

# Staying in Balance: Helping Nonprofits Manage Stress in an Uncertain Economy

By Giselle Stolper, Executive Director  
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As the economy began to cool down, business at New York City nonprofit organizations began to heat up. In June of 2009, more than 375,000 New York City residents were unemployed, increasing NYC's unemployment rate to 9.5% - the highest level in over 10 years (New York State Department of Labor, 2009). Losing a job can be life-changing, and financial strain can be overwhelming, especially if you find yourself in need of social services for the first time.

In the past year, emotional stress stemming from the economic downturn has driven more and more New Yorkers to seek assistance from local nonprofit organizations. Increases in service demands place additional stress on the frontline staff members who deliver these essential services. As New Yorkers find themselves increasingly unable to make ends meet, our city's nonprofits are stretching their resources to meet the demand.

In response to the growing need for these services, the Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA of NYC), with support from The New York Community Trust, has developed a groundbreaking new program to promote emotional wellness and organizational health during the economic crisis.



Giselle Stolper

*Staying in Balance: Managing Stress in an Uncertain Economy* provides key safety-net organizations with a tool-kit and training for managing the stress associated with economic loss.

*Staying in Balance* is designed to meet the needs of individuals and families whose economic stability has been threatened to the point that they must seek assistance from a safety-net organization, and the needs of the front-line staff members whose own economic situation may mirror that of their clients.

For staff members, the *Staying in Balance* training will focus on:

- Reducing Stress in the Workplace: Day-to-Day Tips for Supervisors
- Reducing Personal Stress: Helping Yourself, Helping Your Clients – A training for front-line workers
- Managing Challenging Client Behavior: Resources for Clients in Serious Emotional Distress

Client material will promote coping skills by offering stress reduction tips, information on navigating the social service system, and resources to help clients overcome barriers imposed by the economic crisis.

*Staying in Balance* has been funded by the New York Community Trust to provide emotional support to eight New York-based organizations that deliver critical services to the neediest of New Yorkers, including: The Bridge Fund; Legal Services NY; NY Financial Network Action Consortium; City Meals-on-Wheels; Cancer Care; City Harvest; Food Bank of NYC; and United Neighborhood Houses.

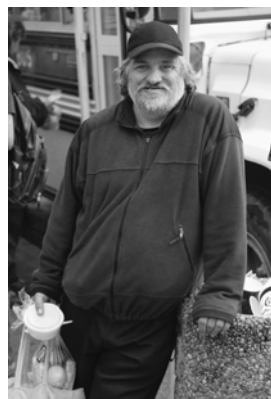
*Staying in Balance* will prepare these organizations to distinguish between normal emotional responses to difficult times and responses that demand professional attention. Through this project, MHA of NYC will provide these organizations

with tailored trainings and materials to identify when and how to refer emotionally fragile clients to 1-800-LifeNet, New York City's primary 24/7 mental health crisis, information and referral hotline or 1-800-273-TALK, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Following 9/11 and again after Hurricane Katrina, MHA of NYC was a first port-of-call for those on the frontlines of disaster response delivery. Through lessons learned from years of post-disaster work, MHA of NYC has crafted a public health approach that builds community resilience and engages and prepares a wide range of human service providers impacted by crisis or disaster. *Staying in Balance* is one way in which MHA of NYC is responding to the emotional needs of those experiencing the financial crisis.

The *Staying in Balance* training and toolkit will be made available to wider audiences of social service providers, clergy, educators, government agencies and private sector employees in the coming months. *Staying in Balance* resources will be available online on the MHA of NYC website ([www.mhaofnyc.org](http://www.mhaofnyc.org)) in the fall of 2009.

Organizations interested in receiving the *Staying in Balance* training, should contact Kathryn M. Salisbury PhD, Director of Program Innovation and Community Partnerships at the MHA-NYC at [Ksalisbury@mhaofnyc.org](mailto:Ksalisbury@mhaofnyc.org)



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