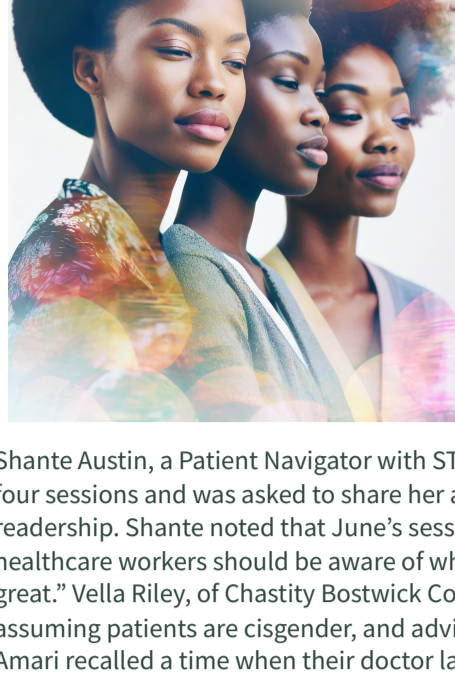




Fall/Winter 2023

#BeHealthyForYou

## Learning Collaborative on Optimizing Health and Well-Being for Black and African American Transgender and Gender Diverse Communities



From June through September 2023, several STAR-Downstate staff representing Nursing, Front Desk, and Care Coordination participated in a four-month national learning collaborative, Optimizing Health and Well-Being for Black and African American Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) Communities. Sponsored by the Fenway Institute's National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center, this monthly workshop series brought together community healthcare providers throughout the nation so they might better understand the barriers and challenges that Black and African American TGD people often face when seeking health care and wellness support. Best practices to build affirming health care experiences were shared by community activists and healthcare providers with extensive leadership experience.

Shante Austin, a Patient Navigator with STAR's Care Coordination Program, actively participated in all four sessions and was asked to share her assessment of the program with STAR Community Link readership. Shante noted that June's session, which included an expert panel who advised what healthcare workers should be aware of when caring for Black/African American TGD people, "was great." Vella Riley, of Chastity Bostwick Consulting & Talent Group, warned participants against assuming patients are cisgender, and advised providers to recognize that gender is a spectrum. Kabir Amari recalled a time when their doctor laughed at their identity as non-binary, leading them, the Director of the Campaign to End AIDS at Positive Impact Health Centers in Atlanta, to say they would rather die with dignity at home than have to defend who they are to a doctor. Shante noted that the learning collaborative series became "underwhelming" when specific sessions neglected to mention how racism plays a part in the substantial rates of unemployment, homelessness, and delay of necessary healthcare of Black and African American TGD people.

Shante was asked how STAR might move forward with what we learned from the collaborative. "We need to speak with the community directly and bring them into the conversation. They should lead the conversation." Shante went on to note that many of the people we serve are transient and may move around during the year. "We need to meet them where they're at. Don't let them fall through the cracks." Describing the harm caused by "domestic violence, self-harm, and substance use, compounded by transphobia," Shante emphasized the importance of culturally attuned mental health services. "It's very easy for people to be overwhelmed with the weight of the world living in New York City."

Shante also discussed the opportunity created by the recent upgrade of the University Hospital at Downstate electronic medical record. In line with Joint Commission standards, to promote culturally sensitive care and identify health disparities, our medical record now contains fields to document sexual orientation and gender identity. Ensuring that every individual's health record is complete with this information is an important next step in the provision of specific and meaningful patient-centered care.

Shante cautioned against stereotyping Black and African American TGD people. "Suffering exists, but that's not all there is. No one wants to be sensationalized. People are more than their surgeries." Noting that reducing stigma leads to better health outcomes, Shante recommended that STAR sponsor specific social media campaigns informed by the voices of Black and African American transgender and gender diverse patients. "I would love to hear more from our patients."

## STAR PROGRAM UPDATES

**STAR Program staff**, including the **FOCUS** and **Prevention teams**, submitted abstracts that were accepted for poster presentation at the 8th annual 2023 New York State Ending the Epidemic (ETE) Summit. The ETE Summit is scheduled to be held on November 28-30, 2023, at the Albany Capital Center in Albany, NY. This year's event theme is **'Family Reunion: Together We Adapt and Thrive!'**

**Abstract Title:** "Leveraging EHR modifications, routine screening, and patient navigation to integrate comprehensive prevention services for underserved populations at risk for HIV."

**Synopsis:** To address disparities in new HIV diagnoses and PrEP utilization, our clinic adapted routine HIV screening to identify clients at risk for HIV who may benefit from comprehensive prevention services (CPS). We modified the electronic health record (EHR) system to send Patient Navigators an automated weekly report of clients who had a negative HIV screening test and a positive STI test in the past 12 months. Navigators outreached those identified in the report to provide PrEP and PEP education and to facilitate linkage to services. These systemic changes enabled us to connect underserved populations at risk for HIV to comprehensive HIV prevention services. **Authors:** Alexis K. Fields, MPH; Eusica Edmond-McBean, MPH, CHES; Steven Rose, AS, MPM; Ivan Ortiz; Tracey Griffith, MHA; Jessica E. Yager, MD, MPH

**Abstract Title:** "Data-Driven Efforts to Tackle Health Disparities: Using the NY Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR) to Fine-tune 2023 mpox Vaccine Outreach."

**Synopsis:** In May 2022, the sudden introduction of mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) among networks of MSM and transgender and gender diverse people in the United States required a timely response by HIV prevention and treatment providers, including the STAR Program in Central Brooklyn. This poster graphically demonstrates the outcomes of STAR's two-year initiative intended to address disparities in mpox vaccine uptake and demonstrate the value of cross-referencing patient data with the New York Citywide Immunization Registry to assess follow up needs.

**Authors:** Simon Korotzer-Mariani; Lori Hurley, PhD, MPH, MSW



In 2018, in response to implementation barriers, provider input, and evolving literature, NYC DOHMH integrated changes into an existing HIV patient navigator-centered program that had served STAR patients and thousands of other NYC individuals living with HIV since 2009. The PROMISE study (Program Refinements to Optimize Model Impact and Scalability based on Evidence) was launched in 2018 to evaluate the implementation of revisions to the HIV Care Coordination Program, which were intended to minimize persistent disparities in HIV outcomes among high-need persons living with HIV in New York City. STAR Program staff (Lori Hurley and Antoinette Davis) served on the Community Advisory Board and recruited patients to be interviewed for this study, supported by NIH (R01 MH117793) and undertaken by NYC DOHMH and the CUNY Institute for Implementation Science in Population Health.

Using discrete choice experiment methodology, the study explored Care Coordination (CCP) clients' experiences in the program, and the extent to which they felt the program responded to their needs. Two key general preferences emerged. Clients endorsed telehealth for ART adherence support and visit location, and clients endorsed intensive services, such as directly observed therapy (DOT) and Patient Navigator home visits, comparatively less frequently than less intensive CCP services. In addition, 40% endorsed telehealth for CCP visit location and ART adherence support and endorsed help with securing housing/food; 37% endorsed telehealth for CCP visit location and ART adherence support and endorsed staff reminding/arranging transportation to get to appointments; and 23% endorsed staff meeting clients at program location for CCP visits and staff working with clients to stick to medication schedules.

**Alexis Fields, MPH, and Steven Rose, AS, MPM**, launched a new phase in outreach efforts through a recent partnership with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). To facilitate efforts to engage people living with HIV who are out of care and who were previously seen or tested at Downstate, STAR has begun to receive referrals and updated contact information from Assess. Connect. Engage (ACE) Team of the DOHMH. FOCUS Navigator Steven Rose will reach out to these individuals and assess their current needs, offering them the opportunity to get care at STAR. We are looking forward to welcoming back many of our patients with the professional care they need!

## STAR Health Center



The **STAR Program's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee** has been charged with guiding the development and maintenance of a more equitable and inclusive workplace that affirms anti-racism, diversity, and intersectionality for all patients and employees. To that end, STAR has contracted with a consulting agency to provide services, including leadership training for supervisors, DEI training, and to inform more ways that STAR can provide greater operational transparency and career development and growth opportunities for staff. Thank you to the initial DEI committee (Michelle Melendez, David Odegard, Adrienne Pierce, Tonya Taylor, Jessica Yager) for leading the way in the selection of Sweet Livvy, LLC. For nearly a year, the second cohort of DEI Committee members have continued to work diligently and solicit staff feedback in an effort to advance new policies and initiatives that increase trust, transparency, and inclusion. Recommendations from the current DEI Committee have led to several recent successes: 1) development of a STAR Grievance Policy, 2) production of written procedures to clearly outline our Pay Parity and Pay Increase Policies, and 3) introduction of pronoun buttons for staff and pronoun stickers for STAR Health Center patients. The current DEI Committee members are listed below.

**DEI Committee (second cohort):** Siham Bennis; Lamont Bryant (Co-Chair); Ron Calangi; Alaina Chisholm (Secretary); Alexis Fields (Co-Chair); Mark Frederick; Natalie Mitchell; Adrienne Pierce (advisory member); Manisha Singh; Jessica Yager (advisory member).

**Charles Francillon, MPH**, represented the STAR Program as part of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Community Consultation Group (CCG). This group, comprised of representatives from community-based organizations, healthcare providers, academic institutions, and government agencies, is charged with guiding the direction and health indicators for the NYC Immigrant Health Report. Mr. Francillon's contributions to the inaugural CCG meeting, held in June 2023, left a lasting impact on Gretchen Van Wye, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Division of Epidemiology. During this meeting, he provided feedback on key health indicators to highlight in the new NYC Immigrant Health Report, best approaches to disaggregating data on immigrant populations, and how to present data in a culturally sensitive way.



From left: Zoraima Douglas; Tenisha Gillett-Smith; Kadean Pearl; Antoinette Davis; Musheerah McCray; Pamela Kirlew; Marilou Cerezo-Fronda. Photo Credit: Fiona Thomas

## STAR Health Center

From July to September 2023, ten **STAR-Brookdale staff members** celebrated birthdays (seven are pictured at left). Leonard (Lenny) Roseus, Patient Navigator with the care coordination team, kindly presented flowers to each celebrant on the same day.

## STAR FACULTY AND STAFF UPDATES



**Sabina Hirshfield, PhD**, Visiting Associate Professor in the STAR Program at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, was invited by the Patient Advocacy Committee of The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) to speak at the annual Advocacy in Medicine (AIM) Conference on Thursday, October 12, 2023 (virtual). Dr. Hirshfield is a public health scientist and nationally recognized expert in electronic and mobile health (eHealth/mHealth) interventions to improve HIV viral suppression and improve access to care among populations with a history of healthcare exclusion and discrimination.

The **AIM Conference** is a student-led initiative that seeks to inform and train future healthcare providers to advocate for the health of their patients. This year's theme is "LGBTQ+ Health." Dr. Hirshfield spoke about her intervention work in HIV, how it has contributed to the scientific field, and how it can inform healthcare settings that serve LGBTQ+ populations. The AIM Conference collaborates with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Center for Health Equity and the New York Academy of Medicine to help guide its mission and organization. The steering committee and audience of the AIM Conference comprises medical students and other health professions trainees from schools across the New York State area. Its student committee works to connect students to organizations active in many areas of health advocacy and to teach tangible skills, including lobbying and the effective use of social media.

**Christel Adhemar, BA**, joined STAR-Downstate's Care Coordination Program as a Patient Navigator in October 2023. Ms. Adhemar has worked as a Senior Peer Facilitator at the Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI) (profiled in this edition's Community Partner Spotlight), and most recently as a research assistant at the Research Foundation of CUNY. As a health educator, she provided clarification to misconceptions about substance use and sexual health, and worked to reduce stigma for individuals who live with HIV. She received her BA in Psychology from Hunter College/CUNY.

**Nicholas DiLoreto, MS**, joined STAR-Brookdale in August 2023 as Data Analyst for the Enhanced Data to Care Program at STAR-Brookdale. Prior to joining STAR, they worked as a Data Collection Specialist at the Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY, providing data for outreach and analysis as part of an academic program that targeted low-income Black and Latinx students. They received their undergraduate degrees in both Biological Anthropology and Psychology from Binghamton University/SUNY. Afterward, they received their graduate degree in Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences from CUNY Graduate Center.

**Rio O'Mary, MD**, joined STAR-Downstate in September 2023 as a Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine. She attended Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai for medical school. She completed her residency in Family Medicine at SUNY Downstate, where she also served as Chief Resident. Her clinical interests include HIV care and prevention, women's/reproductive health, and LGBTQ+ care.

**Ivan Ortiz** joined STAR-Downstate in June 2023 as a Prevention Navigator with the PlaySure 2.0 prevention initiative. Mr. Ortiz has been a Case Manager/PrEP Navigator since his early days at CAMBA in Flatbush, Brooklyn where he supervised their PrEP/PEP Program. For 6 years, Mr. Ortiz developed prevention services skills doing sexual health presentations at non-traditional sites like tattoo parlors, barbershops, beauty salons, bars and clubs, integrating good interpersonal skills with knowledge of the local communities and how to reach them. He started referring clients to the STAR Program back in 2017 and developed relationships with STAR Program staff over the years. He is a tester and counselor for rapid HIV, hepatitis C and syphilis.

**Steven Rose, AS, MPM**, joined STAR-Downstate in June 2023 as a Patient Navigator with the FOCUS Program, a routine HIV/HCV screening and linkage initiative. Steven was born in Jamaica and currently resides in Brooklyn. Prior to joining STAR, Steven worked in the HIV education, prevention and testing field for over 5 years at organizations such as APICHA Community Center, Argus Community, Inc., and other non-profit LGBTQ organizations in NYC. Steven has a passion for community building within the LGBTQ Caribbean community and actively works with different community-based organizations to help bridge the gap for access to HIV education, prevention and treatment. Steven has an Associate of Science degree from the Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY and Master Project Manager (MPM) certification from the American Academy of Project Management, and is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in public health at Hunter College/CUNY.



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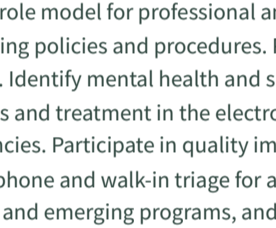
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## EMPLOYMENT OPENINGS

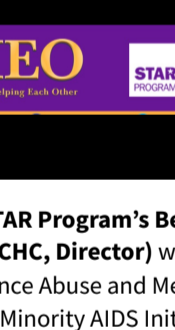
**Nurse Supervisor (BSN, RN) – Ambulatory Care**  
**Minimum Qualifications:** Registered nurse with NYS license; BSN from accredited nursing school with at 3 years of ambulatory care experience. Proficient in the use of Microsoft Office, EHR, and hospital-based applications. **Additional Preferred Qualifications:** Master's degree in nursing, public health, or related field. Experience in the care of HIV/HCV and substance use disorders. Experience in academic medical center with integrated care/research. Experience with regulatory requirements of Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH). **Hours:** 37.5 hours per week; must be able to work flexible schedule, including some evenings and occasional weekends. **Responsibilities:** Provide direct patient care involving the administration and oversight of medications, vaccinations, and nursing care assessments, participate in the evaluation and screening for patients receiving buprenorphine. Participate in the development and implementation of teaching plans for patients, family, and/or caregivers and promote patient self-care activities and treatments that facilitate optimal levels of functioning. Provide direction to outreach activities including provision of HIV testing and education. Serve as team leader and role model for professional and paraprofessional nursing staff; ensure development, execution and adherence of nursing policies and procedures. Participate in the development and implementation of multi-disciplinary case-managed care. Identify mental health and substance use disorders and report issues to the patient's health care team. Document all plans and treatment in the electronic health record (EHR), and complete documentation for NYS DOH and other regulatory agencies. Participate in quality improvement activities, including data tracking and development of PDSA cycles. Provide telephone and walk-in triage for acute patient problems and make appropriate referrals. Assist in coordinating services for new and emerging programs, and assist with administrative responsibilities as needed. **Employer:** The Research Foundation for SUNY. Submit resume and cover letter with salary requirements to: Weda Sen, MHA, ACHE, Operations Director, STAR Health Center-Downstate Email: [weda.sen@downstate.edu](mailto:weda.sen@downstate.edu)

**Patient Navigator, BE InTo Health Project**  
**Minimum Qualifications:** AA or some college with at least 2 years' experience as a case manager or high school diploma with at least 5 years of experience working in an agency providing case management, social services or health care services. Demonstrated experience or certification as a health educator, experience providing HIV health education, and/or peer with relevant lived experience. Effective written, verbal, organizational and interpersonal skills. Computer literacy required. Personal experience with HIV and aging, sexual health, HIV adherence support, HCV, and/or substance use. A 4-year college degree may be substituted for two years of experience. **Preferred Qualifications:** Experience working with older (50+) adults with HIV, substance using and/or MICA clients. Experience implementing evidence-based adherence or prevention programs/interventions. Experience with care coordination, working in multidisciplinary and multicultural, team-oriented setting. Bilingual in English/Spanish or English/Haitian Creole an asset. Experience using electronic health records. Experience working with LGBTQ+ populations. Experience with outreach and use of social media. **Responsibilities:** Implement recruitment strategy; provide field-based health aging education; skills building services; accompany patients to primary care appointments and to other health care and social service encounters; assist with coordination of social and physical activities/events; provide referral and linkage support to clients; coordinate ongoing navigation and logistical support for appointment keeping reminders, transportation and childcare arrangements; track patients' progress through health education curriculum and conduct social service and benefits reassessment and follow-up; provide critical feedback to other members of the health care team based on observations in the field through EHR notes, EHR messaging, participation in multidisciplinary care conference meetings and phone communication; educate, coach and empower patients; provide directly observed therapy (DOT) in patients' homes as needed; observe and record patient self-administration of antiretrovirals (ARVs) and assess for and report any ARV related side-effects; document all patient activities on required data forms for submission into eSHARE or an alternative data system. **Salary:** \$50,000 annually. Submit resume and cover letter to: Tonya Taylor, PhD, Program Director, Building Equity: Intervening Together for Health (BE InTo Health) Email: [tonya.taylor@downstate.edu](mailto:tonya.taylor@downstate.edu)

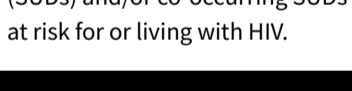
**Nurse Practitioner/Physician Assistant**  
**Duties:** Coordinate with nurse supervisor to provide medical triage in person, via phone, and telehealth. Respond to patient calls, provide refills, and pre-authorizations. Order indicated laboratory tests, review all patient and lab data, and follow-up of all abnormal results. Provide medical care to walk-in patients seeking STI testing, PEP, PrEP, and primary HIV care. Serve as primary provider for STAR patients, including in LGBTQ+-specific evening clinic. Function as a teaching professional clinician for STAR Program's clinical education. Participate in STAR's interdisciplinary case management plans and quality improvement activities of the STAR Health Center. Participate in STAR Health Center outreach and community education. **Qualifications: REQUIRED:** NYS licensed nurse practitioner license. **PREFERRED:** The ideal candidate will have 3 years' experience in a primary care setting; two years' experience in the provision of HIV/HCV care, women's health, and medical care to LGBTQ+ and/or re-entrant populations. Experience in the provision of PrEP/PEP preferred. Bilingual in Spanish/English or Haitian Creole/English. **Hours/Days of Week:** M-F (schedule & hours TBD), 20-24 hours per week. **Salary Range:** \$120,000-160,000 (for F/T, 37.5 hrs./wk.; 30 hrs. for P/T). To apply, send cover letter and resume to: Jessica Yager, MD, MPH, Medical Director, STAR Program, [jessica.yager@downstate.edu](mailto:jessica.yager@downstate.edu)



## GRANT AWARDS



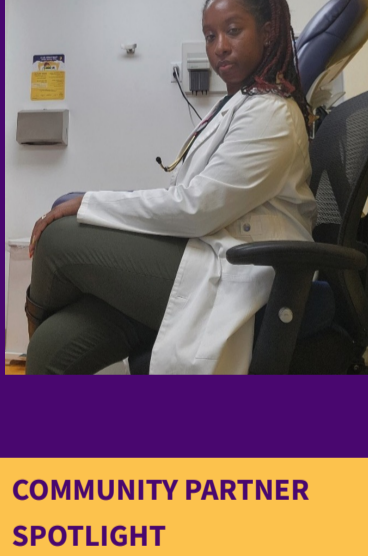
**The Adolescent Education Program (Christine Rucker, MA, Director)** was awarded \$1,725,000 over 5 years by the NYS Department of Health for its Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). To date, PREP has educated over 7,100 youth ages 11-24 years using the evidence-based interventions known as 'Be Proud! Be Responsible!' and 'Making Proudest Choices.' The PREP also conducts clinical referrals, community engagement events, health fairs and social media outreach initiatives. Sessions are held in schools, after school programs, alternatives to incarceration programs, group homes, family shelters, churches, alternative GED programs, and virtually.



**The STAR Program's Behavioral Health Unit (Michelle Melendez, MS, LCSW, CHC, Director)** was awarded \$2,625,000 over 5 years by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the Minority AIDS Initiative: Substance Use Disorder Treatment for Racial/Ethnic Minority Populations at High Risk for HIV/AIDS. The purpose of this program is to increase engagement in care for racial and ethnic medically underserved individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) and/or co-occurring SUDs and mental health conditions who are at risk for or living with HIV.



## THEO ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



**Latisha Monique Romney, BA, BS, RN**, is an alumna of the Adolescent Education Program-Teens Helping Each Other (THEO) training class of 2009. She thrived in the Sexual Health Improvisational Theater component of the program and became a Senior Peer Leader in her last year of high school. She became a Licensed Practical Nurse at the age of seventeen while attending Clara Barton High School's specialized LPN Program. She started her career working in home care at degree in sociology from Hunter College/CUNY, and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at SUNY Downstate. She is currently working as a pediatric intensive care nurse at Kings County Hospital Center and will be returning to SUNY Downstate in the fall to pursue her Master's degree in Nursing.

### COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



**Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI)** (<https://kavibrooklyn.org/>) was founded in 2009 by Dr. Robert Gore, a Clinical Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University. Dr. Gore felt compelled to address the rising incidence of violence among youth in Central Brooklyn. KAVI works to prevent and eliminate interpersonal violence from the lives of young people through social justice advocacy, peer leadership, and community mobilization in hospitals, schools, and community settings. KAVI also works with a broad range of partners to conduct community strengthening and healing programs.



**Brooklyn Association of Teen Educators Network presents**

# WORLD AIDS DAY

*Let Communities Lead*

**FRIDAY DECEMBER 1ST, 2023**

## PEER POWER UP

*Caring For Me, So I Can Care for You*

**4PM-4:45PM**

## TEEN TOWN HALL

*We Know What We Need; No Conversations About Us, Without Us*

**4:45PM-7PM**

REGISTER NOW: <https://BATESWAD2023.eventbrite.com>

**SUNY DOWNSTATE HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY**  
395 LENOX RD  
BROOKLYN, NY, 11203

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CHRISTINE RUCKER, AEP DIRECTOR

PERFORMANCES, PANELS, REFRESHMENTS, EARLY bird gift bags, and more!

THEO, STAR, CAMBA, NYU LUTHERAN, HEAT, BLACK LIVES MATTER, COMMUNITY COUNSELING, BASAP, KAVI, PUBLIC HEALTH SOLUTIONS, DANY DOWNSTATE, PREVENT REACH, YOUTH, NEW YORK CITY TEENS CONNECTION

**Friday, December 1**

### 2023 World AIDS Day: Peer Power Up & Teen Town Hall

**World AIDS Day: Teen Town Hall & Peer Power Up is back in person this December 1st!**

**Come join us in honoring all those affected by HIV/AIDS.**

**FREE**

**GET TICKETS**

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# STAR Health Center

**Patient Care, Community and Medical Education, and Research Programs are listed below.**

For more information, please call the numbers listed below or the STAR Program at: [\(718\) 270-2690](tel:(718)270-2690). OR visit our website at: [www.starprogram.nyc](http://www.starprogram.nyc)

## PATIENT CARE AND SERVICES

### FOR ADULTS

#### Outpatient Care at

##### Downstate

STAR Health Center (SHC) -

Downstate:

(718) 270-3745

#### Outpatient Care at

##### Brookdale Hospital

STAR Health Center (SHC) -

Brookdale

(718) 240-8233

#### Behavioral Health Services:

(718) 270-3745

#### Family-Centered Health

##### Care Program:

(718) 270-2357 or 3745

### FOR ADOLESCENTS

Health & Education

Alternatives For Teens (HEAT)

Program:

(718) 467-4446

### FOR CHILDREN

Infant and Child Learning

Center (ICLC):

(718) 270-2598

### COMMUNITY AND MEDICAL

#### EDUCATION

Prevention Services for

Adolescents and Young

Adults - SUNY Adolescent

Education Program (AEP):

(718) 270-3203

### RESEARCH

MACS/WIHS Combined

Cohort Study:

(718) 270-4435



# STAR

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