, thousands of **AHRC New York City** employees head to work with one goal in mind - to support and improve the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Whether it is in a day program, a residence, in-home care, or out in the community, our **Direct Support Professionals** take on the challenges of their jobs with enthusiasm, perseverance, and an unwavering sense of responsibility.

September 11th through September 17th has been proclaimed National Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week. In this publication, AHRC NYC will highlight the stories of some of our many fine employees. These are men and women who are committed to promoting our key tenet of PRIDE: passion, respect, integrity, diversity, and excellence.

We have also included information about how you can join this exciting field or support our workers during this critical time of financial and political change. Most importantly, we hope these personal accounts inspire you to recognize and thank the Direct Support Professionals who most impact your life.

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The Mentors:

David Alvanes and Manual Avila Torres



In Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus, preparing to embark on his titular journey, leaves the care and education of his infant son Telemachus to trusted friend Mentor. Providing guidance and knowledge, Mentor teaches Telemachus about the world in his father's absence.

Today, personal and professional mentors appear in every person's life. For students in the [Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program](#) at [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#), (BMCC) and [Hostos Community College](#), two people who embody the definition of this word are **David Alvanes** and **Manual (Manny) Avila Torres**.

David Alvanes

"I never worked a day in my life before AHRC, but I felt I could share my skills with our students," David said in the BMCC staff lounge. *"I wanted to be a teacher. I was fresh out of the college experience and felt I could share it with them."*



David Alvanes, Higher Education Support Professional, [Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program](#) at [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#)

David was previously an economics student at [Pace University](#) and took Dr. **James Lawler's** [Community Service Learning](#) project that partners with AHRC NYC. *"Something that caught my attention was the potential of the students and a sense of responsibility for me,"* David said. Upon graduating, David felt a calling and joined the Riggio Program as a Higher Education Support Professional.

Manny Avila Torres

Similarly, Manny was a student at Hostos while a friend was a Riggio Program employee. *"He was telling me how he went to classes, helped with homework, working through their whole curriculum,"* Manny said. *"I thought he was just volunteering. I wanted to do it anyway but when he said it was a job I wanted to do it immediately."*

Furthering Student Education

In their roles, David and Manny assist students in a variety of ways, from taking notes to teaching time management skills to helping them become fully immersed in the college experience. Additionally, both of them have created programs to further the students' education: David with a money management course and Manny, who's originally from the Dominican Republic, with the early stages of a conversational Spanish curriculum.

"We explain things straightforward with each other," David said. *"Money management can be very boring so I wanted to be creative. It's allowing them to learn practical skills plus things like debit and credit cards."*

"So far [the Spanish class is] just spontaneous but we're trying to develop a whole curriculum over the whole semester," Manny said. *"It started out mainly helping two students—one who doesn't speak Spanish at all and one who speaks it but can't write it, and she wants to send letters to her family in Peru."*

Improving Lives

The two mentors take pride in seeing the ways in which their students have grown over short periods of time. *"One student started at around the same time I did here,"* Manny said. *"His mom told me he now sounds like a college student, especially with his vocabulary. To me,*



Manual Avila Torres, Mentor, [Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program](#) at [Hostos Community College](#)

that's everything, that we are doing the right thing."

"David embodies the title of mentor; he has a natural talent to connect with both the students he supports, as well as the entire BMCC team," **Jessica Giorgio**, CSS at BMCC, said. *"He displays creativity, patience and such dedication each day and is always willing to lend a helping hand."*

Manny plans to continue working at Hostos while studying towards a degree in business administration at Lehman College. *"I want to take some social work courses while I'm there as well,"* he said. *"I don't know what exactly is going to happen for me."*

Despite receiving his degree in a separate subject, David intends to continue to immerse himself in this line of work. *"This field provides a reward that I can't get anywhere else,"* he said. *"I would not have grown as a person if I didn't have this experience."*

If you would like to speak to someone about how AHRC New York City can help your loved one, please call our [Referral and Information Center](#) at **212-780-4491** or email your inquiries to referrals@ahrcnyc.org

“I’m Here 24/7 For Them”: Crystal Mars



For **Crystal Mars**, being a *Job Coach* is more than just her occupation - it’s a way to improve not only the lives of the people she supports, but also to teach her new skills every day.

“I had a family member that worked for AHRC and she was telling me about her job,” Crystal said in her office at [Bronx Employment and Business Services](#). *“I have a daughter with a disability so I was interested in finding out more. I took a look at what jobs they offered and was just like ‘Wow, this is what I want to do.’”*

A Change of Career

After working in a pharmacy for 13 years, Crystal decided to switch careers and become a Job Coach.

“I advocate 100 percent for my people, both at AHRC and at their jobs,” she explained.

Crystal provides supports in a number of ways, from teaching job skills to helping workers find out more information about medical services and apartments. *“It’s a very hands-on job, and it’s a big difference when you’re the one out there with [the workers]. I’m out there to show them how to do it, not just tell them. If it’s sweeping a floor, then we will learn to sweep this floor together.”*

It is Crystal’s personal approach that has won her recognition throughout her two-year tenure with the agency. *“Crystal has proven to be flexible, hard-working, reliable, and able to achieve results from our people through hands-on training and the appropriate follow-through,”* **Wayne Thomas**, Regional Director, Bronx EBS, said. *“Her hard work and dedication really makes a difference to the people we serve. Through her training and supervision, our employees are able to succeed in a highly competitive work environment.”*



Crystal Mars, Job Coach, [EBS Bronx](#)

Crystal took great pride in spearheading a partnership with [SUNY Purchase](#). In addition to driving employees to and from the upstate college, Crystal said that the project required intensive training.

Keeping it Clean

“A lot of them were new workers just learning how to be porters,” Crystal recalled. *“We taught them to work as a team, how to listen to directions, time-management skills, safety, and hygiene. I encouraged them by saying ‘If you can clean this college, you can clean anywhere.’ It was fun and exciting for them to know that they can do this.”*

Life Lessons

Through working as a Job Coach, Crystal has also learned new strategies to take home to her daughter. *“When I get my caseloads it*

helps me a lot, because I see so much of my daughter in many of them,” she said. *“I can’t help each person in the same way--different people need different strategies. So that helps me when I go home.”*

Crystal said her daughter is in AHRC’s [PROMISE program](#) and hopes to enroll in future services once she becomes of-age.

Going forward, Crystal has a goal of becoming a supervisor and teaching job coaches successful support strategies. *“I want job coaches to interact more. This is not just about observing the work.”* She also stressed the importance of effective, constant encouragement towards support employees.

“Many of our guys think that everything they do can be wrong. But I tell them it’s ok to forget, that it’s ok to repeat questions,” she said. *“I am here 24/7 for them!”*

AHRC New York City has a long-standing tradition of supporting people with disabilities as they prepare for employment.

We provide a variety of programs across New York City that harness each person’s existing talents and skills, and teach new skills to empower them to be successful in the workplace.



[CLICK](#) to Learn More:

- [School to Work Program](#)
- [Daily Job Readiness](#)
- [Job Connection Center](#)
- [Employment Training](#)
- [Young Adult Internships](#)
- [Careers in Food Service](#)
- [Careers in Hotel Housekeeping](#)
- [Careers in Janitorial Services](#)
- [Microsoft Office Training](#)
- [Specialisterne USA](#)
- [Pathway to Employment](#)
- [Project Search](#)

Award-Winning Worker: Kelly Anderson



Kelly Anderson, Direct Support Professional, [Lander IRA](#)

Kelly Anderson's job has taken her all around the New York metro area. Summer trips to Coney Island, fall excursions to Times Square, and shopping adventures to Long Island and New Jersey are nothing out of the ordinary for her and the residents of **Lander IRA** that she supports.

"I always want to take [the residents] to places they haven't been before," Kelly explained. "My goal is to get them to look forward to doing things they've never done."

Kelly joined AHRC NYC about four-and-a-half years ago after previously doing home health aide work. She chose to join [Residential Services](#) because it is what she felt most familiar with.

"This is a 24/7 job," Kelly said. "You know them at the day programs, but you really know them here."

"She just takes initiative every day, which you can't teach," **Christina D'Arpa**, Manager of Lander IRA, said of Kelly. "She's always doing something new with them—they've been places I've never even been!"

Essential Services

Direct Support Professionals are often responsible for a variety of important tasks, including medication administrations, cooking, driving, and dressing people. Kelly embraces it all.

"I love my job, and there's no one specific thing I can point to about it," Kelly said. "When

I come to work I have so many things to do. But they always look forward to seeing you. There's joy in their faces."

In spending over four years in this position, Kelly has seen many of the Lander residents evolve in personality and life skills. "I'm most proud of the changing effect I've had on them," she said. "Their behaviors are different. A lot of them are getting to the stage where their independence and confidence is beginning to show more."

In recognition of her dedication to the residents, Kelly has been honored by the [Staten Island Developmental Disability Council](#) and in October she will receive the Thomas A. Maul Direct Support Professional Excellence Award from [NYSARC, Inc.](#) Kelly was humbled, saying "I don't know what I did to deserve these awards! I'm just regularly doing what I do every day."

The Road Ahead

Kelly said she would like to continue expanding the horizons of Lander's residences through more trips.

"We do everything locally. I'd love to go away for the weekend and stay in a hotel with them," she said. No matter what activities or trips may be added, though, Kelly is unwavering in her commitment. "This is the type of work that's more than just a job. You have to be in it completely. Everybody is somebody. You must treat them with respect and come off the same way you would with anybody else."

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

AHRC New York City provides a variety of residential options in group homes, supervised apartments, and independent settings.

Since 1970, when AHRC NYC opened the first group home in New York State, we have continued to develop residential opportunities for people with developmental disabilities of all ages and functioning levels, throughout the five boroughs.

Our residences are beautiful, well-run, safe environments. Located in well-kept neighborhoods, each home is different as regards décor and has its own special quality reflecting the interests of its residents. All AHRC NYC homes are well-run with the safety and well being of its residents a priority.

Communication with the family of each resident is clear, open, and prompt. We value the participation of our resident's relatives and friends as we plan for the future needs of their loved ones. We always put the needs and choices of each resident first, making sure that family members and friends remain involved, advocating, planning, and supporting future goals and aspirations.

AHRC NYC's programs provide person-centered support for positive change and personal improvement, in a variety of settings as they work to attain the joys of independence and growth with the assistance of professionally trained staff.



Our residential supports fall under three models:

- Individualized Residential Alternatives
- Supervised Apartments
- Residential settings for people who are medically fragile (with 24/7 Nursing Care)

Learn more at [our website](#).

Striking a Balance: Fidelia Telfort



The [Borough of Manhattan Community College](#) website says that the major of Human Services “attracts well-organized people with excellent communication skills and a desire to improve the lives of others.” For **Fidelia Telfort**, the description could not be more fitting.

“When I graduated from high school I wanted to work in this field,” she said during a break between her classes. “There was a job fair at BMCC where a rep from AHRC was there and she told me about the agency. I attended one of the Home Care open houses on a Friday after that.”

Beginning over a year-and-a-half ago, Fidelia joined AHRC NYC as a *Community Habilitation Counselor*. In this position, she is responsible for improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities in their own homes. This can include anything from helping to prepare meals, to assisting with academics, to teaching important skills to increase independence.

“I have many cases with both children and adults,” Fidelia explained. “I’m teaching them basic life skills. Some are non-verbal, and I have to communicate with them through signs or by writing.”

Connecting to People without Language

Fidelia described in detail one instance where the use of alternative communication came in handy. “I work with one person who is almost totally non-verbal-when she wants to go out. She just says ‘Out.’ When



Fidelia Telfort, Residential Habilitation Coordinator, [In-Home Supports](#)

I got there one day she was very upset. Her family knew she wanted to go out but she couldn’t express why.” Fidelia encouraged the young woman to express herself in a different way. “She drew a picture of peanuts. So we went out to the store and got some, and she was so happy when she came back!”

Learning from Each Other

Fidelia, who immigrated to New York from Haiti six years ago, has found that her work can often be mutually beneficial to herself, as

well as to the person receiving services. “A lot of times they teach me things I don’t know,” she said. “When I’m helping one person with his homework, I say words with my accent and he corrects me on the right way to say them.”

Perhaps Fidelia’s most admirable trait is her time-management, balancing the rigors of school with a steady work schedule. “I take four classes per semester, and I don’t work on Mondays and Thursdays. I have to keep that balance. I must have time to study and to go to work.”

“Despite her busy schedule she manages to be to work on time with nearly no cancellations and performs her work duties flawless showing no fatigue,” **Tyshaun McCallum**, Field Supervisor, said. “She is loved by all of the families and individuals she works with. Ms. Telfort is a great employee and I enjoy the pleasure of working with her.”

Going forward, Fidelia wants to further her education and plans to remain in this industry. “I want to stay and work more in this field, and my goal is to get a [Masters in Social Work]. I want to go from one level to the next.”

IN-HOME SUPPORTS



AHRC NYC offers a range of supports in the home. With the assistance of a Service Coordinator, families determine the actual services they need to help them at home. Our In-Home Supports include **Community Habilitation, Individual Services and Supports**, and **In-Home Respite**. The frequency of service provision is dependent upon the need and the availability of in-home opportunities.

Learn more at [our website](#).

From Harlem with Love: Tisa French-King



Tisa French-King, Community Support Professional, [Betty Pender New York League](#), and Daseana Almond show off their Harlem pride.

Colorful collages and arts and crafts from years of travels and experiences line the walls in **Tisa French-King's** work room. Located in the heart of Harlem, the space has served the jumping point for Tisa and the people she supports to become ingrained in their neighborhood as part of [Betty Pender New York League's Without Walls](#) program.

"Every week we go and help out in the community," Tisa said. "On Tuesdays and Wednesdays we work in Mount Olivet Baptist Church making grocery bags. And on Fridays we help people take food home at Salem Methodist Church. We serve over 300 people there!"

Urban Innovations and Job Path

Tisa is an integral part of [Urban Innovations](#), a Harlem-based organization that supports people to connect and contribute in their home community. It formed out of a partnership from AHRC NYC and [Job Path](#), another service provider. *"We wanted to have our group where [people receiving services] could be rooted where they live,"* Tisa explained. It has been a great success, spawning an offshoot group, Revolutionary Seeds, where people receiving services create a variety of materials and sell them inside and outside Harlem.

In fact, Tisa and two people receiving services, **Daseana Almond** and **Chris Kelly**, traveled to Baltimore recently to represent *Revolutionary Seeds* and Urban Innovations at a conference. *"The fact that I got a chance to go away with them was amazing,"* Tisa said. *"They don't get to travel that much. They were so comfortable being open, meeting new people, and being in a new environment."*



Daseana Almond shows her craft creations..

Tisa began in AHRC NYC over nine years ago, shortly after graduating college. She has gotten immense personal gratification from her career. *"It gives me a sense of giving back,"* she said. *"We're enriching and enhancing someone else's life. I definitely view them as my family now."*

Being a *Community Support Professional* has also allowed Tisa to share her passions, including a knitting class in winter time. *"I get so excited to see the look in their [people receiving services] eyes about the small things that we take for granted,"* she beamed.

Tisa's committed work has earned her praise from both her colleagues at AHRC NYC and from her partners in the community. *"Tisa has worked extraordinarily hard to make sure the people she supports have opportunities for true belonging in their communities,"* **Kate Buncher** from Urban Innovations and Job Path said. *"She takes every opportunity to find creative ways to amplify their gifts and talents and is always encouraging. Her sunny, upbeat personality makes her a joy to be around and her enthusiasm lifts us all up."*



Tisa French-King with Daseana Almond and Chris Kelly in Harlem.

Without Walls Winners: Staff and Supervisors Recognize Each Other



Day Hab Without Walls, (DHWOW) staff members represent the future of community-based services. As our field moves toward complete societal inclusion for people receiving services, DHWOW provides opportunities for increased independence and exciting experiences all throughout New York City.

This model is both highly rewarding and uniquely challenging for employees. *Directors* and *Supervisors* from DHWOW wanted to recognize the passion and dedication of these

workers as **Direct Support Professionals Appreciation Week** approached. Thus, the *DHWOW Awards* were created! "Initially [the award ceremony] was Community Support Supervisor (CSS) **Kimeisha Thomas'** suggestion when we were discussing ideas for team building," **Sarah Soriano**, *Director*, DHWOW, said. "Then all of the *DHWOW leadership team* worked together to develop it into a reality."

Sarah said that categories were developed by Community Support Professionals and then

fully formulated through group discussion and meetings. "A week was given for all DHWOW staff (CSPs, CSS, and Admins) to submit for nominations via email and two weeks were open for all staff to vote online," Sarah explained.

The result was a fun-filled, humorous, and uplifting afternoon! Held on Thursday, September 8th, at [Manhattan Day Habilitation](#), 20 awards were given out, along with music and refreshments.



Awards were provided to these professionals for attributes including resourcefulness, leadership, creativity, thoughtfulness, teamwork, dedication, communication skills, and professionalism.

The *Community Support Professionals* and *Community Support Supervisors* that were honored for their work to support people with disabilities included:

- Peter Doherty**, CSP, Bronx
- Vladimir Bozic**, CSP, Manhattan
- Edgar Rodriguez**, CSS, Brooklyn
- John Joseph**, CSP, Manhattan
- Bianca Rivera**, CSP, Brooklyn
- Lashonda Young**, CSP, Queens
- Jessica Taveras**, CSP, Manhattan
- Charisse Henry**, CSP, Bronx
- David Valand**, CSP, Brooklyn
- Marquita Johnson**, CSP, Bronx
- Lisa Palmer**, CSP, Queens
- Melanie Freeman**, CSP, Manhattan
- Fulani Nuyenzikazi**, CSP, Bronx
- Krystle Cruz**, CSP, Bronx
- James Pedroza**, CSP, Queens

- Lanasia Allen**, CSP, Queens
- Holli Flack**, CSP, Manhattan
- Josiah Wells**, CSP, Brooklyn
- Nicholas Sparacino**, CSP, Queens



A special award was also given to **Sarah Soriano**. Because she is DHWOW's *Woman of Many Hats*, she received several different headpieces with various labels: Team Builder, Director and Supervisor All-in-One, etc.



Enrich the Lives of Yourself and Others: Become a Direct Support Professional

Being a Direct Support Professional is more than a career. It's a calling. DSPs are the backbone of our organization, providing care, comfort, and companionship to thousands of New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities each day.

AHRC New York City is always looking for dedicated professionals to join our day programs, residences, in-home services, and more. We offer competitive salaries and excellent benefits, as well as the immeasurable opportunity to change and improve lives.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about careers at AHRC New York City, please visit our website. Full Time, Part Time and Per Diem Positions are available, with flexible schedules.