

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NY-BASED NONPROFIT DIRECTOR CREATES VIRTUAL EVENT SERIES FEATURING TV'S SHARK TANK AND HELL'S KITCHEN WINNERS TO "REFUEL" ESSENTIAL WORKERS FIGHTING COVID AND RACIAL INJUSTICE**

*Mark Jennings, The Associate Director, of Project FIND had to fight COVID 19 which kept him quarantined for nearly two months. He has also been fighting racial injustice for years. In 2001 he was part of a racial profiling case that led to a grand jury against the Ventura County Police Department, in California while a journalist for the local newspaper.*

[http://www.projectfind.org/project\\_find\\_speaker\\_series](http://www.projectfind.org/project_find_speaker_series)  
<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jan-24-me-16259-story.html>

**NEW YORK, NY**—The combination of COVID and civil unrest due to racial inequality has taken its toll on the people of America. This is doubly true for those who are caring for the most vulnerable persons in the city. While nurses, teachers and even grocery store workers are lauded as heroes; supportive housing employees in the nonprofit sector operate mainly unnoticed. Project FIND, an elder service and affordable housing nonprofit is hoping to give Supportive Housing Heroes a respite and shine more light on the importance of this sector in stabilizing the city and the country.

Supportive housing sites are usually located in the very zip codes that are hotbeds for COVID infections and protest right now.

"We have a plethora of workers who show up like postal workers – through rain, sleet, snow, protests and pandemics to help keep people out of institutions and off the streets. Frontline supportive housing workers' wages pale in comparison to nurses, doctors and others." said Mark Jennings, The Associate Executive Director of the NY-based elder services organization which operates a 280-unit supportive housing site in Times Square. "I don't see them listed in the CARES legislation coming out of Capitol Hill. I don't see teams of fire trucks and ambulances pulling up to the buildings to salute them. I do not think they are thought about when people bang on pots and pans at 7pm."

Jennings realized that money is not the only way to improve employee morale during uncertain times. Many times, it is finding creative ways to simply offer thanks for the tireless work they do. Understanding this, he reached out to people he has met through his life to see if they would offer their gifts in support of supportive housing staff. What was birthed from Jennings' efforts is a two-week virtual conference running from 6/8 to 6/19 that aims to care for those who serving the people nobody wants to see or hear.

"Initially, the plan for this series of virtual events was to provide workers with a chance to unwind and deal with the isolation of COVID. While COVID is still with us the world has changed in the last few weeks with the racial injustices that have upended the news cycle," Jennings said. "The running joke on the internet is that folks have watched all of Netflix during the Pandemic. To help keep people find a healthy distraction from the news, we brought reality TV winners from Shark Tank and Hell's Kitchen. We also kept the healing focus with events like

neo-soul yoga and Zumba. However, we were obliged by the moment to pivot and add in sessions related to death, racial disparities and building black businesses. This is our organization's way of not just talking about making a difference in the world but doing it."

The presenters for this series will operate from New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Denver, Washington, D.C. and Maryland. They are excited to share with the virtual crowd. Felix Lloyd who had the opportunity to win \$250,000 from Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban on the ABC TV show Shark Tank said he and his wife were looking for tangible ways to give back to the community. Chef Rock, winner of Hell's Kitchen Season Three offered the following message about the importance of giving back to essential workers.

"I think it's important to give back to essential workers because their work is terribly difficult and often even thankless," he said. "The least I can do. The least we all can do is offer gratitude by serving people with financial or other gifts."

Sessions will be offered via Zoom and persons are encouraged to RSVP at [projectfind.org](http://projectfind.org). They will also be streamed live on the Project FIND Facebook page. Jennings hopes it will be well received by the 100-plus employees at Project FIND and other supportive housing heroes throughout the city and nation. He also hopes this event helps people learn more about his and other supportive housing agencies. For example, during the height of the pandemic Project FIND's Woodstock Hotel-based Homeless-In-Reach program and Coffeehouse Senior Center location operating from the basement of a Catholic Church in Times Square never ceased to serve homeless older adults.

Horace Hedgepath is one of the workers who kept the doors open. He has been with Project FIND for almost five years and currently serves as a Cook/Maintenance staffer at the Coffeehouse. He said the refueling series promoted by Project FIND is just what he needs. He hopes to RSVP for some of the events.

"This is right on time," he said while securing garbage at the main office. "I think a lot of people here and everywhere could use something like this to get things off their chest and minds."

**#### END ####**

### **About Project FIND**

Project FIND is a non-profit agency based in New York City. Founded in 1969, Project FIND provides low- and moderate-income and homeless seniors with the services and support they need to enrich their lives and live independently. To learn more about the series visit [http://www.projectfind.org/project\\_find\\_speaker\\_series](http://www.projectfind.org/project_find_speaker_series)