Celebrating Solutions Award
Nomination Form

Legal name of organization: Barrier Free Living Holding, Inc. (formerly named Barrier Free Living, Inc.)

Year established: 1981

Program nominated for award (if different): The Secret Garden

Year established: 1986

Address: 270 East Second Street

City/State/ZIP code: New York, NY 10009

Contact person: Paul Feuerstein

Title: President & CEO

Phone number: 212-677-6668, ext. 123

Fax number: 212-539-1526

E-mail address: paulf@bflnyc.org

Website address: www.bflnyc.org

Brief description of organization:

Barrier Free Living (BFL) provides emergency and transitional housing, along with residential and nonresidential case management, safety planning, occupational therapy, and short- and long-term counseling, to people with disabilities who have extremely limited incomes and are either homeless or facing domestic violence issues and the threat of homelessness. In the almost 30 years we have been working with individuals with disabilities, we have both provided comprehensive services and been instrumental in successfully advocating for the necessary systemic changes that allow people with disabilities to achieve full and rightful access to all segments of society. And while we continually advocate on behalf of people with disabilities, we also, as importantly, help them to advocate for themselves.

Geographical area served: New York City

Is the organization tax-exempt under IRS 501(c)(3) guidelines or a public agency/unit of government? Organization is an IRS 501(c)(3) entity.
Celebrating Solutions Award
Nomination Form

Please check up to five descriptors that best apply to the program you are nominating:

X Shelter-based
X Counseling
_____ Healthcare setting
_____ Dating violence
_____ School/youth violence
X Underserved population
_____ Faith-based
_____ Elder abuse
_____ Legal aid/assistance
_____ University setting
_____ Batterer treatment

_____ Prison-based
_____ Stalking
_____ Coalition/collaboration
_____ Transitional housing
_____ Technology/Internet service
_____ Employment/training program
_____ Victim relocation
X Hotline service
X Public awareness/education
_____ Other ____________________
Celebrating Solutions Award
Program Outline

1. Describe the mission of your organization in five sentences or less.

Barrier Free Living's (BFL) overall mission is to help people with disabilities live dignified, secure, and independent lives. More specifically, BFL's mission largely focuses on assisting domestic violence survivors with disabilities through four primary objectives, two of which are person-centered and two of which are systems-based. Person-centered objectives involve (a) mitigating the stigmatization and inequity experienced by people with disabilities who are/have been victims of abuse by ensuring culturally sensitive and disability literate service delivery and (b) promoting safety, empowerment, and ability to self-advocate by offering therapeutic and benefits counseling, housing assistance, and independent living skills training. Systems-based objectives involve (a) removing the social, economic and political barriers to access that are typically encountered by people with disabilities by participating in advocacy and community organizing activities and (b) ensuring understanding of the treatment issues unique to disabled survivors of domestic violence by conducting outreach and educational activities with other service providers, policymakers, public servants, and the general community.

2. Describe the most innovative aspects of the program you are submitting for consideration.

Secret Garden, BFL's nonresidential domestic violence intervention program, is one of only a few programs nationwide purposely designed to serve people with disabilities who are also experiencing or recovering from situations of domestic violence. Recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice as one of twelve model programs in the country to address the needs of disabled victims of crime (with only three of these engaged in domestic violence issues), Secret Garden's innovations are substantial:

- We have focused on understanding and treating the unique co-existing issues faced by domestic violence survivors with disabilities for over 20 years.
- We do not limit our assistance to individuals with specific disabilities; rather, we are a cross-disability service provider to people with a broad range of physical, sensory, cognitive, medical and/or psychiatric conditions.
- We further enhance our work with people with disabilities by hiring people with disabilities; at present, more than 25% of BFL's staff of 90-plus employees are individuals with self-reported disabilities, with Secret Garden employing three employees with disabilities as case workers.
- We ensure a treatment environment that provides the full spectrum of accommodations that is required to serve people with varying disabilities. This includes: fully accessible office space that accommodates consumers and employees who are mobility-impaired; TTY and Sorensen telecommunication/hotline systems and caseworkers with American Sign Language skills for interactions with and services for deaf or hard-of-hearing consumers; resource materials available in large print, Braille or audiotape as needed by blind or visually-impaired consumers; and on-site psychiatric and legal clinics that allow consumers to obtain services they may not otherwise be able to receive due to external barriers (e.g. lack of available accessible transportation, inaccessible office space at other agencies, etc.).
- We wholly acknowledge and work to address the issues of dependence, imbalance of power, and stereotyping that follow domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Our program provides
strong disability-sensitive crisis management and therapy; comprehensive individualized treatment planning and follow-up for ongoing safety planning; housing advocacy and entitlements counseling; educational and vocational advocacy and referrals; and on-site occupational therapy for the development and/or improvement of overall independent living skills.

- We are informed in our approach by our cumulative knowledge of the stigmatization in society towards both disability and domestic violence, and, as a result, we actively participate in systemic and individual advocacy in order to ensure that barriers to independent living are identified and subsequently addressed as best as possible. This direct involvement in advocacy is necessary if our consumers are to achieve and maintain safe, equitable living circumstances in their communities.

- We offer free access to our services for as long as our consumers feel they are needed, because we understand that the recovery process from situations of domestic violence is long-term in nature.

3. Describe your program's implementation. What barriers did your organization have to overcome? How did you marshal the necessary resources for implementation?

In 1986, BFL's then-existing Mental Health Clinic expanded its scope to work with disabled victims of domestic violence. This expansion was in direct response to the discovery, through our work with disabled adults, that a large proportion of people we worked with had some history of being victimized by members of their family, significant others or non-family caregivers. From 1986 through 1997, BFL served some 1,800 disabled victims of domestic violence as part of the clinic program. In October 1997, BFL began a contract with the NYC Human Resources Administration to provide non-residential domestic violence intervention services to people with disabilities on a city-wide basis. This program, Secret Garden, continues to the present, receiving nearly 300 calls a month from disabled women requesting help, counseling and crisis intervention related to domestic violence situations.

Given that no other agency in NYC had engaged in working specifically with disabled survivors of domestic violence, there was a great deal of initial skepticism over the need for such a specialized program. There existed a belief -- especially by potential funders -- that domestic violence victims, regardless of disability status, could be adequately served by a mainstream service program. In fact, most mainstream agencies lacked -- and often continue to lack -- the comprehensive accessibility, accommodation and treatment policies and practices required to provide appropriate assistance to people with disabilities (e.g. full accessibility of space; alternative modes of communication such as ASL interpretation, TTY or Sorensen systems, Braille, large print or recorded materials; peer-to-peer mentoring by people with disabilities; other means of disability accommodations). As a result, BFL conducted and continues to conduct a broad range of outreach and educational activities aimed at state and local government agencies and other service providers to underscore the unique needs related to domestic violence survivors with disabilities. These activities are described in greater detail below.

4. How do you know your program works. Please cite two examples.

To measure impact, Secret Garden uses the Self-Efficacy Scale for Battered Women (SESFBW), which provides comparative baseline and post-service scores on ability to self-disclose or ask for
help, plan for safety, and attain reasonable psychosocial functioning. The SESFBW baseline serves as a guide by which individualized action plans (with clearly stated treatment and independent living skill objectives) are developed. Plans, in turn, provide documentation of either progress or lack of progress relative to actions and goals and are periodically reviewed and/or modified to ensure ongoing relevancy to the consumer's recovery issues and needs. An improved SESFBW score over time is one significant measure of service success, and progress-to-plan is another critical measure.

As tellingly, we see successes in the individual achievements of our many consumers. Maria, a 43-year-old Latina woman with degenerative multiple sclerosis and major depressive disorder, was referred to Secret Garden by a social worker after being hospitalized due to an attack by her former partner. Maria had lived with her mother in a one-bedroom apartment prior to hospitalization, but since her attacker knew of this location, it was no longer safe for her to return to that site. Maria required the use of a scooter, as well as the care of a home health aide to assist in selected activities of daily living. These two factors, however, were distinct barriers in accessing a New York City emergency domestic violence shelter, since few, if any, are fully accessible (in terms of entryways, toilet and shower facilities, hallway expanse) and none allow for a resident to be accompanied by an aide. Secret Garden staff knew immediately where to seek help for Maria – at BFL’s transitional housing facility, the only shelter in New York City that is fully accessible and provides home care services (along with independent living skills training, permanent housing placements, and counseling) specifically to homeless disabled adults. With the BFL facility offering a safe haven to Maria, Secret Garden staff was able to provide complementary case management to address Maria’s domestic violence and trauma issues. After a period of several months – in which Maria received weekly individual counseling, referrals for outside psychiatric and medical care, assistance in securing disability benefits and an accessible housing placement, instruction in managing the symptoms of her disability and in enhancing daily living skills, and help in securing legal advice from the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and the Urban Justice Center – Maria was successfully moved from the BFL facility to an assisted living facility outside of the city, where she currently lives independently and safely.

5. Who are your key partners? What are their roles?

Secret Garden partners with its sister programs within BFL, as well with a broad range of outside community-based organizations, in order to ensure comprehensive delivery of services to its consumers. Internally, Secret Garden works with (a) BFL’s transitional housing facility to secure for its consumers actual shelter when appropriate (as exemplified by Maria’s story) or housing assistance for consumers who are at risk of becoming homeless and (b) Freedom House, BFL’s 44-apartment emergency shelter for disabled victims of domestic violence and their families, in which consumers requiring post-discharge domestic violence services can directly avail themselves of Secret Garden’s program.

Externally, Secret Garden has a longstanding partnership with the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office (Brooklyn DA) and a more recent partnership with the NYC Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence (NYC OCDV). In 2000, Secret Garden began collaborating with the Brooklyn DA in a groundbreaking program known as Barrier Free Justice. This program identifies disabled victims of domestic violence in the Brooklyn Criminal Court System, who are then directly connected to Secret Garden and South Brooklyn Legal Services for further evaluation of service needs. From this partnership, Secret Garden was invited by NYC OCDV to join fourteen other agencies in staffing newly-formed Family Justice Centers (the Brooklyn location opened in 2005, the
Queens location opened in 2008, and the Bronx location is scheduled to open in 2009. These Family Justice Centers serve as the city’s “one-stop” locations for domestic violence victims to obtain the therapeutic, legal, and benefits assistance they need – and Secret Garden serves as the only program specializing in working with disabled survivors of domestic violence within each of these centers.

BFL also has reciprocal service agreements with a significant number of NYC-based organizations specializing in disabilities, domestic violence, homecare, legal aid, and housing, including: Association to Benefit Children; Brooklyn Family Justice Center; Brooklyn Legal Aid Society; Coalition for Battered Women; Center for Urban Community Services; Independent Care Systems; Mt. Sinai Hospital; Odyssey House; Queens Family Justice Center; Safe Horizon; Sanctuary for Families; SCAN New York; Steps to End Family Violence; Urban Justice Center; and Volunteers of America. These and other community-based collaborations provide BFL with a strong network for making direct referrals and obtaining outside services as needed – all of which allows Secret Garden to more optimally assist its consumers.

6. Could/should your program be replicated in other areas of the country? Why?

Secret Garden is singularly unique in its expertise and experience in serving survivors of domestic violence with physical, sensory, cognitive or medical disabilities. While other agencies provide services related primarily to either domestic violence or disability, Secret Garden is the only program in New York City – and one of only a few nationwide – with longstanding knowledge and proficiency in working to address the complex issues related to both disability and domestic violence as a collective service discipline. This expertise is especially compelling given the urgency of need:

- A 2005 Colorado Department of Public Health study of domestic violence victims with disabilities found that 85% of women with disabilities experience abuse at some time in their lives (www.cdphe.state.co.us/release/2005/CCASA-SAAM05PR.pdf).

- The National Coalition Against Violence reports that women with disabilities are more likely to be victims of abuse and violence than women without disabilities due to their increased physical, economic, social, and psychological dependence on others. Moreover, disabled domestic violence victims report significantly longer durations of abuse (Nosek, M.A., Howland, C.A., Young, M.E. (1997). “Abuse of Women with Disabilities: Policy Implications.” Journal of Disabilities Policy Studies, 8(1-2), 157-176).

- Disabled women tend to stay in physically abusive relationships for 11.3 years as opposed to 7.1 years for non-disabled women. People with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse for a number of reasons including (1) increased dependence on others for care, (2) perceptions of powerlessness, (3) lowered risk of discovery of the perpetrator, (4) social isolation and increased risk of manipulation, (5) physical helplessness and vulnerability, and (6) lack of employment options (Andrews, A. B. & Veronen, L. J. (1993). “Sexual assault and people with disabilities.” Journal of Social Work and Human Sexuality, 8:2, 137-159).

Given the seriousness of need and the unique treatment issues related to disability and domestic violence combined, the Secret Garden program absolutely should be replicated elsewhere. Along those lines, Secret Garden and other BFL staff members participate/have participated in a wide range of advocacy and educational activities, providing information and technical assistance to service providers, policymakers and public servants, and the general community, in the hope that our efforts will be replicated throughout New York State and elsewhere. Highlights include:
BFL is the only disability-focused member of the Safe Horizon Domestic Violence Hotline Task Force, as well as the New York City Residential Domestic Violence Coalition and its Housing and Services Sub-committees, with Secret Garden serving as a member of the New York City Non-Residential Domestic Violence Coalition, coordinating services with thirteen other domestic violence agencies.

BFL has gone to Michigan, where the Northville Regional Psychiatric Hospital requested a one-day workshop on Domestic Violence and Deafness, with representatives from eighteen states attending. The Governor of Indiana requested our assistance in opening that state’s 9th Annual Conference on Mental Health, Disability and Domestic Violence. In Colorado, the organizers of an annual conference on children and abuse requested our expertise on disability. We have presented at the New York State Coalition on Domestic Violence conference in Syracuse.

At the request of the Milbank Foundation, BFL’s President/CEO developed a report on the needs of disabled victims. In the process, we began to set up a nationwide network among the few experts in the field. We have continued to keep in touch with this network by telephone and e-mail.

In 1999, as part of its own Violence Against Women Act initiative, Secret Garden staff trained over 500 New York City Police Department sergeants and began a series of trainings that would ultimately train every domestic violence police officer in the City of New York on issues related to working with domestic violence victims with disabilities.

In 2000 and 2001, Secret Garden received grants from The Doors of Hope and United Way of Greater New York to institute a domestic violence prevention program with disabled students in New York City public schools. Staff targeted ten public schools and provided training to both parents and teachers of disabled students.

In 2002, BFL’s President/CEO was a presenter in the First International Conference on Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities in Riverside, California.

In 2005, BFL’s President/CEO participated in a two-day Disability Grant Program Focus Group for the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Violence Against Women.

In 2006, BFL was invited to be a member of the New York City Task Force on Domestic Violence and Permanent Housing.

In 2007, Secret Garden’s Deaf Services Coordinator initiated a Court Interpretation Task Force for Deaf Survivors of Domestic Violence, collaborating with a number of NYC-based agencies serving the deaf community or domestic violence survivors to conduct advocacy, outreach and education around the need for appropriately trained interpreters for court appearances. This followed the work of BFL’s President/CEO with New York State Office of Prevention of Domestic Violence on developing a region-wide response for deaf victims of domestic violence.

In 2008, Secret Garden staff traveled to Geneva, New York for the Healthy Families New York Conference to present to over 400 participants "Domestic Violence and Disabilities 101" and also made a presentation on "A Journey from Mental Illness to Mental Health: Perspectives on Psychiatric Disability and Interpersonal Violence" at a mental health conference held at the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office.
As one of the goals of the Mary Byron Foundation is to disseminate information about cutting-edge programs and best practices, we wish to post exemplary Celebrating Solutions Award nominations on our website (www.marybyronfoundation.org). Those posted will include the organization’s website address, telephone number, and e-mail address. If you have concerns about this request, please address them to information@marybyronfoundation.org prior to submitting a nomination.

By my signature on this letter, I grant the Mary Byron Foundation permission to use the contents of my nomination for the Celebrating Solutions Award in the manner and for the purposes set above. I further affirm that I am fully authorized to grant such permission to the Mary Byron Foundation. [Signature]

Sharon Fong, Chief Operating Officer
Paul: Paul Feuerstein

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

TO: Paul Feuerstein
FROM: Kathy Clemens

COMPANY: Barrier Free Living/Holding
DATE: 7/1/05

FAX NUMBER: 212-539-1526
TOTAL NO. OF PAGES INCLUDING COVER: 3

PHONE NUMBER: (502) 425-6205

RE: Celebrating Solutions

ENCES

URGENT FOR REVIEW PLEASE COMMENT PLEASE REPLY PLEASE RECYCLE

NOTES/COMMENTS:

Paul: This is a copy of what was mailed to you in May. The address appears to be correct. Please advise how much time we will need to get the information to us. We are in the process of reviewing the 2nd round information now, so we do need this ASAP. Thank you.

Kathy

10401 LINN STATION ROAD
LOUISVILLE, KY 40223
PHONE: 502-992-3444 OR TOLL FREE 866-264-6684
FAX: 502-425-6205
May 29, 2009

PAUL FEUERSTEIN
BARRIER FREE LIVING HOLDING INC
270 EAST SECOND STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10009

Dear MR. FEUERSTEIN,

We are pleased to inform you that your nomination for the Mary Byron Project’s Celebrating Solutions Award has been chosen to advance to the next round of judging. We received nearly 250 nominations and our selection committee has narrowed this field to about 21. We congratulate you on reaching this stage.

The field of semi-finalist candidates represents the best of our very excellent applications and thus is very competitive. As such, we are seeking more information in order to move closer to choosing the award recipients.

Please read the following instructions carefully, as an incomplete submission will result in elimination from consideration for the award.

1) Submit three letters of support which illustrate why the applicant or nominee is deserving of the award. All letters should include an address and telephone number for confirmation. One letter each should be submitted by:
   a) A partnering or collaborative organization or agency; and
   b) A victims’ organization.
   A third letter should be submitted by either:
   c) An elected official who represents the city, county, or state where the program operates; or
   d) A funding source.
Send only three letters. Any additional letters will be discarded.

2) Submit proof of 501 (c) (3) status if the program is operated by a non-profit, non-governmental agency.

3) Submit last year’s budget for the program to be served by the award.
4) Respond to the following questions:
   a) What is the approximate number of individuals served annually by the
      applicant or nominee?
   b) Are there past awards, accolades, and grants furnished upon the applicant or
      nominee that would further exemplify its success in combating domestic
      violence?
   c) If funding were not an issue, what (if any) changes or additions would you
      make to your program in the future?

5) Our selection committee has created a series of questions about each semi-finalist’s
   specific program so that we can better understand your work. Please see the enclosed
   separate sheet for your set of questions and answer each thoroughly.

All information must be postmarked by June 22, 2009. Please do not send us partial
information. When all the information is gathered and the questions are answered,
please submit five copies of the entire packet to us by mail. (Please include one set of
your original letters of support, plus 5 copies of them.)

We expect to announce the winners of the Celebrating Solutions Awards by late summer
of this year.
We commend your agency and its staff on its success in breaking the cycle of violence.
We thank you for applying and congratulate you on advancing to our next round of
judging.

If you have questions, please contact Gisela Nelson at gnelson@marybyronproject.org or
toll free at (866) 264-6684.
Sincerely,

Marcia Roth
Executive Director, Mary Byron Project
July 13th, 2009

The Mary Byron Project
Fostering Innovations and Strategies to End Domestic Violence
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville, KY 40223
Ms. Marcia Roth, Executive Director

Dear Ms Roth,

Please find below (and attached) the additional information requested by the selection committee and a summary of who we are. We are honored to be included in the final stage of nominees and wish to thank you for your generosity in extending our submission deadline!

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIENCE

In 1986, the focus of Barrier Free Living's Mental Health Clinic expanded to begin work with disabled victims of domestic violence. After extensive training of our staff, we came to realize that a large proportion of the people we were working with had some history of being victimized by members of their family or significant others. Domestic violence became an important focus of our Mental Health program. From 1986 through 1997, Barrier Free Living (BFL) served some 1,800 disabled victims of domestic violence.

In October of 1997, Barrier Free Living began a contract with the Human Resources Administration to provide non-residential domestic violence services to victims with disabilities on a citywide basis through our Secret Garden Program. Secret Garden receives over 400 hot-line calls a month requesting help, counseling and crisis intervention for disabled women and children in a domestic violence situation. **85% of the victims who call us are looking for housing or an accessible shelter.** Most must remain in the abusive situation due to lack of accessibility. For example, battered women shelters, though they try to accommodate, do not have interpreters or ramps to make their safe houses accessible. An adult who is disabled and being abused must wait to get accessibility.

BFL's expertise is well known not only in New York but throughout the United States, where our team has received numerous requests for training and conferences on domestic violence and disability. We have gone to Michigan, where the Northville Regional Psychiatric Hospital requested a one day workshop on Domestic Violence and Deafness. Eighteen states were represented at that conference. The Governor of Indiana requested our assistance in opening their 9th Annual Conference on Mental Health, Disability and Domestic Violence. In Colorado, their annual conference on children and abuse requested our expertise on disability.
BFL presented at the New York State-wide Coalition on Domestic Violence conference in Syracuse.

BFL was recognized in 1998 as one of ten model programs for disabled victims of domestic violence in the country by the Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime and the National Organization of Victim's Assistance in its bulletin Working with Crime Victims with Disabilities. In 1999, BFL's President/CEO was invited to participate in a National Academy of Science's colloquium on developmentally disabled victims of crime. He was the only clinician from New York State invited to that national event to help set research priorities for Congress.

At the request of the Milbank Foundation, BFL's President/CEO developed a report on the needs of disabled victims. In the process, we began to set up a nationwide network among the few experts in the field. We have been in touch with them since by telephone or e-mail.

BFL collaborated with Shanti Productions in the making of "Sisters Heard, Sisters Unseen", a video about the forgotten populations in the domestic violence service arena. That film premiered in the International Woman's Conference in Beijing China.

BFL is a member of Victims Services Domestic Violence Hotline Task Force, the New York City Domestic Violence Residence Coalition and its Best Practices Committee, the Manhattan Borough President's Task Force on Domestic Violence and his Task Force on Disability as well as the Brooklyn Borough President's Task Force on Disability.

- In 1996, BFL's Domestic Violence Program received a national award from the National Safety Council for Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities.

- In 1998, Barrier Free Living began collaboration with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office called Barrier Free Justice. This program, Funded with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) dollars, identifies every disabled victim of domestic violence in the Brooklyn Criminal Court System. Every individual is evaluated for their need for service and is connected with services at Barrier Free Living and South Brooklyn Legal Services. BFL has been instrumental in organizing training for district attorneys, police officers and agencies that work closely with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office.

- In 1999, as part of its own VAWA initiative, BFL staff trained over 500 New York City Police Department sergeants and began a series of trainings that would ultimately train every domestic violence police officer in the City of New York on issues related to working with domestic violence victims with disabilities.

- In 2000 and 2001, BFL received grants from The Doors of Hope and from United Way of Greater New York to institute a domestic violence prevention program with disabled students in New York City public schools. BFL staff have targeted ten public schools have provided training to both parents and teachers of disabled students.

- In 2002, BFL's President/CEO was a presenter in the First International Conference on Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities in Riverside, California.

- In 2004, BFL's President/CEO participated in an International Webinar on Disability and Abuse as part of the Disability, Abuse & Personal Rights Project. His presentation on the development of totally accessible shelters is still available as part of a series on disability-abuse.com
• In 2005, BFL's President/CEO participated in a two-day Disability Grant Program Focus Group for the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women.

• In 2006, BFL opened the first totally accessible emergency shelter in the United States for domestic violence victims with disabilities.

• In 2007, BFL began the Sign Language Court Interpretation Task Force which is working with judges and the court system to insure that deaf victims have access to interpreters when they go to court.

• In 2007, BFL began a relationship with the Institute for Healing of Memories in Cape Town, South Africa. The Institute was formed to help victims of Apartheid start their journey of healing from the atrocities that they had experienced. Its founder, Fr. Michael Lapsley, became disabled from a letter bomb sent by the South African government. His work with Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela created a groundbreaking process that allowed victims to tell their stories, find support from one another and take steps toward healing. Fr. Lapsley led a workshop for BFL's Domestic Violence staff and trained six staff members to be group facilitators. Since then, nine staff members have been trained to be facilitators and almost all Secret Garden staff and a significant percentage of Freedom House staff have participated in workshops. Quarterly workshops bring together residents of Freedom House with participants from Secret Garden for the three-day event. BFL staff has worked closely with Michael Lapsley to adapt the program to victims of domestic violence in the United States.

• In October, 2007, Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO and Georgette Delinois, Secret Garden's Director were invited to Cape Town for an international conference on Healing of Memories to meet with people doing similar healing work from fourteen countries and share best practices.

• BFL is the only program in North America that regularly runs Healing of Memories workshops. BFL's CEO is working closely with Michael Lapsley and a group of volunteers to establish the program in North America. He has just become Chairman of the Board of the Institute for Healing of Memories-North America.

• In 2008, John Gilles, Director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime spent a day touring BFL facilities and meeting with focus groups of consumers and partners. He stated at the end of the day that he would like to clone BFL all over the country.

• In 2008, BFL's President/CEO was a plenary panel speaker for the New York State Coalition on Domestic Violence's annual conference which focused on human rights dimensions within the domestic violence field.

• In 2009, BFL's non-residential director and assistant director were chosen to make a presentation at the national conference of the National Center for Victim's of Crime. Our staff was also chosen to present that the National Professional Training Conference on Responding to Crime Victims with Disabilities in Denver this coming September.

• In 2009, BFL began production of Breaking Barriers in Domestic Violence, a monthly e-newsletter to share our expertise with anyone interested in the subject. Our e-newsletter provides timely and relevant information in the field of disabilities and domestic abuse and includes examples of our work with disabled consumers. Individuals can sign up for the newsletter at www.bflnyc.org. (Please see enclosed copy of our first e-newsletter).
MISSION & SERVICES SUMMARY

Our Mission

Barrier Free Living is dedicated to helping New Yorkers with disabilities live independently in the community. We provide a range of services and linkages to other community resources, enabling individuals to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of their living dignified secure lives.

Our Vision

Barrier Free Living is our vision! We work toward a world free from abuse and bias, in which the barriers to housing, transportation, social services, legal systems, jobs, education, recreation and fulfilling relationships are broken down and people with disabilities have equal access in our communities.

Such a world would be a place where individuals with disabilities could overcome not only the obstacles of the physical environment and the indifference of our society, but also the internal barriers which hold them back from reaching their potential.

Our Values

- We come from a holistic perspective in which we respect the individual’s self-determination, culture and religion.
- We hold ourselves to a high standard of ethical and professional integrity.
- Our job is to support our consumers in their quest to attain their goals.
- We focus on a person’s strengths rather than their limitations.
- We believe that professionalism and confidentiality builds trusting relationships.
- Staff and the consumer together form a team to work toward the goals of the consumer.
- The power to change lies within the consumer.
- Taking personal responsibility enhances an individual’s self esteem.
- We recognize that failure is an integral part of progress, growth and success.
- When people build the skills and the mind set to become independent, they are less likely to accept abuse or be abusive.
- Information is Empowerment. Both staff and consumers should share what they know that could help someone else.

Barrier Free Living’s overall mission is to help people with disabilities live dignified, secure, and independent lives. More specifically, our non-residential domestic violence program Secret Garden focuses on assisting domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Our non residential program directly serves over 360 clients every year. Annually, over fifty-percent of them come into our program for the first time. The Secret Garden objectives involve mitigating the stigmatization and inequity experienced by people with disabilities who are/have been victims of abuse by ensuring culturally sensitive and disability literate services. We promote safety, empowerment, and foster the ability to “self-advocate” by offering therapeutic and benefits counseling, housing assistance, and independent living skills training.
Last year our statistics indicate that 64% of our clients had filed police reports and 51% had obtained an order of protection. And in keeping with our mission, mandate and expertise, 100% of our clients have one or more disabilities. We receive on average over 400 hot-line calls per month from people with disabilities and from service providers requesting help, counseling, referrals, and crisis intervention related to domestic violence.

In the past, Secret Garden has received grants from The Doors of Hope and United Way of Greater New York to initiate a domestic violence prevention program with disabled students in the New York City school system. In 2006, we were invited to join the New York City Task Force on Domestic Violence and Permanent Housing. The NYC Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence (NYC OCDV) invited Secret Garden to join fourteen other agencies in staffing both the Brooklyn and Queens Family Justice Centers.

Our services recognize that our clients have unique co-existing issues and, therefore, we do not limit our assistance to individuals with specific disabilities; rather, we are a cross-disability service provider for people with a broad range of physical, sensory, cognitive, medical and/or psychiatric conditions. We are proud to state that of staff mirrors the community and clientele that we serve – we have more than 25% of our staff with self-reported disabilities in jobs ranging from Case Managers to Housekeepers. We ensure a treatment environment that provides the full spectrum of accommodations that is required to serve people with varying disabilities. This includes fully accessible office space that accommodates consumers and staff who are mobility-impaired, TTY and Sorensen telecommunications/hotline systems and caseworkers with American Sign Language skills for interactions with and services for deaf or hard-of-hearing consumers, Braille or audiotape as needed for blind or visually impaired consumers, and on-site psychiatric and legal clinics that allow clients to obtain services they may not otherwise be able to receive due to external barriers (e.g. lack of available accessible transportation, inaccessible office space at other agencies, etc.)

Our program provides disability-sensitive crisis management and therapy; comprehensive treatment planning and follow-up for ongoing safety planning; housing advocacy and entitlements counseling; educational and vocational advocacy and referrals and on-site occupational therapy. Our services are offered free and for as long as our consumers feel they are needed – we understand that the recovery process from situations of domestic violence is long-term in nature and is reflected in our commitment.

OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

Secret Garden uses the Self-Efficacy Scale for Abused Women (SESAX) for clients referred to OT Services, which provides comparative baseline and post-service scores on ability to self-disclose or ask for help, plan for safety, and attain reasonable psychosocial functioning. The SESAX was developed to assess the self-efficacy needs of women who come to an emergency department with injuries and self-reported, current abuse. The SESAX baseline serves as a guide by which individualized action plans are developed. These plans, in turn, provide documentation of either progress or lack of progress relative to actions and goals and are periodically reviewed and/or modified to ensure ongoing relevancy. An improved SESAX score over time is one significant measure of service outcome success.

The SESAX metrics are utilized as a client-centered assessment tool. This tool provides a clinician with a glimpse of the survivor’s perception of their self-efficacy. A survivor’s self-efficacy is vital to determine a person’s ability to independently direct her/his own life while establishing an ongoing plan for safety. SESAX provides a strong predictive tool to recognize behavioral change and behavior choice.

The SESAX instrument takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and is self-administered. There are 12 Likert scaled questions with answers ranging from 0 to 100 in intervals of 10. The overall score is a sum of all raw scores divided by 12. Progress can be measured through comparison of scores over a period of time. An
increase in scores demonstrates greater ability for self-efficacy and a decrease in scores demonstrates less ability for self-efficacy.

Secret Garden also uses a Psychosocial Assessment Form, a Psychosocial Update Form, Treatment Plan, and Treatment Plan Review Form which allows us to track, monitor, and follow up on our client’s progress. (Please see attached).

And most tellingly, we can cite a specific example of how our program affects outcomes for clients:

Maria, a 43-year-old Latina with degenerative multiple sclerosis and depression disorder, was referred to Secret Garden by a social worker after being hospitalized due to an attack from her former partner. Maria had lived with her mother in a one-bedroom apartment prior to her hospitalization, but since her attacker knew of this location, it was no longer safe for her to return to that site. Maria required the use of a scooter, as well as the care of a home health attendant to assist with selected daily living activities. The scooter and home health attendant presented Maria with distinct barriers in accessing a New York City emergency domestic violence shelter.

With BFL securing the immediate safe haven that Maria needed, Secret Garden staff was able to provide complementary case management to address Maria’s domestic violence and trauma issues. After a period of several months, during which Maria received weekly individual counseling, referrals for outside psychiatric and medical care, assistance in securing disability benefits and an accessible housing placement, instruction in managing the symptoms of her disability and in enhancing daily living skills, and legal advice from the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and the Urban Justice Center, Maria was successfully moved from the BFL facility to an assisted living facility outside of the city, where she currently lives independently and safely.

Outreach & Educational Activities

Our program staff provides a broad range of outreach and educational activities to service providers (social workers, therapists, case managers, lawyers, police officers, graduate/undergraduate students, mental health workers, etc.) to underscore the unique needs related to domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Furthermore, we provide outreach to current and potential consumers to educate them about the dynamics of domestic violence, to keep them informed of our services, and to assist them in crafting individualized safety plans. Our outreach activities are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual agencies while also reflecting our agency’s ultimate goal which is: to ensure that individuals with disabilities who are survivors of abuse live dignified lives free of abuse.

To that effect, the topics covered during our educational activities include:

**Domestic Violence 101:**
Basic information on domestic violence: what it is, what it looks like, and how to respond to it. Dynamics of power and control are addressed.

**Domestic Violence and Disabilities:**
This training takes a closer look at domestic violence within the lives of people with disabilities. Issues of power and control are again addressed, with more attention paid to how a person’s disability may be exploited by an abuser. Safety planning for people with disabilities is also examined.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:**
PTSD is a mental illness that is often seen in survivors of trauma. This training helps with learning how to identify signs of PTSD, as well as how to work with PTSD in a domestic violence/disability context.
Vicarious Traumatization:
Working with survivors of trauma can be a difficult and exhausting process, and some workers may find themselves internalizing the traumatic experiences of their consumers. This training will aid in identifying what vicarious trauma is, signs that one is suffering adverse affects from vicarious trauma, and how to prevent burnout.

Domestic Violence and the Criminal Court Process:
Many survivors of domestic violence will find themselves involved with the criminal court process in some way. The criminal court process can be very confusing and frightening; it can also be of great benefit to survivors. This training demystifies the criminal court process by explaining what a domestic violence survivor may expect. Challenges and biases within the criminal justice system are also explored.

Teen Dating Violence:
Explores the issue of violence among teen intimate partner relationships. Topics covered in this training include how to respond to teen dating violence and safety planning for teens.

Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse:
This training explores the link between substance abuse and interpersonal violence, as well as how forced substance use can be used as an abusive tactic. Individuals in recovery from substance abuse may be at enhanced risk in an abusive relationship.

Domestic Violence and the Family:
Domestic violence has a huge impact on the emotional and physical well-being of a family. This training explores how domestic violence may be perpetrated across various family relationships, and the effect this has on other family members. Prevention and intervention techniques are presented.

Working with Parents to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect:
This training aims to educate workers on assisting parents in preventing child abuse and neglect. Signs of child abuse and neglect are discussed, as well as positive parenting techniques.

Trainings on Specific Disabilities/Mental Illnesses:
As mentioned above, Barrier Free Living can tailor presentations to an agency’s needs. For example, we have put together trainings on mental retardation and developmental disabilities for OMRDD.

Intersection of Deafness and Domestic Violence:
This training aims to address specific abuse issues as they relate to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Topics include the lack of understanding of and how to effectively work with that population, the importance of advocacy to help deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers effectively navigate various systems that impact their lives, and lastly the need to always have qualified interpreters on-site when working with that population.

The Challenge Ahead for Secret Garden

The Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence has invited us to be a charter partner in the Bronx Family Justice Center. The center is slated to open this Fall. The Family Justice Centers provide us with an office, a computer, a phone and access to copiers and office support, but no funding for staff to provide services. We are presently searching for funding to be able to respond to the needs of disabled residents of the Bronx who are identified through the criminal justice system.
How Secret Garden’s Program Can Be Replicated

Secret Garden, BFL’s non-residential domestic violence program, is one of the few programs in the nation designed to serve people with disabilities who are experiencing or recovering from situations of domestic violence. It can undoubtedly be a model for other programs interested in assisting this population. Our expertise working with people with disabilities who are victims of abuse has shown us that interventions are only effective if an individual’s abuse and disability are simultaneously addressed. Without addressing both issues, one cannot fully understand the intersection of domestic violence and disability, nor have the knowledge and skills that are necessary to help survivors bring about changes in their lives.

Many service providers treat survivors of abuse with disabilities by referring them to two different agencies, one which focuses on domestic violence and one which focuses on disabilities. In this process, client’s needs are left unmet. Understanding of the dynamics between abuse and disabilities, and how these dynamics effect successful service planning is easily lost by well meaning service providers who are not trained to work with both issues. At Secret Garden, our staff focuses on treating the unique co-existing issues faced by domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Furthermore, we have an environment that provides the full spectrum of accommodations that is required to serve people with varying disabilities.

Because of our expertise and understanding of both disability and domestic violence, Secret Garden has in place a team of social workers, case managers, occupational therapist, and a psychiatrist to support and assist our consumers with habilitation. Our services are comprehensive, sensitive and, client-friendly. Our services are not time limited, as we have a strong understanding that the recovery process from situations of domestic violence that are coupled with issues of disabilities are long-term in nature.

We frequently hear our consumers talking about the need to have a “Barrier Free Living/Secret Garden” in all cities, boroughs, and states to ensure that the needs of survivors with disabilities are understood and adequately met. Lastly, whereas the Family Justice Centers are one-stop shopping, the on-site partner organizations do not have the expertise of working with the co-existing issues that are faced by domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Therefore programs like the Secret Garden are needed and should be duplicated nationwide. This will prevent victims with disabilities from being marginalized.

We have just initiated a conversation with the Heartland Alliance of Chicago to explore the replication of our program in the mid-west. The Heartland Alliance has expressed an interest in sending a delegation to New York City to directly observe our program and protocols. We hope that this will blossom into a full fledged collaboration. With all of the best practice interventions used when working with survivors of abuse with disabilities, we strongly feel that our model should be replicated in all communities nationwide.

To that end, we created our new e-newsletter to provide interested practitioners with guidance, resources and a case example of what is needed to serve victims with disabilities.
In closing, we would be delighted to invite the Mary Byron Project to visit our domestic violence programs for you to observe our program and protocols firsthand!

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Paul Feuerstein, LOSW
President/CEO
E-mail: paulf@bflnyc.org

[Signature]
Donald Logan, MPA
Chief Operating Officer
E-mail: donalddl@bflnyc.org

Cc: Georgette Delinois, Program Director/Secret Garden
    Molly Freyer, Assistant Director/Secret Garden
July 6, 2009

Madeline Garcia Bigelow, Esq.
Director, Domestic Violence Project
Urban Justice Center

Re: Letter of Support for the Mary Byron Project's Celebrating Solutions Award

Dear Sir/Madam:

On behalf of The Domestic Violence Project at the Urban Justice Center, I would like to express our support for Barrier Free Living’s/Secret Garden nomination for the Mary Byron Project’s Celebrating Solutions Award. Secret Garden provides therapeutic interventions, case management, occupational therapy and psychiatric services to survivors of abuse with disabilities. Barrier Free Living is a leader in its field and has been providing comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence and their families for over twenty (20) years. This Award will speak to the excellent work provided by BFL’s Non-Residential Domestic Violence Program. It will further clearly reiterate the program’s commitment to survivors of domestic violence with disabilities and their quest to educate and sensitize service providers to the needs of that population.

Our agency has a positive working relationship with Barrier Free Living and we know them to be capable and effective partners in efforts to serve New York City residents in need. They have partnered with us through monthly legal consultations and trainings for our staff as well as city-wide initiatives in addressing the needs of victims.

Established in December of 2003, DVP gives low and middle-income survivors of domestic violence and their children the psychosocial support and legal advocacy they need to achieve freedom from the abuse and violence in their lives. Our mission demands a holistic approach in addressing the obstacles faced by our clients, with services provided by a collaborative team consisting of a social worker and an attorney. The team offers much needed legal assistance and supportive advocacy services to survivors of violence, including men, women, youth, and seniors. By providing non-judgmental support, respecting the victim’s perspective on
their own experience, advocating on their behalf, assisting them to develop a safety plan, and recognizing the complexity of each victim's experience, we are able to offer uniquely comprehensive services that address the multiple stressors faced by our clients.

DVP has had a long-standing partnership with Barrier Free Living and is intimately aware of its ongoing reach for excellence in service provision. It is with the utmost certainty and respect that we recommend Barrier Free Living/Secret Garden for this most prestigious award.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are in need of any additional information to further support this nomination. I can be reached via phone at 646.602.5610 or via email at mbigelow@urbanjustice.org.

Regards,

Madeline Garcia Bigelow, Esq.
Director, Domestic Violence Project
Urban Justice Center