

Judy Leonard – A Letter to BronxWorks Friends

BronxWorks Volunteer Board Member – Judy has served on two non-profit boards for over 40 years.

Greetings to all the wonderful friends of BronxWorks! I was asked recently why I have served as a volunteer board member for roughly 45 years. I am delighted to tell you. But first, let me relate a story that is just one example of why the Bronx is such a special place in New York City and indicative of why I willingly give my time and support to an organization serving needy Bronx residents.

Many years ago, I was on my way to the Community Center on the Grand Concourse for the first meeting of the combined boards following the merger of the Girls Club of New York (of which I was a board member for many years) with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB – now known as BronxWorks) in 1994. I got off the subway and descended an incredibly long flight of stairs only to emerge on the street as it began to rain. I looked both ways but realized I didn't know which way to go and had no protection from the rain! A gentleman walking by asked if I needed help. When I said I was looking for the CAB building, he said, "I know it well. I am going in that direction so I'll walk with you and we can share my umbrella."

What a wonderful, warm welcome to the Bronx! I have never lost that "warm" feeling for the borough and its residents – thousands of whom seek help from BronxWorks every year.

To the original question of why serve for so long? There are four reasons:

1. Bronxites are good people – as my example above demonstrates!
2. Many Bronx residents live in poverty and need support.
3. BronxWorks has developed and continues to develop excellent programs to improve the lives of low-income Bronx residents.
4. The BronxWorks staff is excellent, dedicated, and caring.

I could go on at length about all of these reasons, enumerating the vast array of BronxWorks' services that help individuals and families cope with the impact of poverty while giving them the resources and tools to make their way out of poverty. I could regale you with examples of our staff's dedication such as when the East Coast blackout stranded a group of BronxWorks staff and kids on a field trip to Coney Island, but through sheer determination and overcoming multiple obstacles, the staff got the kids back to their families safely.

But time and space here will not permit me to explain the four reasons in greater detail! What I can tell you is that in my years of volunteer board service, I have both learned about and witnessed how BronxWorks is helping low-income Bronx residents live productive, satisfying lives so they can raise their families and enjoy their retirement years. I know it is working to ensure the residents have a roof over their heads, food on their shelves, and an education for their children; that they are ready for employment or to pass an ESL, GED, or citizenship exam; and that they may continue to have satisfactory lives even though living with HIV/AIDS.

So much has been accomplished in four decades and it has been my privilege to be a small part of this vital mission. If you are already a part of the BronxWorks community, thank you. If you aren't, please consider becoming a part as a donor, volunteer, or helping us spread the word about how important BronxWorks is to the borough and New York City! Thank you.

Judy is one of 24 volunteer members of the BronxWorks board of directors. The board carries governance and fiduciary oversight responsibilities for the organization and also gives generously of their time, talent and treasure.

