

## MEMBER Spotlight



## New York City Region

### Unique People Services

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**Yvette Brissett-André**  
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First, let's make it clear that the UPS we're talking about here has nothing to do with the brown trucks that deliver packages! Instead, Unique People Services delivers something altogether different, something that doesn't come in a box or envelope: Its mission is to serve, holistically and without judgment, those who have been denied compassionate and considerate treatment elsewhere due to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, developmental level, health status, criminal history, or substance use history. That means UPS's reach stretches to support formerly homeless people with HIV/AIDS or with mental illness as well as people with developmental disabilities. And that means UPS keeps up with new developments across a broad range of entities: New York City Human Resources Administration's HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA), New York State Office of Mental Health, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, and New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Yet the driving force of the agency, Yvette Brissett-André, is all about creating a sense of unity within and across the agency, which she diligently nurtures. It is important to her that all the diverse programs share common values of respect for each person's unique strengths.

The next thing you need to know is that Yvette Brissett-André is a 1995 graduate of National Urban Fellows, an organization that develops accomplished and courageous professionals of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, particularly people of color and women, to be leaders and agents of change in the public and nonprofit sectors, with a strong commitment to social justice and equity. She is one determined person, leading by example as she pursues continuous personal and professional development. Since she knows that qualified staff are the backbone of the agency's success, she and her executive team invest in them with training, educational opportunities, and participation in policy and procedure development and review so that they can learn how the agency works. She is proud of the fact that 98% of UPS's management vacancies are filled from within, a reflection of how successful the investment in her staff has been.

Another point of interest is that Yvette has a reputation as one of two "Energizer Bunnies" within her organization, along with Cheryelle

Cruickshank, her Associate Executive Director. The two of them have tackled the tasks of shaping a good agency into something even better by tapping into the rich creativity of all the staff, developing and holding high expectations, looking for ways to further diversify UPS services, strengthening the organization's strategic position, and fund-raising. Their belief in continuous improvement extends to the annual use of the Leadership Practices Inventory, a process that allows a leader to self-assess and invites others in the agency to assess the leader. Such openness and transparency reflects the creative spirit of their leadership and commitment to staff involvement in setting goals.

Now that we've talked about the spirit and energy of the organization, here are some facts: UPS has seven Individualized Residential Alternative homes and one Intermediate Care Facility, all permanent residences for 46 people with developmental disabilities. There are living opportunities for 166 people with serious and persistent mental illness and over 271 opportunities for people with HIV/AIDS. In addition, UPS offers care coordination services and a variety of clinical, case management, and recreation support. UPS programs are located in the Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan; the staff number around 230.

When Yvette needs inspiration, she turns to her family and her long-held belief that with great faith, all things are possible. At an early age, she was instilled with the drive to believe in herself and do her very best at everything she attempts. With her husband, she is applying that same wisdom to her two young sons, both toddlers now, who travel with her when she has trips away from home so that they know what "Mommy" does.

The future, with its financial challenges and rapid pace of change, is ever-present in Yvette's mind. She is rethinking how the organization operates, looking for creative ways to serve people in need, investing in staff development, maintaining the agency's strong financial stability, and making contingency plans to be prepared for further funding cuts—again, all with staff involvement. Yvette and her team are determined, and they will rely on each other and the support of NYSACRA to keep on getting better.