



ST. ANN'S CORNER OF HARM REDUCTION, INC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For Immediate Release: Bronx-based Father Luis Barrios, PhD leads International Overdose Awareness Day convocation at St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction's (SACHR) reopening on Monday August 31, 2020.

Opioid-related overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in New York City, taking more lives than homicides, suicides, and car accidents combined, with the Bronx and Staten Island reporting the highest fatal overdose rates citywide. Yet with naloxone, a medication that reverses the effects of opioid overdose, all opioid-related overdose deaths are preventable. It became legal to carry naloxone in New York State in 2006.

For 30 years, St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction has been at the forefront of efforts to save the lives of people who use drugs, greatly reducing the incidence of HIV/HCV/AIDS in the South Bronx by providing syringe access to injecting drug users and a comprehensive range of social and mental health services. SACHR Founder and Chief Executive Officer Joyce Rivera reminds us that, "Against all odds, we've succeeded in reducing the incidence of drug-injecting related HIV infections from over sixty-five percent to under three percent. We will succeed in bringing these rates down even further and we will keep it down with our grassroots bottom-up approach to providing essential services. By leading with empathy, practicing mercy and providing safety we involve all community stakeholders, users, their partners and family members to drive home the message that only community-based solutions will work to ameliorate this community problem."

Father Luis Barrios, PhD, who has fought for decades against the systemic repression of drug users will provide the convocation that kicks off SACHR's efforts on International Overdose Awareness Day. Father Barrios said that "Supporting the work of St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction is where I put into practice what the Bible tells me." His inspiration and guidance have motivated the staff at SACHR, and they have begun to achieve similar results in reducing overdoses among drug users that they did with HIV/HCV/AIDS.

Overdoses among drug users served by SACHR are far lower than their peers elsewhere in the South Bronx, and now, those successes are being brought to the wider community, even during the depths of the COVID pandemic. The COVID19 pandemic has decimated many social service agencies across the city but Ms. Rivera notes that SACHR "staff have consistently risen to COVID's challenge of remaining relevant and meeting our participants' ever evolving needs with innovative service delivery solutions. Indeed, we have even grown." The efforts to bring down overdose rates even further during the COVID pandemic will be a major challenge, but one that SACHR and its staff look forward to overcoming.

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