

Pavement Pieces

By Lauren Garry

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Using exercise to promote mental health



Community Access tenants pose for a photo during their bike ride on Governors Island.
Photo by Lauren Garry

The first day of fall in New York City was today and it was marked by quintessential autumnal weather. The sun was in the sky, accompanied by low humidity and a crisp breeze. It was the perfect day for [Community Access](#), a mental health and supportive housing nonprofit, to host a tenant bike ride on Governors Island.

“I haven’t been on a bike in over 30 years,” said Antoinette Whiting, 51, of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. “I spent a lot of my youth doing things that weren’t too good, so I’ve never been here. I didn’t even know (Governors Island) existed, and it’s just really awesome.”

Whiting is one of the thousands of people Community Access has served in New York City. The nonprofit’s mission is to expand opportunities for people living

with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination.

“I was in the shelter and I was going through a pretty dark area in my life,” said Timothy Davis, 28, of Crown Heights, Brooklyn. “Community Access definitely helped me. They helped my self-esteem, they helped me job wise and most of all they got me a place I could call home.”

Through the Housing as Healthcare model, health and wellness activities were integrated into Community Access tenants’ everyday lives. The bike rides began two years ago.

Community Access’ partnership with Citi Bike helped to make this bike-share event possible. Through the



Timothy Davis, 28 of Crown Heights, Brooklyn was excited to be on a Citi Bike. He participated in the Community Access bike ride on Governors Island today. Photo by Lauren Garry

partnership, Community Access received 30 Citi Bike keys to use wherever bikes are available for staff members to lead group rides.

“This is not something that our tenants may have gotten to do otherwise,” said Rica Bryan, 31, Community Access’ Health and Wellness Coordinator. “People can choose to use the Citi Bikes, or explore the island on foot.”

While this was the first year of the partnership between Community Access and Citi Bike, today’s event was not the first tenant bike ride they’ve hosted on Governors Island.

“The first time I was overcome with enjoyment,” said Davis. “I’m super stoked. This is a great day to be out here. It’s beautiful. “

Davis’ excitement was palpable. He smiled, skipped and ran around with enthusiasm, and even tried some tricks on his Citi Bike.

“This is special because there’s a whole lot of negative things going on right now and for us to come together as different people from Community Access, to come together and share this excellent experience is totally awesome,” said Davis.

Bryan described the part of the day she most looked forward to as “sharing in the joy of being together, being in a really beautiful place, and gathering our Community Access community.”

Eugene Smith, 61, of Morris Heights in the Bronx was happy to be out in the fresh air and having stability in his life.

“I’ve been with Community Access now for nine years, and until now, I’ve never lived in a place for nine years in my entire life consistently,” he said

Tenants and employees worked like a family. They helped each other put on helmets, adjust bike seats, and even to balance on the bikes.

“We’re all in this together, to figure out how to support each other,” said Bryan. “I’m getting connected to some really wonderful people who haven’t always had opportunities to thrive or live to their full potential, so I feel great to be with them today.”