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"There but for the grace of God, go I"

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# Philoxenia Times

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Fall 2022

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Setting up for Philoxenia's first Pop-Up Pantry with St. George & St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church this past June. Details on page 2.

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## President's Message

This edition of the *Philoxenia Times* is about our community of allies who share our values and commitment to feeding and clothing New York City's homeless and those in need.

We fulfill our mission thanks to the generosity, support and friendship of individuals and small nonprofits. In this edition we're happy to introduce two of

our cherished friends – Dale Williams of Midnight Run and John Orr of Vibrant Emotional Health – through a new feature, "Community Conversations," that we hope will become a regular fixture of future newsletters. We also are sharing some of the more interesting trends and news about serving our community via another new



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## President's Message (*continued*)

section called "What We're Reading." And we report on Philoxenia's activities, including recent and upcoming events, and an invitation to those nonprofits seeking assistance to contact us about a potential grant.

As always, none of this would be possible without your interest and support. We encourage you to connect with us, follow our organization on social media, and consider volunteering in our efforts.

In the meantime, on behalf of Philoxenia, I wish you and your families a Happy Thanksgiving and blessed holiday season

### *Despina*



*Volunteers at our East Harlem Pop-Up Pantry.*

## Philoxenia Returns to East Harlem

On June 10, a group of Philoxenia volunteers worked to hand out over 170 large bags of shelf-stable groceries and fresh produce – each bag containing enough to make more than 20 meals – to members of the East Harlem community.

Once again, much of the food and supplies were donated by our friends at [The Urban Outreach Center of NYC](#). And for the first time, Philoxenia benefitted from the extraordinary generosity of [St. George & St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church](#). Located in the heart of East Harlem on East 103rd Street between

Park and Lexington Avenues, the church has been an integral part of the community for nearly 150 years.

The church generously offered to work with Philoxenia to provide a central location for our Pop-Up Pantry after the untimely closing of Vibrant Emotional Health's community center, where we traditionally held these events.



*Volunteers at our East Harlem Pop-Up Pantry.*

## Save the Date!

Interested in volunteering with Philoxenia or donating to support our work?

- **November 18, 2022 @12:00pm.** Our annual Thanksgiving Pop-Up Pantry is a perfect opportunity to get involved with Philoxenia. It will be held at Goodwill Industries, located at 413 East 120th Street in Manhattan. A big thank you to [Goodwill NYNJ](#), [BakerHostetler](#), [Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church](#), NYC Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity for their support. You can read more about the event in Annunciation's Rejoice newsletter.
- **December 10, 2022 @11:00am.** Philoxenia will once again partner with [FOCUS](#) and [One Sandwich at a Time](#) to provide food and clothing to those in need via a "Sandwiches, Socks & St. Nicholas Sacks" event at Vibrant Family & Youth Peer Support, located at 29-46 Northern Boulevard in Long Island City.

Send a DM on Facebook if you would like to join us.

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## Philoxenia Announces 2023 Grant Program

In addition to providing direct food and clothing donations to those in need, Philoxenia is proud to once again offer financial support to like-minded organizations that seek to help support positive changes in our community.

We invite proposals from organizations to initiate and/or operate local grass roots outreach and service projects that focus on responding to the daily needs of hungry, homeless and income-insecure people with the goal of helping them achieve dignity and independence in their lives.

To apply for a grant, please click [here](#) to complete an online grant application.



Dale Williams, Midnight Run

## Community Conversations

In this edition of the *Philoxenia Times*, we're sharing insights and reflections from our allies in the nonprofit community who share our values and have been generous supporters of our organization and activities.

### Dale Williams, Midnight Run

Dale Williams is the Executive Director of Midnight Run, a volunteer organization in Dobbs Ferry

dedicated to finding common ground between the housed and the homeless.

Midnight Run coordinates over 1,000 relief missions per year, in which volunteers from churches, synagogues, schools and other civic groups distribute food, clothing, blankets and personal care items to the homeless on the streets of New York City.

Dale and the staff orchestrate the efforts of over 100 local coordinators and over 5,000 volunteers, and the in-kind donations of hundreds of organizations. Several homeless or formerly homeless men work part-time sorting clothes as a first step back into the job market. Dale has managed the operations of Midnight Run since 1991. He spent the prior year as a part-time worker, and was homeless in New York City between 1987 and 1990.

**Midnight Run provides plenty of physical things people need – food, clothing, personal care items – but could you please discuss what you've called the "human exchange" that happens?**

Of course, the physical items are important; empathy on its own isn't enough. But the food and clothing, and the handing it out in an equitable way, is really a gateway to open a conversation with people and connect with them. I was homeless myself 32 years ago. I can remember food made for me with love and care, but what I really remember about Midnight Run was, after the food and clothing were distributed, people were standing together, just laughing and talking.

When you're on the streets, you feel isolated. The connection is important for the people we're serving, but it's equally critical for the volunteers going on a run. I take plenty of youth groups, church groups and others on these runs. It's the "God bless you" from someone in need to a volunteer that resonates with people new to the experience, particularly young people. After all is done, many of them often say to me, "wow, these folks are just like us." And that breaking down of barriers is the part I hope people can remember. It's a huge part of what we're about.

**What do you say to people who have been generous with donations but apprehensive about going on a run itself to get them to turn the corner on volunteering?**

The best persuasion we've had is word-of-mouth. Our volunteers are connected with others who have had the experience.

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When it first started, Midnight Run was two people in a VW bug from a local church here in Dobbs Ferry going into the city. One of them told a friend, who recruited a group from a synagogue in Hastings, and then there was a gradual build of like-minded people who fueled the growth of our volunteers and the number of runs. Not long ago a work neighbor of mine happened to talk with a great supporter of both Midnight Run and Philoxenia – Father [Rev. Presbyterian] George Hazlaris of the Greek Orthodox Church of Our Savior in Rye. Despite my knowing this neighbor for years, thanks to Father George, he's now a dedicated volunteer; this is all due to the great support we get from our community. The bigger challenge we have is trying to manage the high volume of donations, as unfortunately some of it is not useful for those we serve.



**Homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1930s. How can organizations like Midnight Run help foster greater understanding between people with housing and those seeking help or simply a human connection?**

To me, what small nonprofits like Midnight Run does is part of the bigger societal goal of raising a generation of people who view the city's homeless as people, with real names and faces learned through volunteering, versus trying to battle uphill against the many public policy issues a place like New York wrestles with.

Homelessness is not a single problem with a single solution; nor is housing. We see people on our runs who are facing myriad problems, ranging from addiction issues to simply something like chronic depression, even what seems like temporary bad luck.

When we organize a Midnight Run at a specific location, we're often helping people who do have housing, but are food and/or income insecure. If we can foster those human connections, no matter the circumstances of those we're helping, maybe we can succeed in getting people to think less rigidly, and

then maybe that can lead toward more open-minded conversations that can influence public policy solutions.

**You've seen a lot in your journey as a New Yorker and a community leader. As we get closer to what will hopefully be the conclusion of the pandemic, are there any lessons from your experiences that might inform where we're headed?**

I don't have any grand philosophical approach to this, but the idea that we keep on keeping on – that we as an organization continue to try to do the right thing, and the rest should take care of itself. If things aren't working, then you need to pause and ask yourself what needs to change. Midnight Run has had some incredible fortune over the past two years with support, and we in turn have been able to help as many people as we can.

I also want to say that Philoxenia, its volunteers, and the churches they belong to and their friends and family, are part of what makes a big difference. Whether they're going on a run, or making sandwiches, or knitting hats, this kind of support is what makes this effort possible. And a big thanks to those who do take the time to go on a run and make those connections with people.



*Midnight Run coordinates over 1,000 relief missions per year in New York City.*

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*John Orr, Vibrant Emotional Health*

## **John Orr, Vibrant Emotional Health**

John Orr is the Vice President for Programs of Vibrant Emotional Health. Formerly the Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA-NYC), Vibrant Emotional Health's groundbreaking solutions have delivered high-quality services and support, when, where and how people need it for over 50 years. Through state-of-the-art technology-enabled crisis care tools, local community service programs, and advocacy and education work, Vibrant is committed to advancing access, dignity and respect for all.

In his role, John oversees clinical and administrative oversight of Vibrant's 15 direct service programs – 14 in New York City and one that is national. Building upon Vibrant's Core Values – Lead the Way, Respect, Commit to Excellence, & Be Well – John emphasizes the fostering of genuine relationships, delivering skilled clinical care and a building an ever-expanding community of empowered individuals. Having originally joined Vibrant to develop the Child and Adolescent Care Coordination Department, his focus has broadened with this new role where he places emphasis upon building empowered relationships and efficient operations.

**You oversee such a wide array of direct service programs. Could you please describe Vibrant's focus at the intersection of mental and emotional health with the dramatic increase in food insecurity in our communities?**

When I think of mental health and emotional well-being, I feel we always should consider the social, political, financial and societal pressures impacting

people. When basic needs – food, clothing, housing – aren't being met, there's a tremendous effect on someone, which can create a fast opening for onsetting depression and mental health challenges.

For our team at Vibrant, we focus on the systemic, communal issues affecting people. That's where partnerships with Philoxenia to do things like Pop-Up Pantries are so vital. Sure, there's an immediate need to help people with food and clothing. But there's also an opportunity to alleviate the pressures people are feeling. You can see it at the events; even on a cold day, there are lots of smiles and expressions of gratitude.

**What does it mean to help people build empowered relationships as we continue to struggle through the Covid pandemic?**

I believe we each have a wisdom that's inherent in us. Empowering relationships, to me, is to help people get past the self-doubt and other mental barriers we create to try and trust ourselves. The ability to get out of our own way, while feeling so difficult, is really critical to seeing ourselves in a greater context, which in turn allows us to better connect with and maybe advocate for others.

If we view people with challenges as being somehow different than we are, that's also a barrier. At Vibrant, we run a number of peer support services programs for young people and their parents and families. Through therapy and support group activity, we help people find and use their own voice for change by finding that inner confidence and wisdom they have. We feel this is more effective than relying on a traditional case management model where we hope someone else will solve things for us. Through peer support, the act of sharing insights with others goes a long way toward demonstrating hope and possibility in our lives.

**You've written about the need for self-compassion as a means of combatting the stigma associated with mental illness. How can those interested in volunteering change whatever mindset may be holding them back from engaging with those in need?**

One of the first things is the power of presence. There's a lot of healing power in the ability to interact with others. There's not a pressure to resolve the greater issues. You're here. You showed up. That's what matters.

I have been inspired by Dr. Kristin Neft (Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of

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(Texas at Austin), who has written and lectured extensively on self-compassion. Dr. Neft essentially says that having compassion for ourselves is no different than having compassion for others. In a moment when we're not feeling great, we need to recognize we're having a normal, human experience. We can remind ourselves that it's okay not to have it all together; in fact, as we get older and have more life experience, it's the notion of perfection is easily identifiable as both unrealistic and maybe not an ideal. In other words, accepting our imperfections is a gateway to self-compassion and, therefore, our ability to better relate to and communicate with others. Most volunteers I know seem to have this clarity.

**Philoxenia has been incredibly fortunate to partner with Vibrant Emotional Health. What is your view on the importance of nonprofits working together to effect change and help our communities?**

Philoxenia's mission is so needed in our city. There's a real generous donation to each person when your volunteers take the time to engage with the community. It contributes to positive mental health and then rippled out to better communal health. One of our core values is to be well, which I feel is alignment with your organization. We're thankful for our partnership.

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## What We're Reading

Here's a roundup of interesting content Philoxenia volunteers have been sharing with one another over the past few months:

### Climate Resilience Hubs

We often associate challenges New York City's homeless face with the winter season, and the next few months will likely be no different. However, as the past few summers in the city have demonstrated, intense heat conditions affect not only New York's homeless population, but also an array of citizens disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, including those in low-income housing and in underserved neighborhoods. Climate resilience hubs are increasingly being written about as hot-weather solutions that can provide a respite from the heat and offer other services people need. More than a traditional "cooling center," the hubs provide everything from air conditioning and phone charging to social services and emergency training. As a [recent Axios article](#) describes this emerging solution, climate resilience hubs seek to "meld heat relief with social justice."

### More on Self-Compassion

In our Community Conversation with John Orr of Vibrant Emotional Health, the subject of self-compassion surfaced as a critical tool for better empathy and understanding of others. John recommended the writings of Dr. Kristin Neff, who is the Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Neff is a pioneer in the field of self-compassion research, creating a scale to measure the construct almost 20 years ago. She has been recognized as one of the world's most influential research psychologists. More on her work can be found [on Dr. Neff's website](#).

### A New Approach to Addressing Food Insecurity

Nonprofit Welfare, Inc. seeks to fight food insecurity through a familiar, popular method of food delivery: the box subscription model. Welfare works closely with the New York City Housing Authority to identify families in low-income housing who would be interested in the free subscription. Families can pick up their boxes of nutritious pantry staples from popup distribution sites, located in the community, each month. And because they are subscribed to the service, they are guaranteed a box, regardless of the time they arrive. Read more about this initiative [here](#).

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**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/philoxenia-inc/>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/philoxeniainc>

We also accept donations via Amazon Smile; thank you for your support!



## Philoxenia Board of Directors

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