

Rising

Rapid Re-housing:

Moving on From the Past & Making Way for the Future

When 25-year-old Chanel opens the refrigerator of the Bronx apartment she has lived in for the past year, she sees more than its contents. When she looks at the vegetables and meat products, she thinks about the guidance she has received on buying groceries and budgeting for food. As she assesses the use-by dates and checks her produce for signs of spoiling, she thinks about the food safety instruction she has been given as well as the general tenant safety information about window guards and smoke alarms. She also thinks about the time in the not-so-distant past when she did not have her own refrigerator or a home. She thinks about where she had been and how far she has come.

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Rising Ground's New Central Offices

This summer, Rising Ground opened its new centralized administrative offices at 1333 Broadway in Manhattan. Positioned at the heart of our expansive geographic reach across New York City, our new central administrative hub supports programs and services in communities throughout New York City and lower Westchester.

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From our CEO

Dear Friends,

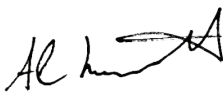
Transitioning into adulthood is a monumental step in anyone's life. For many, this phase is filled with both excitement and anxiety as they navigate the complexities of becoming increasingly independent. Securing stable housing and acquiring life skills are critical areas where support and guidance can make a profound positive impact. Rising Ground is proud to have numerous programs that guide young adults through these challenges, equipping them with the tools they need and giving them a greater capacity to thrive.

For young people lacking a robust support network, including those aging out of foster care who have not been reunited with family members or adopted, the transition can be especially daunting. Secure and stable housing is a fundamental need for all and our Rapid Re-housing program, featured in this issue, has been helping young people find a pathway out of homelessness.

Alongside the Rapid Re-housing program, our nine Transitional Independent Living (TIL) residences for runaway and homeless youth and our newly opened Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP) for youth leaving foster care also provide more than just a roof over a young person's head. They offer practical steps towards self-sufficiency by providing assistance such as financial literacy training, career readiness counseling, and emotional supports – often provided by staff with similar lived experiences.

The constructive impact of these programs is enormous both in scope and in the lives of each individual. Young adults who participate in housing and life skills programs often report increased confidence, better financial stability, and a greater sense of independence. Success stories abound, showcasing individuals who, with the help of these programs, have gone on to secure stable employment, find permanent housing, and build fulfilling lives.

Your support of our work to help young people find positive paths forward is critical to our success. Thank you!



Alan Mucatel
Chief Executive Officer





Fall Benefit

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2024 | 6:30PM

LA VIBRA NYC | 37 W 26th St, New York, NY 10010

Celebrate and Support Our Work

Join us at our Fall Benefit cocktail party on Tuesday, October 8 to celebrate the work of Rising Ground! An informal and fun event, the Fall Benefit brings together compassionate individuals who share a commitment to making a positive impact in our community with funds directly supporting our programs including our youth development, child welfare, mental health, intimate partner and gender-based violence, unaccompanied migrant child programs, and other life-affirming services.

In addition to enjoying cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, the evening will provide an opportunity to hear firsthand from individuals supported by Rising Ground.



La Vibra NYC, this year's Fall Benefit venue.

Tickets are \$250 and available online at RisingGround.org/2024FallBenefit

Gary Moross & Graham Thomas Join Our Board

We are pleased to welcome Gary Moross and Graham Thomas to Rising Ground's Board of Directors. Gary Moross is a Partner at HG Vora Capital Management and a member of the firm's investment committee. Graham Thomas is a private equity operating executive at KKR, where he focuses on driving employee engagement and implementing broad-based ownership programs across KKR's portfolio companies.

"I am thrilled to welcome Gary Moross and Graham Thomas and their wealth of professional experience and personal experience to Rising Ground," said Matt Del Percio, President of the Board of Directors. "At a time of rapid organizational growth and increased impact, I look forward to the valuable insights they will bring to our work providing children, adults, and families with the resources and skills needed to rise above adversity and positively direct their lives."

Gary Moross said: "I have been extremely impressed by the wide-ranging and deeply impactful work of Rising Ground and I look forward to joining this impassioned, empathetic, and skilled group of individuals to further the mission of this incredible organization."



Gary Moross

Graham Thomas said: "I feel privileged to be able to support the critical work that Rising Ground does to help families, youth, immigrants, and so many others find opportunities to thrive in life. I am particularly appreciative of Rising Ground's ability to address needs holistically with on-staff counselors, psychologists, social workers, educators, and advocates, and the ability to refer families and individuals across programs."



Graham Thomas

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Rapid Re-housing

Chanel is supported by Rising Ground's Rapid Re-housing program that helps young adults aged 18 to 24 quickly exit homelessness into permanent housing. Funded by the US Department of Housing Urban Development (HUD) and regulated by New York City's Continuum of Care, Rapid Re-housing provides up to two years of rental assistance and support services that are tailored to the needs of each young person. Rising Ground receives referrals from the New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development and Department of Homeless Services for young people who have either been in the city's shelter system or living on the streets. Rising Ground is also a provider of HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) that offers up to three years of rental assistance with the "homeless" definition expanded to include young people who have been couch surfing. Combined, the Rapid Re-Housing program and YHDP offer assistance to over 120 young people a year.



Rapid Re-housing Program Director, Karim Lewis, was presented with the Employee Excellence Award for Management in May. L-R: Rising Ground CEO, Alan Mucatel, Karim Lewis, and Senior Vice President for Community Programs, Bradley Pierre.

In a city with a notoriously difficult apartment market, Director Karim Lewis says the programs have established relationships with seven affordable housing companies and also private landlords, including roommate shares. Following an assessment on whether living alone or with a roommate is most suitable, a housing specialist helps the young person to evaluate and select an apartment and assist with the steps of signing a lease. Once housed, the young person receives support from a Case Manager and a Youth Peer Advocate (YPA). YPAs are professionally credited young people aged 30 and under who have experienced homelessness. They serve as a personal advocate for the young person as they transition

from survival mode to stability, and provide emotional support. Zaqanah Stephens and Onyx Walker are two of the YPAs at Rising Ground.

"Often we assume it is very straightforward when someone gets housing – that they are going to be happy and that everything will be great. However, there are a lot of emotions that could come up when someone moves from homelessness to housing, even if it is something positive," says Zaqanah, who has been a YPA for three years. "Housing instability can create a lot of trauma that surfaces when moving and around housing in general. You could feel afraid to be happy or not feel safe to be happy because you're not sure if it is something that will be taken away from you. I work with the youth to get comfortable in their space and to trust that they can be independent."

Onyx, who has been a YPA for two years, agrees trusting that the support is solid and sustained takes time and that understanding the young person's reactions is key: "There's a saying, 'it's better to stick with the devil you know, than the angel you don't know.' I think for a lot of people that seems to be true, because change is scary. The whole thing is scary – you were just homeless and now you have an apartment, and this person is telling you to do something you've never done before. It's terrifying for a lot of people. I think childhood struggles are a part of what is coming up during this transition. Current struggles are a part of it as well. As someone with lived experience, I understand how hard it is to shift your mindset from the survival mode."

For Chanel, the support of her Case Manager, Demetrice Gore, helped her overcome her fears: "Don't get me wrong, being housed definitely does take a lot of stress off of one's shoulders, but having a case manager by your side helps to process the experience you've been through and make the transition easier. My case manager, Demetrice, has been very supportive. First, she makes sure I am safe. She helps me understand the responsibilities of having an apartment. She has helped me understand that the things and the trauma I have been through don't define me."

In addition to a Case Manager, who makes regular home visits, and the YPA, the young people receive employment and income support services including

financial planning and budgeting assistance. The youth also receive counseling and mental health services when needed.

Chanel says the scope of the support and the time spent making sure she is ready for independence was unexpected: "I thought this was only going to be a short-term, three-month thing. This is a government program and I thought they would just want to say that they got me housed and that I would just be another number for them. Now it is almost a whole year later. There's a team of people that want to support me in becoming more stable, helping me grow, and helping me get beyond my trauma."

Trusting the support offered to her has helped Chanel make her apartment into her home. She has brought clothing out of storage and bought furniture. She is focused on managing her finances to cover the expenses of one's own apartment, paying off college and credit card debt, and broadly achieving stability in her life.

And then there is the pride she has in her well-stocked, regularly cleaned fridge. She says she now feels secure enough to not overstock on food because she knows there is going to be another grocery shop, a safe place to keep her food, and a kitchen where she can cook her meals. She knows she has a home. ★



Rapid Re-housing Youth Peer Advocates Zaqanah Stephens and Onyx Walker at the Neighborhood Mixer organized by the Runaway & Homeless Youth teams.

Being Pro-active About the Personal

For Rapid Re-housing Youth Peer Advocates, drawing on their lived experiences when working with young people is rewarding, especially when they can provide the emotional support that was not available to them when they were homeless. However, reliving their trauma on a regular basis can also take an emotional toll. In addition to having support within the Rising Ground Runaway and Homeless Youth Services team, Zaqanah and Onyx find support through the Youth Action Board (YAB), a group that aspires to be agents of change using lived experiences of homelessness as a tool to assist NYC youth 16-24 years. Onyx, who is the current chair of the YAB, says sharing experiences and resources with others allows his personal efforts to support many others.

"Among our accomplishments is our work with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to create a youth mental health forum. They were already doing these forums, but they had not addressed the runaway and homeless youth population. They reached out to see if there was any way that they could get feedback from homeless young people or folks that have experienced homelessness before. We brought people together and had a three-hour long conversation That was super impactful because we were really getting to the bottom of why is it that young people do not look into mental health services as well as how to make services accessible for them when they do."

The YPAs recently joined colleagues from other Rising Ground runaway and homeless youth programs to organize a mixer for young people living in the same neighborhood, giving individuals who may have been feeling isolated by their new living situation an opportunity to meet other young people with shared experiences. The goal is to expand their network of support in the community.

"Being encouraged to fully explore what peer and youth advocacy can mean helped me to unpack many difficult emotions, have a sense of purpose, and has allowed me to realize that I'm able to do something about the challenges others face," says Zaqanah. "Knowing that I have support at my work to fully invest in myself is powerful and has made me able to do this work better and remain safe." ★

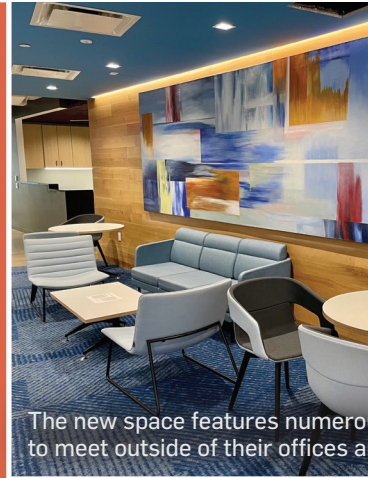
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Rising Ground's New Central Offices

The new location brings together our administrative teams from Yonkers and Brooklyn with over 100 employees from our Finance, Human Resources, Performance, Evaluation, and Monitoring (PEM), General Services, IT, Training, Institutional Advancement, Diversity, Fairness, and Belonging (DFB), Purchasing, Real Estate, Administrative, and Executive departments.

Alongside the vibrant new artworks in the new space, you will also find some treasured monuments from our 193-year history. Two of the marble plaques from the historic Yonkers administrative building have been installed at Broadway – one from 1840 that commemorates the opening of the Leake & Watts orphanage from when it was in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and another commemorating the opening of the Yonkers building in 1890.

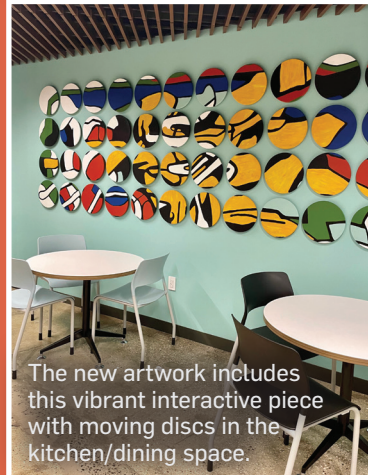
Plans are also underway to bring the statues of John George Leake and John Watts Jr. into the new building. This is a monumental undertaking as they are extremely large and heavy. We look forward to sharing the details of their journey with you in the coming months and to continuing to welcome staff, supporters, and friends to our new space.



The new space features numerous areas for employees to meet outside of their offices and cubicles.



The first New Employee Orientation cohort to use the new training space.



The new artwork includes this vibrant interactive piece with moving discs in the kitchen/dining space.



Iconic view from the 8th floor.



Statues of John Watts Jr. and John George Leake await their transfer to Broadway. Photos: Method Design.



Members of the HR and PEM teams with one of the historic plaques moved from Yonkers to Broadway.

Early Head Start Program to Grow

Rising Ground has been funded by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services to expand its Early Head Start services in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Early Head Start is a federal program that bridges the achievement gap so children from low-income families can start school with a solid educational foundation by providing infants and toddlers ages 0-3 with a safe environment to learn and grow while their parents can work. The program also provides parenting classes and assistance with accessing services such as food stamps, ESL classes, job training, and healthcare.

Currently Rising Ground provides high quality childcare to 136 families through 16 family day care providers in the Bronx. In addition, the program provides support to 20 pregnant parents with assistance with prenatal information covering fetal development, labor and delivery, postpartum recovery, and breastfeeding. The two new contracts will allow Rising Ground to support an additional 268 children through new family day care providers as well as assist 40 additional pregnant parents.

“Rising Ground has a proud track record with over 10 years of providing Early Head Start services to Bronx families,” said Alan Mucatel, Rising Ground’s CEO. “We are thrilled to expand our services in the Bronx and into Brooklyn and to be able to support many more families at this critical time of parenting, from providing pre-natal resources to laying a firm foundation for the future success of their toddlers.”



In the News

Rising Ground’s CEO, **Alan Mucatel**, and Senior Vice President for Diversity, Fairness, and Belonging, **Travis Rodgers**, are featured in 2024 “Power Player” lists published by *PoliticsNY* and *amNYmetro News*.



Alan Mucatel & Travis Rodgers at the NYC Pride March in June.

Alan was named a **LGBTQ+ Power Player** in June—Pride Month—with the list also published by *Gay City News*. Speaking to the ways Rising Ground supports the LGBTQIA+ community, he said: “Rising Ground’s direct work with, and support of, youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+ is extensive including our work with runaway and homeless youth, children and families who are impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and survivors of intimate partner violence. I hope to spread the message about our capacity to assist community members by providing safe spaces and giving every person supported the ability to be their authentic self.”

In August, Travis was featured in the **2024 Power Players in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** list. He shared that his passion for fighting for equity and justice was first ignited when a teacher made him Thurgood Marshall in a school play. Of his vital work at Rising Ground, he said: “It’s important to Rising Ground because the people we support are often the most forgotten about folks in the city and so it is critical that we approach all of our activities through a lens of equity and a lens of fairness to be able to make sure that our staff is equipped to help these folks and also to advocate and fight against the systems that have created the situation that they’re in.”

Simplifying Planned Giving

Rising Ground has partnered with FreeWill, a platform renowned for making impactful gifts both easier to give and simpler for organizations like ours to receive. FreeWill breaks down barriers to estate planning such as time constraints and cost. Their secure online Planned Giving Suite can help you make or update your will within 20 minutes, free of charge.



Including a gift to Rising Ground in your will is entirely optional but builds a legacy that helps us continue to safeguard and steward children in need all the way to adulthood for generations to come. When you support Rising Ground with a planned gift, you are welcomed into our 1831 Society, a community for donors whose generosity provides hope and opportunity for the future.

FreeWill's Planned Giving Suite allows people to take the opportunity to record decisions that protect their loved ones and plan for all their assets. They can also create a gift in their wills to support Rising Ground long into the future. FreeWill's gift intent form allows those who have already included us in their wills to notify us so we can ensure our records are up-to-date and acknowledge them. FreeWill also offers a trusted online resource to help individuals plan their beneficiaries for non-probate assets not part of their will such as an IRA, 401(k), and life insurance policy. Donors will have the option to designate us as a beneficiary of these to also establish their legacies with Rising Ground.

You will find links to Rising Ground's FreeWill tools on our Donate and on our 1831 Society Planned Giving pages on our website, www.RisingGround.org. If you would like to have these links emailed directly to you, or if you have any questions about FreeWill, please contact Sharon Pyle at SPyle@RisingGround.org.

Celebrating Excellence

Congratulations to our **2024 Employees of the Year**, **Kariym Bell**, Youth Counselor, Justice for Youth & Families, and **Okeefa Plaskett**, Child Care Counselor, Youth Reception Center. They were celebrated at our annual Employee Recognition Evening dinner in May saluting those who have demonstrated extraordinary skill, empathy, and resilience in their work. Kariym and Okeefa were selected from our 24 Employees of the Month. The evening also recognized eight Employee Excellence Award recipients. Additionally, 137 Length of Service awards—ranging from five years to a remarkable 35 years—were presented. The full list of award recipients can be found online at RisingGround.org/events



Employees of the Year,
Kariym Bell and Okeefa Plaskett



35-year Length of Service
recipients, Suzanne Santos
and Michele Erazo

Photos by Lamarr Nelson/
Get Every Moment Photography

SAVE THE DATE!

Rising Ground's **2025 Gala** will take place on
Wednesday, March 12 at Tribeca Rooftop.



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 over 30,000 individuals reaching 72,000 adults, children, and families across 101 programs at 138 sites.



@RisingGroundNY

1333 Broadway, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10018-1064
RisingGround.org