



25 Flatbush Avenue, 3rd Floor ▪ Brooklyn, NY 11217 ▪ Phone: (718) 852-2584 ▪ Fax: (718) 875-5496

Testimonials from the Members, Staff and Volunteers of Rainbow Heights Club

Rainbow Heights Club currently has 350 members who are LGBT people living with mental illness. We also have a staff consisting of a clinical psychologist, two social workers, four consumer/provider peer specialists, and three student interns. These are some of their stories.

A Refuge and Sanctuary

There is no other refuge and sanctuary than Rainbow Heights Club for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people, those who are questioning, and also mentally ill. Rainbow Heights not only brought new friends from the LGBT world into my life, but its existence gave me a sense of empowerment. It was a wonderful day when I first joined the club in the summer of 2004 and I said to myself that the world seems to be becoming a better place—a place where people with all types of problems, whether health-related or whatnot, are provided with the necessary services that enable them to function in today's increasingly stressful society. I somewhat came out of the depressed state of mind and was happy—seeing life from a new perspective through my experiences in Rainbow Heights. Attending the support groups, playing pool, watching movies, playing board games, and socializing with new friends are most of the experiences brought into my present daily life courtesy of the Rainbow Heights Club. Going to this club brings joy and meaning into my life. If the club were to close, I would be very upset and drawn back into a lost state where I can't even begin to describe the situation. So let's not close this place, please!

-Anonymous

Rainbow Heights . . . A Story of Hope

My name is Michael L., and I am a member of an endangered species, Rainbow Heights Club. This club serves a unique purpose, what with helping both the mentally ill and the LGBT community at the same time. I personally have come to respect and count on the sage advice given out by the experienced and caring staff there. The people of Rainbow Heights are a special bunch, able to handle a double stigma daily. The loss of these specialists in the mental health community is simply wrong. I have made many friends and acquaintances due to this club's existence, and it serves as a safe place for us to talk openly and without fear of reprisal. Few places of this type exist in New York anymore. I have dedicated my precious free time to fighting this indiscretion tooth and nail. Many have joined me. We need many more. It is my hope, with this short letter to the community, that we might band together and save this valued commodity that is Rainbow Heights. I don't think of this as an end, but as a new and glorious beginning. God bless all of you. Thank you.

-Michael L.

After 17 Years... I am Now a Taxpayer!

I have been a member of Rainbow Heights Club for a little over a year. My psychiatrist had been suggesting that I attend the Club for about a year before I actually started attending.

I have been on disability for about 18 years and had not had much contact with other people. I started to lose friends I had and my socialization skills got weaker and weaker. Fortunately, I was able to start coming to the Club. I started making acquaintances with the other members and slowly but surely, my socialization skills started coming back. With this, with time, my self-confidence and self-esteem started coming back and growing to levels they had not previously ever reached.

After a year, I started feeling the need to increase my income over my monthly disability check. With what I have gained from Rainbow Heights, I was able to start thinking about getting a job part-time. I talked about this in groups at RHC and with some good friends I have made at the Club. Within a couple of weeks, I got the nerve(after having perused the want ads for nearly a month) to actually apply for a part-time job. I had the confidence to do this and work my hours around attendance at the Club (I work at night). I am earning a paycheck for the first time in over 17 years which is definitely a point of pride (and, indeed, I am once again a taxpayer).

I have new, good friends, my confidence and self-esteem are at higher levels than they have been in more than 40 years, my socialization skills are much improved, and I have been off medication and out of the hospital for over a year, all thanks to Rainbow Heights Club.

-Steven H.

The Only Day Program...

By all means, Rainbow Heights Club is like a day program for LGBT people with mental illness. And it is the only day program for LGBT people with mental illness. There is no other program like Rainbow Heights Club.

Without Rainbow Heights our clients would lose the opportunity and the pleasure of being in a place where they can socialize, meet, and make friends who are both LGBT and mentally ill. LGBT people with mental illness need a place to congregate, a place to meet, a place to come together where it is safe and welcoming—a place that can understand what it means to be LGBT and also to have a mental illness. That place is Rainbow Heights. There just is no other place like it.

Rainbow Heights helps its members to stay out of hospitals, to have mental and emotional stability, it helps members develop social relationships that are positive and meaningful, develop skills like writing, cooking, speaking in social settings, being assertive; it also helps members find out information about services that are available in the community such as housing programs and benefits counseling.

Without Rainbow Heights, many consumers would not have the emotional stability that the Club helps to build.

-Eric Jackson,
Peer Specialist

Off of Social Security, Working and Safe

I first came to Rainbow Heights as a member two years ago. I was totally disorganized mentally and socially and it gave me a framework, a safe space in which I could be myself (bisexual and a person living with schizoaffective disorder.) I met people and got much-needed support. Later on the most important part of my personal journey occurred and I took a job as a Peer Specialist at Rainbow Heights . It has been a wonderful experience, crucial to my livelihood and development—I've had a chance to work in an environment supportive of my strengths and challenges without the constant pressure of a job at an ordinary nonprofit organization. This IS no ordinary place. It is magical. It has made me able to work with good attendance when I previously had an absenteeism rate of 50% at jobs (due to psychiatric symptoms and hospitalizations), and it has made me look forward to days when I come here instead of dreading them. I care very deeply about the people of Rainbow Heights —they are like family to me. If this place were to close, I don't think I would be able to find another job, or another agency like it—I know I'd have to go back on Social Security and I'd likely relapse mentally.

-Kate Spencer,
Peer Specialist

Supporting Others

I started to volunteer at Rainbow Heights almost a year ago. I was their first volunteer. The day that I arrived I was asked to join the members in the lounge and talk a little bit about why I felt I wanted to be here. I told everyone that it had become a priority in my community and in my life to support LGBT mental health consumers. Since I have been here I have watched members, who I have grown to care for dearly, grow and change in ways I believe could only have happened with the support that they receive at Rainbow Heights. The unique quality of this support is that it is a matrix built entirely of consumers which provides an understanding and connectedness that no other program can offer. It is amazing how much I have learned about myself by coming and spending time at RHC; I think we are all the same in this way, we are all volunteering parts of ourselves in order to help support a growth process for people we care a great deal for.

-Shannon S., Volunteer

A Three Hour Train Trip for Unique Services

The Rainbow Heights Club provides essential services. It may seem that the services here are duplicated in other agencies – that view point does not take into account the ingrained homophobia and anti-gay and lesbian attitude that one meets.

I have been to other clubs – not only was I subjected to sexual harassment and come-ons by male clients, staff refused to take my objections seriously – and some were actively anti-gay, literally preaching at me within club house walls. In general I avoid clubhouses as I find such harassment intolerable. Rainbow Heights is the only place I have not been subjected to such things.

-Michele M.
Bronx , NY

P.S. I come here, to Brooklyn, all the way from the Bronx – an hour and half by train – because I feel safe here.

My Safe Haven, My First Home

Rainbow Heights Club ***is my safe haven, my first “home.”*** Being at the club with people who I can trust has helped me ***let go of things that were holding me back***, so now I am ***more self-sufficient*** because I know how to take better care of myself physical, emotionally and psychologically. People are positive and everyone works together here so it is easy to ask and receive help and advice.

It is ***essential and vital*** that Rainbow Heights Club stay open. Without a place like Rainbow Heights Club people will go back to hiding, won't feel safe to ask or get help, and will have nowhere to go. Being so isolated can lead to becoming more paranoid and having suicidal ideation, emergency hospitalizations or going back to inpatient psychiatric care for months.

-Beatrice C.

My Best Thing

Rainbow Heights Club is the best thing I ever found. It gave me my first opportunity to have close friendships with people to accept me completely. Being with people who can accept that I'm gay and have mental illness and have even “been there and done that” has given me the confidence and trust to talk openly and frankly about what's going on. Whether it is about medication or relationships I know that people will be sensitive and caring –it's easy to find someone to talk to here.

Without a place like Rainbow Heights Club, I am worried that people like me will keep problems to themselves and go “back inside and not come out.” Before I came to RHC, I stayed at home, didn't go out and didn't want to face problems because I thought no one would care or relate to what I'm going through. Now I have a community of people who accept me completely.

-Michael L.

A Very Important Network

At Rainbow Heights Club, a very intimate part of me reaches out in all directions; it reaches out to connect to the many unique people who comprise this agency. The program is unique as it is where mental health consumers can resolve the two-fold stigma of being LGBT on one hand and of suffering from mental illness on the other. At Rainbow Heights, I have built a very important network of people with whom I share and for whom I care.

Without this club, the net would be shattered.

-Sergio R.

I Was in Agony...

Help from Rainbow Heights Club is vital. Before I came here, I was always in agony—for about 9 or 10 years. I had no place to go to alleviate the suffering. Rainbow Heights Club is a wonderfully challenging place to again feel like a person. I am terrified that if the Club closes on July 1, 2005 , I will return to the same state I was in before it opened, and I may not survive.

-Anonymous