

FALL 2020

# HEIGHTS AND HILLS

• AT HOME •



## Welcome to Interim Executive Director, Betsy Smulyan



"The messages of appreciation we get from clients and their family members are of course the best type of support we get!"

I have been Interim Executive Director of Heights and Hills for 3 months now, and I feel so lucky to be part of an organization with such "hard heads and soft hearts."

When the pandemic hit, the safety of our at-risk clients was of course paramount. We immediately shifted to contactless strategies: telephone, video conference and home delivery. Our staff and volunteers have made thousands and thousands of phone calls to ensure clients are safe, delivered meals and groceries, held virtual classes, arranged for air conditioner installations, and much more.

The best way we can help our clients is by supporting our staff. Every staff member now has a Heights and Hills laptop computer. Staff communication has been critical; in addition to regular 'zoom culture,' we have offered support sessions on topics such as mindfulness and self-care. The messages of appreciation we get from clients and their family members are of course the best type of support we get!

Staff are still primarily working from home, but our offices are open on a limited basis and staff at the senior center go in to prepare food deliveries for our clients. But of course, our work is based on personal contact and we all look forward to returning to in-person operations as soon as it is safe.

Thank you for all you do to support the critical work of Heights and Hills.

Betsy Smulyan  
Interim Executive Director

### WELCOME FROM THE BOARD

The Heights and Hills Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Ms. Betsy Smulyan as Interim Executive Director, following the previously announced retirement of Executive Director Judy Willig in July.

A graduate of Brown University and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Betsy brings over thirty years of experience as a nonprofit executive. She most recently served as Executive Vice President at BRIC, where her responsibilities included oversight of government contract management, reporting and audit, assisting the organization through COVID-19 disruptions, and serving as Acting President during two interim periods. Betsy's prior experience also includes ten years as the Vice President of a nationally-recognized worker-owned home care company as well as a stint in long-term care at the NYC Human Resources Administration.

Please join us in welcoming Betsy into the Heights and Hills family. The Board is thrilled to have Betsy's guidance and leadership during this transition period while it undertakes the search for the organization's long-term Executive Director. As we embark upon this next chapter, we also thank Judy Willig, for the remarkable legacy she leaves and the strong foundation she built for Heights and Hills over her 33-year plus tenure.

# HEIGHTS AND HILLS **OUTREACH** during the pandemic

## **CAREGIVING**

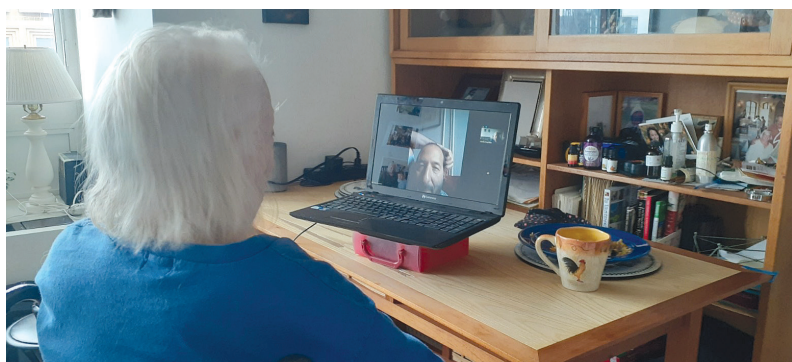
Caregiving is stressful under normal circumstances, but since the start of the pandemic, our Caregiver Team noted an uptick in the need for support. Caregivers are seeking more help and more interpersonal connection. The convenience of online workshops and support groups has suited caregivers and provided a flexible opportunity to join from anywhere. Participation in both support groups and workshops has increased since March.

Here's a recent example of how caregiver services impact clients. Recently, "Connie" reached out to our caregiving team for support. She struggles with her mother's resistance to care and confusion due to dementia; she was seeking help on how to manage her own feelings of burnout. For Connie, the Caregiving and Anger workshop, was especially salient:

*"Thank you again for providing the safe space for all of us to feel and share our feelings of anger and to use it as an indicator for necessary change. It was a relief to see how common an emotion it was among caregivers. Many folks said exactly what I was thinking/feeling, and it was good to be reminded that positive action can come out of anger; we just need to provide the space for it to be recognized, released, and transformed."*

## **CAREGIVER MEETINGS**

All meetings are free of charge. For up-to-date information on caregiving webinars and workshops, please visit [heightsandhills.org](https://heightsandhills.org) or call Raquel Perlman, Caregiver Program Director, at (718) 596-9789.

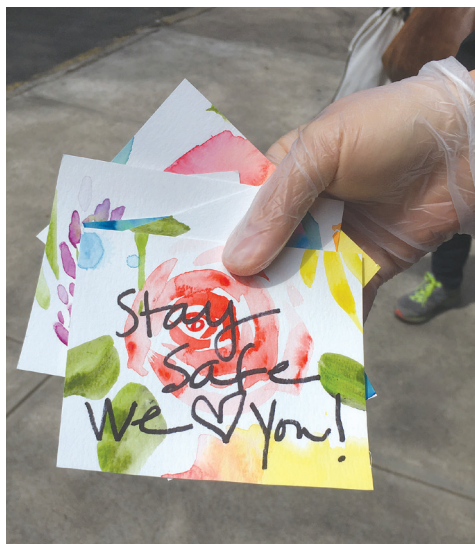


## **CASE MANAGEMENT**

Even though our case managers have not been able to visit clients in person since mid-March, they have kept in close contact with all clients through frequent phone calls.

At the start of the pandemic, calls were made twice a week to each client. At first, some clients felt like it was too much contact, but most became receptive over time. Case managers reported that these same resistive clients were more open during calls and more accepting of meal and produce deliveries and emergency food bags.

The consistency of calls from case managers reminding clients that they are not alone helped reassure them of our trustworthiness and allowed us to assess the shifting needs of clients throughout this pandemic. Case managers have tapped into many resources both within Heights and Hills and externally to meet the needs of clients who are struggling to get food and supplies. One group that has been helping our clients with delivery of produce and meals is The Camp Friendship Food Pantry in Park Slope.



## **PARK SLOPE CENTER FOR SUCCESSFUL AGING**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has forced everyone to rethink how to maintain connections and community when gathering in person is unsafe.

At PSCSA, community connections have continued through Zoom classes in topics such as meditation, Tai Chi, yoga, and digital photography. PSCSA has also continued to provide 5 meals a week for members, delivered by our wonderful volunteers.

Visit [heightsandhills.org](https://heightsandhills.org) for the latest online class schedules at PSCSA or call Matt Abrams, Center Director at (718) 832-3726 for more information.

*At left, some of the uplifting cards for clients designed by our volunteers.*

## VOLUNTEER Shopping Squad: A Covid innovation

Many older adults are facing increased food insecurity because of the pandemic. Challenges include: no access to technology for food delivery, fears about going out in public, fewer family visits and simply lack of funds. In response, we created our own special Shopping Squad, with generous support from the **Brooklyn Community Foundation COVID-19 Relief Fund**, **Plymouth Church COVID-19 Relief Fund** and **Northfield Bank Foundation**.

This new program assigns trusted and vetted volunteers to shop for up to \$50 worth of grocery items chosen by the recipient. Deliveries are made without contact to protect both volunteers and clients. Since May 1st our Shopping Squad volunteers have made over 300 individual shopping trips to provide groceries for over 125 of our homebound Case Management clients. The program offers what most food delivery programs do not – choice. Volunteers have shopped for everything from fresh blueberries to sweet potato fries providing food that “made an 80-year-old young lady very happy.”

As one dedicated Shopping Squad volunteer, Micheleen, puts it, “Food is essential, food doesn’t involve bias or politics, isn’t concerned about state of the world. It can soothe and restore a sense of normalcy.”

Patrick, one of our case managers, has two clients who have benefited from the Shopping Squad. Ms. J’s son and daughter are caregivers and usually shop for their mom. However, one of them was exposed to COVID on the job and had to quarantine. The Shopping Squad was able to grocery shop for Ms. J. when her children could not safely do so. This has reduced caregiver and financial strain for the entire family. Another client, Mr. W, who has severe vision issues, was referred because he had not been able to safely grocery shop for a long time. His very sensitive stomach doesn’t react well to Meals on Wheels, so it’s difficult to meet his food needs. A fiercely independent man, Mr. W has a very hard time accepting help with shopping, laundry, and cleaning. But the Shopping Squad struck a chord with him. Now he is more open to receiving additional services so he can remain in his home. And he was able to make coffee for the first time in two years!

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities to volunteer for Heights and Hills are updated weekly on **[heightsandhills.org](https://heightsandhills.org)**

If you have any questions about volunteering, please contact Betsy Guttmacher, Volunteer Program Director, [volunteer@heightsandhills.org](mailto:volunteer@heightsandhills.org) or (718) 596-8789 x329

### HEIGHTS AND HILLS 2020-21 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Betsy Smulyan,  
*Interim Executive  
Director*



### CLIENT REVIEWS

“The volunteer was extraordinary. First of all, I was very much in need of shopping list assistance. My volunteer, Victoria, was an adept shopper. She was able to obtain everything on my list. She was a kind and caring person.”

“I love the program. I love that you are helping citizens like ourselves at our age who are scared to go outside...it has made such a real difference in our lives.”

# VOTE

Your vote counts! Please visit **[www.vote.org/state/new-york](https://www.vote.org/state/new-york)** for information on voter registration, absentee ballots, voting by mail and polling information. Create a voting plan that works for you!





# HEIGHTS AND HILLS

supporting brooklyn's older adults

81 Willoughby Street, Suite 302

Brooklyn, NY 11201

718-596-8789 • [www.heightsandhills.org](http://www.heightsandhills.org)

## THANK YOU!

Since mid-March, here are some of the many ways your support made a difference for Brooklyn's oldest adults during this unprecedented time.

Special thanks to those of you who • donated generously to our Homebound but Not Alone and Jeff's Space appeals • delivered meals • made wellness calls • shopped for clients • made friendly visiting calls • hosted a fundraising concert online • organized a birthday fundraiser on Facebook • participated in our 5K Virtual Fun Run/Walk • donated to our 5K runners/walkers • decorated beautiful cards for clients • donated much needed supplies such as masks and toilet paper.

A shout out to **Brad Lander's** office for mobilizing volunteers to help make wellness calls, **Camp Friendship Food Pantry** for distributing food and **BloomAgainBklyn** for providing cards and flowers for clients.



Heights and Hills proudly meets all standards for charity accountability.