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## A Boost for Rainbow Heights

The Rainbow Heights Club, New York State's only government-funded, community-based program, which provides support and advocacy services focusing the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons living with severe and persistent mental illness and developmental disabilities, announced more than \$100,000 in new program funding at its annual "Spring Fling" Open House.

This new funding, which represents a 33 percent increase in its current funding levels, is the result of the agency and its supporters, faced with closure just three years ago, re-focusing their efforts and identifying and funding unmet need in the community it serves.

The agency has received a one year grant from the NY AIDS Fund in the amount of \$50,000 as well as a \$10,000 one year grant from the Brooklyn-based Independence Community Foundation. Both grants will be used to provide a first of its kind HIV prevention and testing program for LGBT persons living with mental illness, a group with a seropositivity rate placed as high as 20 percent in some studies.

Additionally, the group announced a one-year grant for \$44,000 from the NY Community Trust to develop and deliver LGBT cultural competence trainings to the professional staffs of mainstream providers of mental health services in the city of New York. This will help educate mental health staff of the unique challenges faced by LGBT persons living with mental illness and receiving services in the City of New York as they try to access care.

The agency, now in its fifth year of operation, also announced that its main source of funding, a three-year contract with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, has been renewed through June of 2010.

The open house event was attended by City Councilmember Leticia James, who has directly supported the agency through member item funding, as well as Assembly Member Hakeem Jeffries, who lobbied Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver for more LGBT specific funding, which resulted in a 50 percent increase in the discretionary funds provided by the speaker for LGBT social service providers statewide.

Speaking at the event, Rainbow Heights Club Executive Director, Dr. Christian Huygen, told the audience that, "We're thrilled to be at a place now where we can be confident that our funding base is continuing to grow and diversify so we can address the needs of LGBT persons living and recovering from mental illness with new programming initiatives and services for a long time to come."

Speaking to a group of Rainbow Heights Club members, Assemblyman Jefferies remarked, "For far too long the needs of LGBT people in our city have been under funded and people who desperately need services have gone without. With the help of our new governor, it is our goal to begin to change that so residents of our city can access services they need without regard to their sexual orientation or gender identities."