

# Rising

## Foundation Place Provides Respite & Relief

In the *Harry Potter* series of books and movies, Hogwarts Castle features a “Room of Requirement,” a magical room that appears whenever a person urgently needs it and providing whatever is required at that moment.

Rising Ground’s newly opened Foundation Place has a similar mandate, in a more permanent Brooklyn location, offering respite for parents and caregivers during emergencies and times of crisis by providing short-term care for their children in a safe and nurturing space.

The new facility — currently New York City’s only center-based respite program contracted to Rising Ground by New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services — fills a gap in family stabilization services by allowing parents and caregivers to find temporary care for their children without having them enter the child welfare system.

Top photo - Foundation Place team, Jasmine Ramsey; Getmary Perez, Andrea Carter, and Christina Galletti. Bottom photos: The vibrant play area and one of the children’s bedrooms.

Continued on Page 4 ►



## Rising to the Challenge

Rising Ground was proud to be selected as one of nine nonprofits in the New York metro area to participate in Morgan Stanley’s 2024 Strategy Challenge this spring, the firm’s annual signature pro bono initiative...

Continued on Page 5 ►

Pictured, L-r: Jennifer Westpfahl, Morgan Stanley MD Advisor; Alan Mucatel, Rising Ground CEO; Angie Molina, Morgan Stanley Inclusive Ventures Group; Stephanie Serino, Morgan Stanley Legal & Compliance; Dr. Robyn Jacobson, Rising Ground Vice President, Behavioral Health Services; Christina Tam, Morgan Stanley Operations; Susan Sampogna, Rising Ground Executive Vice President/Chief Program Officer; Joanna Barberii-Rosario, Rising Ground Assistant Vice President, Mental Health Services; and James Reid, Morgan Stanley Fixed Income Division. Photo taken by Robert Curtis.



## Expanding our footprint and working towards our vision of equal opportunity for all New Yorkers

### From our CEO

Dear friends,

As we look to do more to help our neighbors, I am pleased to share information about two long-anticipated and much-needed new services: the opening of Foundation Place providing short-term center-based respite for parents and guardians; and the launch of *From Hope to Home*, an expansion of our *Passage of Hope* program for unaccompanied minors, providing post release services to help to ensure the children's safety after they leave our care.

As New York City's only center-based respite program, one of the vital elements of Foundation Place is that the child or children placed in our care is not entering the child welfare system (foster care). As you will read in our story about a mother who recently used Foundation Place's services, the goal is to provide temporary relief, particularly in times of crisis or emergency, and prevent child protective involvement. "Respite," and "Relief," are two powerful words and form the core of our preventive and family stabilization work. Foundation Place provides a timely release valve for family pressure, and I look forward to the center's expansion in June to be able to accommodate a total of 10 children aged from birth to 14.

Since opening our *Passage of Hope* (Camino de Esperanza) program a decade ago, we have wanted to have a greater constructive impact in the lives of the children after they have left our care and moved in with their sponsor, most commonly a relative. *The From Hope to Home* (De la Esperanza a Casa) program providing post release services and home visits not only enables us to ensure they are safe and cared for, but allows us to connect families with a wide array of services, including education, legal, and mental health assistance. It is an expansion we wholeheartedly welcome and with the goal of conducting more than 250 home studies each year, will make a significant contribution to the communities where the children and families are forging their futures.

These two examples of Rising Ground's life-affirming work make up a much larger picture. Each of our services supports our vision of a future where every child has an equal opportunity to succeed; where vulnerable individuals and families have the resources and support they need; where people with disabilities can access opportunity and fully participate in their communities; and where all are supported as they navigate life's challenges and positively direct their lives.

**As we continue to evolve,  
I thank you for your support  
& commitment to this work.**

**Alan Mucatel**  
Chief Executive Officer





Photos by Ben Asen Photography/Melanie Einzig.

# A Night to Remember: Gala 2024

Our annual Gala was held on March 14<sup>th</sup> at the Metropolitan Club of New York. Thank you to everyone who attended and to our sponsors who made this such a successful fundraising event providing critical funds to continue our work. A heartfelt thank you to all of the people supported who graciously shared their stories with us on the night, either in person or via video, and to the Rising Ground staff members who demonstrate daily what it means to be mission driven. It was truly a night to remember!

## SAVE THE DATE!

**Fall Benefit**  
October 8, 2024

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► Continued from front page

## Foundation Place

Families who are supported by this service may be experiencing a medical or psychiatric emergency where the parent or caregiver is hospitalized, an emergency move, or the parent's admission into a short-term substance abuse treatment program, among other situations. Foundation Place provides care for up to 10 children aged from birth to 14 for up to 21 days. In addition to meeting immediate needs, Foundation Place staff can also assist families in identifying family and community-based support beyond the short term. Referrals to Foundation Place can come from hospitals, human services organizations (including within Rising Ground), or direct calls to the 24/7 help line (1-888-435-7553) from the parent or caregiver.

For Fatima, a single mother of four including a newborn daughter, Foundation Place met an urgent need when she experienced post-partum complications and had to return to the hospital. Fatima, who currently lives in a shelter, was referred to Foundation Place by a hospital social worker. Initially reluctant, especially about being separated from her newborn, her health situation became life-threatening, and she was admitted. Her social worker encouraged her to call the help line and Rising Ground's Foundation Place staff came to the hospital to pick up the baby and two of Fatima's other daughters aged six and 11.

"They were very quick. They came and picked up my daughters and at the time they picked them up I was able to speak to them. They gave me everyone's phone number, from the director to every staff member, so I could get in touch with my daughters. Even at the wee hours of the night, I was able to FaceTime to make sure everything was okay and to make sure I felt at ease with my baby daughter being away from me."

Foundation Place staff took Fatima's older daughters to and from school, something else she had been concerned about.

"They listened to every detail that I had to tell them about my daughters — what time they had to be picked up, and what time they had to be dropped off. With my newborn, they listened to everything with her as far as her feeding and when I went to pick her up, she was clean and she looked fine. My daughters

didn't have any complaints. My six-year-old didn't want to leave! When the kids don't want to leave, that's a good thing."

Foundation Place Director, Jasmine Ramsey, says Fatima's situation illustrates why center-based respite is so needed.



"We know that there are many parents or guardians who do not have robust support systems. Not being able to find someone to look after their children can sometimes mean they don't want to keep medical appointments or seek care for themselves. With Foundation Place, we strive to reassure them that their children will be safe and well cared for and we work closely with the parent or guardian to find out what their children's specific needs are so they can take the time to care for themselves."

Located in a two-level house in Brooklyn, Foundation Place staff have created a warm and welcoming space, with the bedrooms colorfully decorated for the children and the living spaces bright and cheerful. The basement includes a vibrant play area, and the house has a backyard space allowing for outdoor play.

Fatima is enthusiastically spreading the word about Foundation Place to other single mothers and would not hesitate to use the services again: "I give you guys five out of five." ★



Foundation Place's rec room, infants room, and children's room décor.

## ► Continued from front page

### Rising to the Challenge

Over 10 weeks, staff from our senior management and mental health services teams worked with Morgan Stanley employees to address strategic challenges within the organization. They specifically looked at how Rising Ground may grow its community mental health services.

The final recommendation from the Strategy Challenge team was to expand our work through a clinic in the South Bronx, fulfilling a strong need in the community for expanded access to barrier-free mental health services. In determining that the South Bronx was the preferred location, the team considered the following: greatest impact, differentiation from peer organizations, operating model, and financial viability.

In addition to recommending the location, the team provided guidelines on implementation, identified areas requiring operational improvement, and provided financial forecasting and suggestions for organizational strengthening.

The Morgan Stanley Strategy Challenge team presented its findings at an event showcasing all nine participants. Initial steps are beginning to proceed with expansion based on the recommendations from the Morgan Stanley volunteers. For their efforts, the Morgan Stanley staff were awarded 3rd prize among their colleagues based on their work on Rising Ground's behalf, and Rising Ground was provided a grant to go towards implementing the plan. ◆

# Immigration Services Expanded to Include Post Release Care

Rising Ground's immigration services have expanded with the new *From Hope to Home* program, which consists of home studies to further assess the safety of homes and potential sponsors of children, as well as post release services, which assist the sponsor/family with the supportive services they need to ensure the child's physical and mental well-being once they are living in the community.

Rising Ground's *Passage of Hope* program increased its capacity last year and we are currently able to care for up to 348 youth on any given day. The children stay with us while awaiting placement with caring adult sponsors, most commonly close relatives. With these new home study and post release services we are able to provide children who have left Rising Ground's care, as well as from any other provider in the U.S., and have been placed in homes with sponsors in the New York and New Jersey area.

"For a very long time we have wanted to create a continuum of care for the unaccompanied children," says Senior Vice President for Immigration Services, Diana Amado. "Our work is not done once children are reunified with their families - on the contrary, that is when they need us the most. We can now provide them with resources and supports to facilitate their successful integration into their new communities."

One area of concern has been the delay in children being enrolled in school following their release. *From Hope to Home's* services include assisting with the school enrollment process and encouraging a better understanding of the local school system to promote engagement, development, and growth.



### Post release services (PRS) may also include:

- Assistance in accessing food and other materials following a comprehensive needs assessment of the children and their families.
- Supporting children and their families in securing medical services by assisting in Medicaid and/or health insurance enrollment and connecting them to doctors.
- Connecting children and their families to pro-bono attorneys to help with their naturalization/legal status.
- Utilizing trauma-informed practices to adequately assess and support every child's needs and encourage healthy familial relationships and appropriate mental health referrals.
- Connecting children and their families to local organizations to enrich family and community relationships.

Home studies are an in-depth assessment of the potential sponsor's ability to ensure the child's safety and well-being on discharge. Previously, home studies were mandated by the federal

government for children who had been victims of trafficking or physical or sexual abuse, and for children with special needs or a disability. Home studies were also required for sponsors seeking to sponsor multiple children at once, or who had previously sponsored a child and who were seeking to sponsor another. This has now expanded to include discretionary home studies to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child, including children with mental health or medical concerns.

Our home study workers integrate engagement techniques as they thoroughly assess the new environment for the child. They then make a recommendation that ensures the safety, well-being and best interests of the child. The home studies are carried out over four to six weeks and include background checks on all adults in the household, home visits before the child is released, and face-to-face interviews with everyone in the household.

Rising Ground expects to conduct 250 home studies annually and to support 1,000 families with post release services. ♦

## Rising Ground advocates for *JustPay* for all human services workers

Rising Ground joined roughly 200 human service workers from 40 organizations in Albany in March to advocate to New York State Senators and Assembly members for a 3.2% cost of living adjustment (COLA) as part of the Human Services Council-led *JustPay* campaign. They also raised awareness of two bills, one to include all human service positions in the COLA and the other to create a Wage Board to annually evaluate wages of similar positions in government compared to non-profit organizations to promote pay equity. Throughout the day, human services workers shared their stories in over 50 meetings with legislators' offices, held a press conference, and took part in social media campaigns.

Later in the month, New York City announced that it will be providing a 3% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for human service workers under city contracts with non-profit providers beginning in the fiscal year that starts July 1<sup>st</sup>.

"What is particularly exciting is that it includes an additional 3% increase for each of the subsequent two years. This is the first time we have an indication of multi-year salary increases for any city, state, or federal contracts," says Rising Ground CEO, Alan Mucatel. "There are many details still to come, so we are cautious in our excitement and we know that 3% annual increases are not enough. We must, and we will, push for better wages, with an eventual goal of parity with city workers doing similar work."

Mr. Mucatel emphasized the need for continued advocacy efforts: "We must press further for our government contracts include an escalation each year to cover increases in rent, food and other expenses that could otherwise put a squeeze on funds available for salaries."

For more information, visit [justpayny.org](http://justpayny.org).

# Help Us to Meet the Needs of New Yorkers Year-Round

Rising Ground is currently seeking donations for Personal Care Packages to support over 4,000 runaway and homeless youth. The packages include toiletry and personal care items, cleaning supplies, undergarments, socks, and more. The personal Care Packages drive is one of four in-kind donation drives Rising Ground has to meet seasonal needs, providing a tangible and effective way for people to help their neighbors.

In addition to individual donations such as donating money towards a specific drive or purchasing items using Amazon wish-lists curated by Rising Ground, the in-kind donation drives are also an excellent opportunity for companies and organizations to engage their employees or members in volunteering. Companies and organizations can coordinate their own internal drives, collecting bulk items for Rising Ground to pick up and distribute. To inquire about how you can get involved in a drive, please contact Sharon Pyle at Spyle@RisingGround.org or 212-437-3551. We are happy to coordinate the pick-up of the donated items if needed or to advise on drop-off locations. If you are on our email list, you will receive notifications of each of these drives with donation links and detailed lists of requested items. You can also find this information on our website, RisingGround.org under "Get Involved/Corporate & Group Volunteering" and on our social media channels.

Below you will find details of our four seasonal drives. Several of our community-focused programs also have a year-round need for supplies to support families.

## May-June 2024

### Personal Care Packages for Homeless Youth

Requesting toiletry items and personal care items, undergarments, socks and outerwear to support over 4,000 youth in our Runaway & Homeless Youth programs.

## July-September 2024

### Annual Back to School Drive – Backpacks & School Supplies (Kindergarten – High School)

Requesting backpacks and school supplies to help more than 3,000 students with the required resources to have a successful and productive school year.

## September-November 2024

### Thanksgiving Food Drive

Requesting unexpired canned goods, frozen turkeys, dry goods, and pantry staples such as seasonings to support over 1,000 families experiencing food insecurities.

## October-December 2024

### Holiday Gift Drive

Requesting toys and \$25 gift cards for Amazon, Target, or Visa/Mastercard to support more than 3,000 youth across the organization. In most cases a gift from Rising Ground is the only gift youth will receive for the holidays.

### Year Round In-Kind Donations

Diapers (all sizes), laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, feminine hygiene products, and can openers are some of the supplies our community-focused programs require on an ongoing basis.



Driven by the belief that each of us can thrive when life has hope and opportunity, Rising Ground provides caring support and proven paths to positive change, helping New York City area children, adults, and families rise above adversity. Founded as an orphanage in 1831, Rising Ground is a leading nonprofit human services organization that has been at the forefront of evolving community needs and is a leader in utilizing results-driven, evidence-based practices. Today, the organization's work is a positive force in the lives of more than 25,000 individuals across 101 programs at 138 sites.



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