



PROJECT  
GUARDIANSHIP

Changing the way we care for people.

2021

# Annual Report



# A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

**Project Guardianship was founded to meet a critical and urgent need**—the legal system was failing to protect and support older adults and those with disabilities who could no longer care for themselves. Too often, people were unable to stay in their homes, manage their resources, or were subject to abuse and fraud because they lacked someone who could care for them and act as a guardian. In 2005, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) identified this need and created The Guardianship Project. In 2020 and with much support and nurturing from Vera, the initiative became an independent nonprofit under the name Project Guardianship (PG).

At PG, we provide an innovative, interdisciplinary model of care that includes financial oversight of resources and entitlements, case management, and legal support for approximately 180 individuals throughout New York City. The courts appoint PG as the guardian for people who have no family members or friends to act as their guardian, and no resources to

hire a professional guardian. Most of our clients are very low-income and disproportionately people of color, and the nature of their cases are often complex. Despite case complexities, PG makes every effort to keep clients in their homes and communities, prioritizes their dignity, and celebrates the big and small ways in which they exercise independence.

2021 marked our first full year as an independent nonprofit and our second year as a service provider during a global pandemic. Against this backdrop, we created a strategic plan and vision to guide our work. Our plan outlined goals for building and strengthening our new organization by establishing a board, developing partnerships, and expanding our reach. We also set goals to build public awareness of the need for effective decision-making support and guardianship programs, to advocate for innovative service models and resources to meet the growing need of older adult and disabled populations in need of protection and support, and to build capacity within the court system.

We are well poised to carry out our goals, thanks to the support of our newly formed and deeply committed board of directors, government agencies such as the New York State Office of Court Administration and New York City Department for the Aging, philanthropic institutions such as the Brooklyn Community Foundation and the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation,

**PG makes every effort to keep clients in their homes and communities, prioritizes their dignity, and celebrates the big and small ways in which they exercise independence.**



and a growing number of individual donors. In the coming year, we will continue to leverage our expertise as practitioners and field leaders to improve the broader guardianship system. This includes educating and training fellow practitioners and members of the general public on a variety of guardianship topics, and advocating for a more equitable statewide guardianship system with elected leaders.

2021 was a complex and challenging year on many fronts for all of us, and we applaud our staff for their steadfastness, creativity, and passion in delivering the care that you will read about in this report. The pandemic showed the heart-breaking effects of institutional living without effective oversight, and revealed pre-existing inequities in our health, economic, and social systems.

We know that the people we serve are in many ways living the end results of an unjust system, and are deeply committed to prioritizing equity throughout our efforts.

As we approach the year ahead, we are excited by the many opportunities to deepen and expand our work, and are grateful to those of you who have supported us over the past year. Your partnership is valued and vital to our future success.

**In solidarity and with gratitude,**

*Joan Malin*

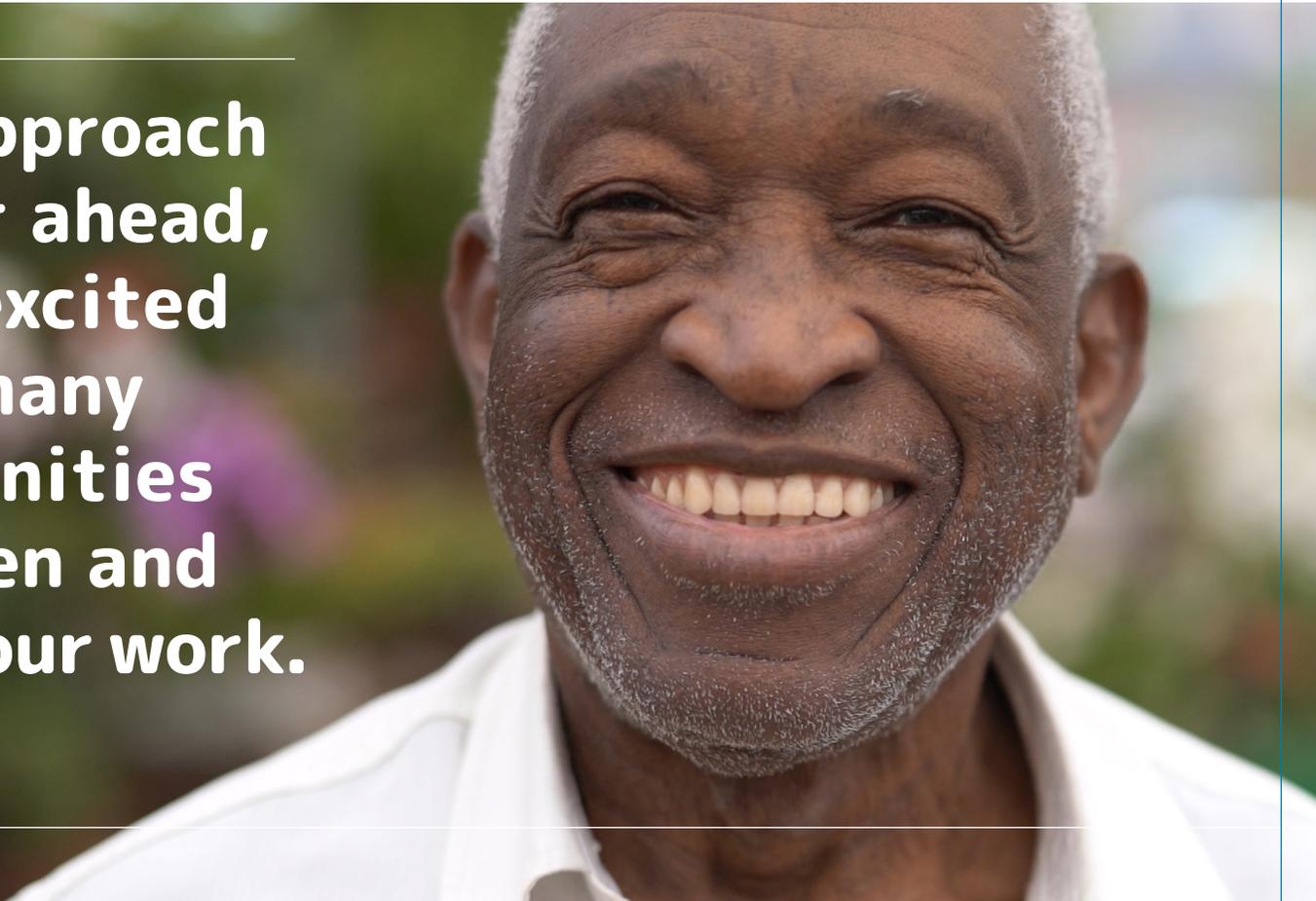
**Joan Malin**  
*Board Chair*

*Kimberly George*

**Kimberly George**  
*President & CEO*



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# ABOUT PROJECT GUARDIANSHIP



## MISSION

**Project Guardianship (PG) provides person-centered care for older adults and people living with disabilities and mental illness who need help making decisions. We also transform the systems that support them to ensure safety, promote independence, preserve dignity, and advance racial and social justice.**

## Background

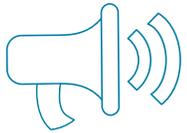
In New York, adult guardianship operates under Article 81 of the Mental Hygiene Law, whereby courts have the power to determine whether an individual needs a guardian to manage their personal and/or financial affairs. If a person is found in need of a guardian, the courts are then responsible for appointing a guardian to serve. That guardian may be a family member or friend, a professional guardian, or a nonprofit agency guardian.

Despite the system in place, there is no state fund or program to ensure that those without family or friends to serve as their guardian, and without resources to hire a professional guardian, are appointed a good guardian—one that recognizes their personhood and prioritizes their dignity. PG and other nonprofits form a patchwork of providers attempting to address this inequity by serving as agency guardians and advocating for more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.



## Strategy

Our goal is to reduce the overall need for guardianship and, when all else fails, to ensure that those who require guardianship have access to a guardian with the dedication and resources to promote autonomy and guarantee the least restrictive setting possible. To achieve this goal, PG developed and invested in a strategic plan with three core pillars.



### PILLAR 1

## AWARENESS, ADVOCACY, AND ALLIANCES

Ensure access to quality decision-making supports and, when necessary, good guardianship, by influencing the public agenda and increasing resources and accountability.



### PILLAR 2

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Build local capacity for good guardianship; alternative protective arrangements; and supports for older adults, individuals living with disabilities and mental illness, and their caregivers.



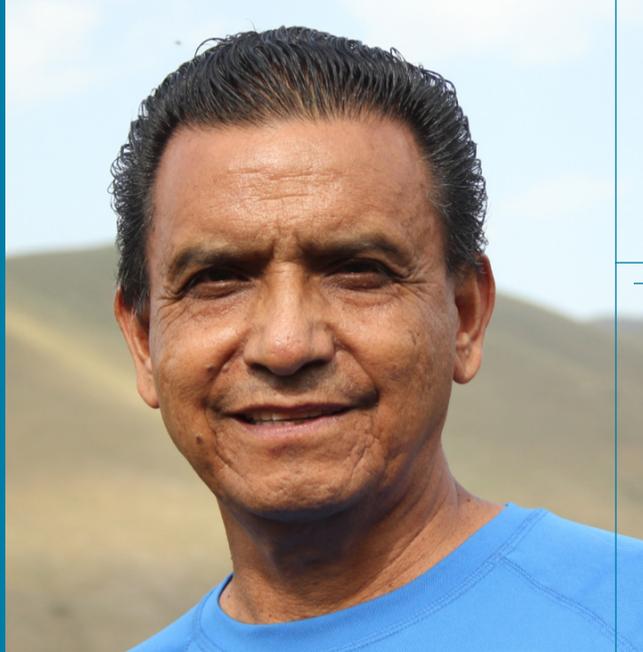
### PILLAR 3

## THE MODEL

Prove and provide a comprehensive, supported guardianship model to better address current and future needs of individuals who need help making decisions.



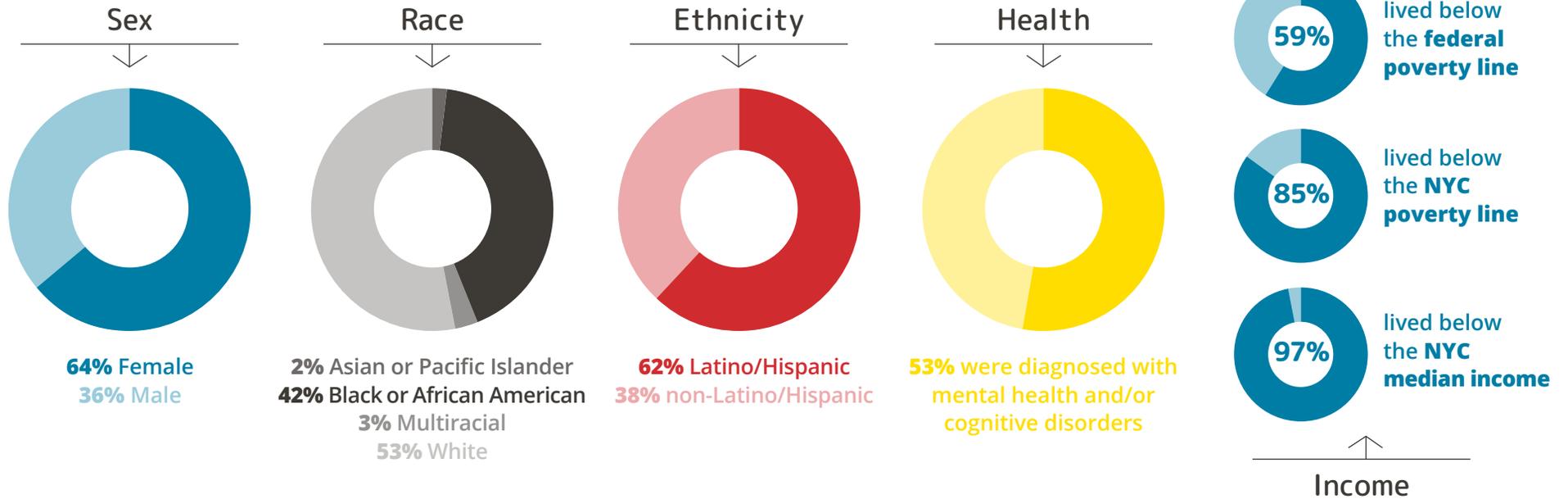
# ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS



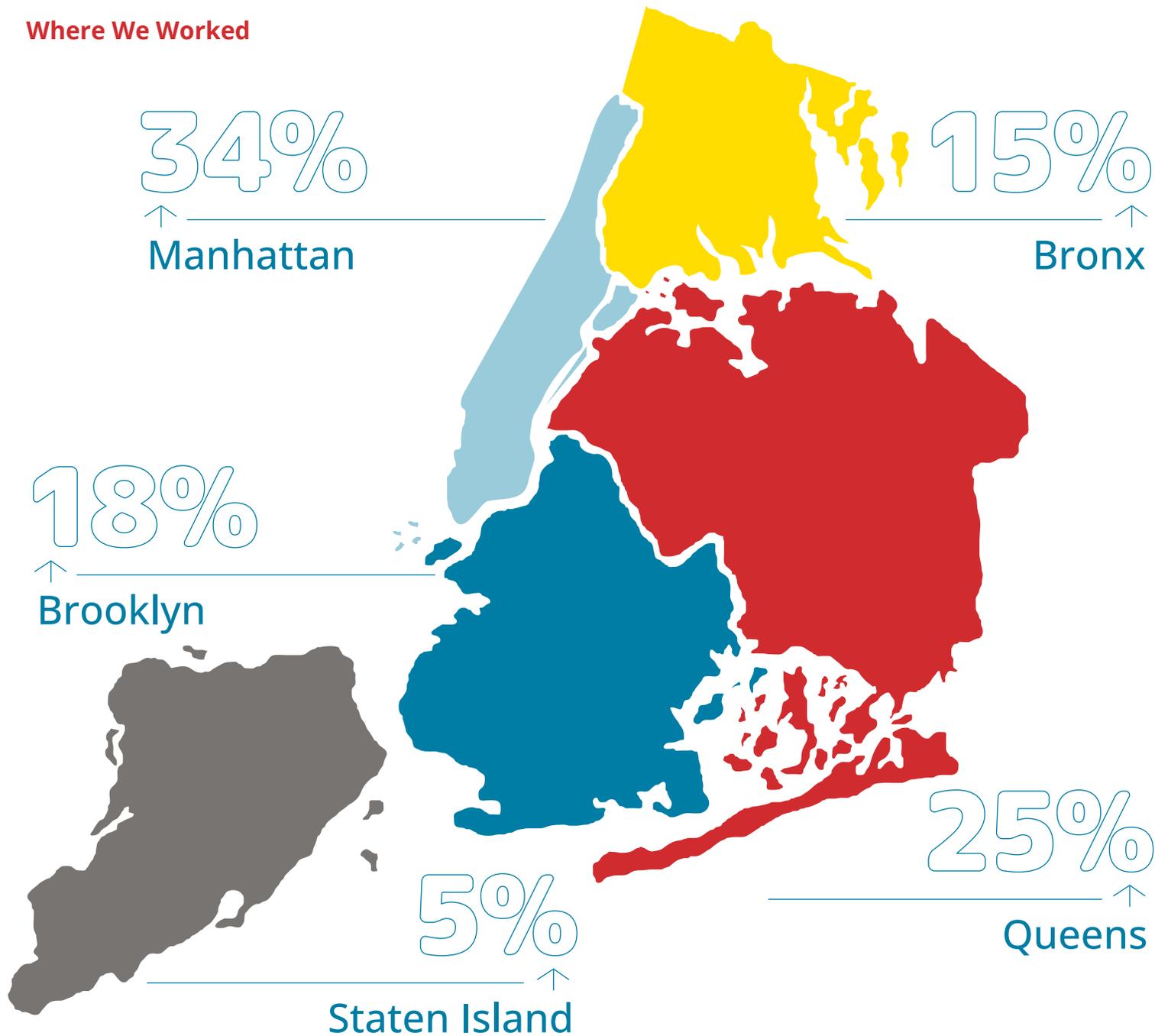
## THE MODEL

Amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, PG's multidisciplinary teams of lawyers, case managers, and finance associates delivered holistic care to clients across the five boroughs of New York City.

### Who We Served



Where We Worked



ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

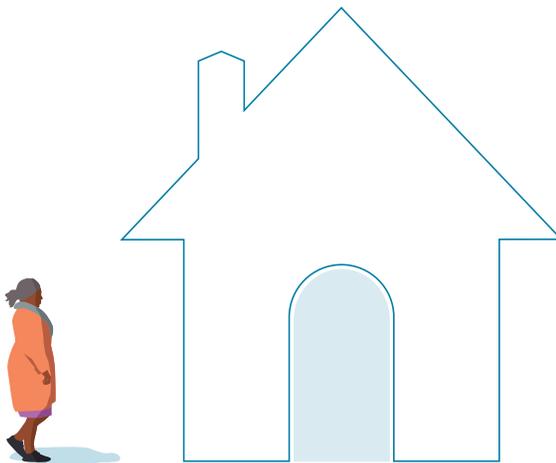
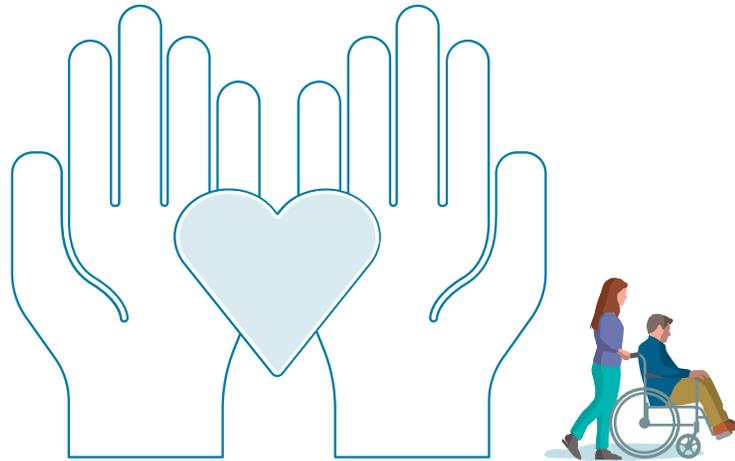
THE MODEL

2%  
↑  
Non-NYC

## Outcomes

89%

↑  
of clients obtained or  
maintained **public benefits**



52%

↑  
of clients remained  
**in their homes** and  
out of institutional settings



## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

We bolstered our education and training activities through a series of webinars, panel discussions, and custom workshops for health and social service providers.



### Article 81 Guardianships During COVID-19: Perspectives from the Bench

PG co-hosts a webinar attended by 243 individuals during which judges discuss how the courts were impacted by the pandemic, emergent best practices, and their hopes and recommendations for the future.



### Article 81 Guardianships in New York: A Statewide Perspective

PG co-hosts a panel discussion featuring social service practitioners from across New York State. Practitioners share their perspectives on the state of guardianship in their geographic areas and brainstorm ways to improve the quality and availability of guardianship services statewide.



### Ethical Considerations in the Practice of NYS Article 81 Guardianship Law: Part I—The Petition and Hearing

PG launches a two-part webinar series on the ethics of guardianship and delivers part one, focused on the petition and hearing. The series enables PG to engage key stakeholders and strengthen existing partnerships.

MAR

APR

JUN

JUL

SEP

DEC



### Partner Info Session with Professionals from Aging Services and Healthcare Sectors

PG provides information about guardianship and PG's model and mission to a group of over 30 professionals. The session identifies a need for information and discussions in the aging and healthcare sectors on the existing continuum of services and its gaps, end-of-life decision-making, guardianship powers, and the Family Health Care Decisions Act.



### Article 81 Guardianship: Assessment and Application in a Hospital Setting

PG presents to over 60 social workers, nurses, physicians, and attorneys at Mt. Sinai Hospital on Article 81 guardianship including: how to assess the need for guardianship; the petitioning and appointment processes; the role, powers, and limitations of guardians; and working with guardians on medical decision-making including end-of-life decision.

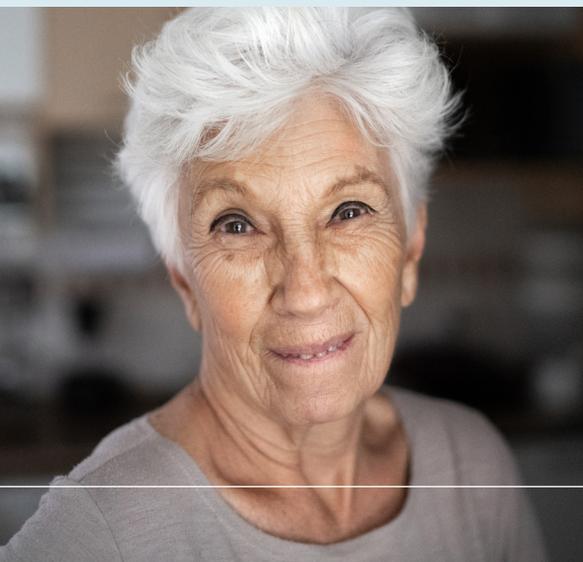


### Article 81 Guardianship as an Elder Abuse Prevention Tool

PG presents to the New York City Elder Abuse Center on the phases of guardianship and the potential role of Enhanced Multidisciplinary Teams (E-MDTs) during the different phases that could help prevent elder abuse.

## AWARENESS, ADVOCACY, AND ALLIANCES

We created new staff positions to lead our awareness, advocacy, and alliances work and engaged in a broad range of related activities.



1

**PG testified at three New York City Council Hearings** on the following subjects to represent our clients and their needs, increase visibility around our work, and influence the broader discourse on aging.

- ▶ Access to Technology for Seniors with Limited Capacity
- ▶ The Committee on Aging's Discretionary Budget
- ▶ Seniors Aging in Place in NYCHA Public Housing During the Covid-19 Pandemic

2

**PG testified at a New York State Assembly Committee** on Aging Hearing on the impact of COVID-19 on programs and services for older and adults and their caregivers within the state.

3

**We made significant investments in our web and social media presence** to increase public engagement with a variety of tools and resources. These investments included a language audit to ensure the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility of PG's content.

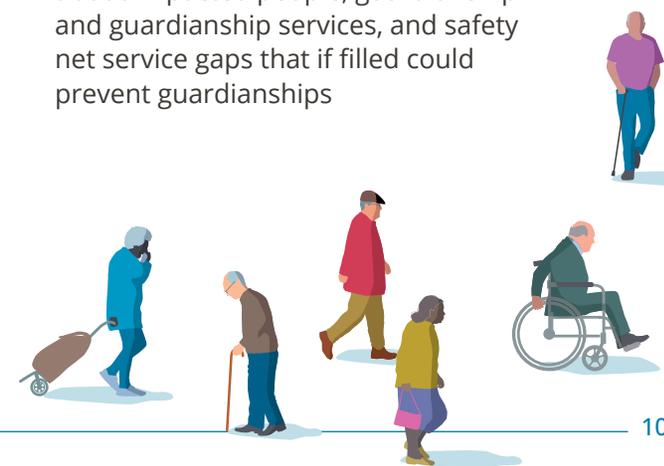
4

**PG hosted its first annual Race for Care**—a virtual 5k run, walk, roll, or bike event to raise awareness and generate support for PG's mission.

5

**At the end of 2021, PG rolled out a 3-month advocacy campaign to:**

1. **Engage** the NYS Governor's office on the need for funding for nonprofit guardianship services
2. **Build** an expanded network of partners, supporters, visible allies, and sustained political power to address guardianship issues
3. **Increase** public awareness of guardianship
4. **Advance** broader understanding about impacted people, guardianship and guardianship services, and safety net service gaps that if filled could prevent guardianships



# MEET GEORGE

George\* (he/him/his) was an MTA employee and subway conductor until a workplace accident in the mid-90s left him with a cognitive impairment and severe speech impediment. When PG was appointed to be his guardian in 2011, George needed urgent support with housing, public benefits, and medical care.

PG assigned George a multidisciplinary team—including a lawyer, case manager, and finance associate—and got to work. We paid his rent and other outstanding bills, and configured automatic payments to avoid future penalties; we checked to make sure he was receiving worker's compensation, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and pension benefits each month; and we enrolled him in Medicare. We also scheduled and began to accompany George to medical appointments, stepping in to act as his advocate where needed.

While PG's services improved George's housing, financial, and health outlook, he talked often about his identity as a second-generation MTA employee and expressed a longing to go back to work—an impossibility due to his health condition. PG took extra steps to make sure that George was fulfilled in other aspects of his social life. We often accompanied him to the Transit Museum and on subway rides, and joined with him in caring for his cats. We also encouraged and celebrated the ways in which George remained independent, including shopping for groceries and tending to his nutrition.

*\*George is a pseudonym and the photo is a stock image. PG is committed to maintaining the privacy and protecting the identity of our clients.*



In more recent years, George has developed hoarding tendencies and struggled to maintain a level of cleanliness at home. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, George's hoarding worsened and his quality of life began to deteriorate. At one point, his building management company threatened to evict George. PG stepped in to mediate and worked closely with George to clean and organize his apartment over the course of several months. With George's permission, we successfully discarded 15 bags of refuse from the home and joined with him in celebrating a fresh start.

As George ages, we anticipate that new health, housing, and financial challenges will arise. As his guardian, PG will continue to support George to age in his home and community, to seek medical care for health concerns as they arise, to manage his finances, and to partake in the activities of life that bring him joy.



## REFORM AND PREVENTION



**In 2022, PG will hone its partnership and advocacy work to focus on reforming the guardianship system and reducing the need for guardianship statewide.**

In partnership with the New York State Office of Court Administration, PG will implement a number of recommendations from its 2018 study, *Incapacitated, Indigent, and Alone: Meeting Guardianship and Decision Support Needs in New York*, including:

- ✓ Engaging and surveying stakeholders
- ✓ Enhancing guardianship data collection and reporting
- ✓ Establishing uniform forms statewide
- ✓ Creating and centralizing resources about guardianship and alternatives



In doing so, PG aims to simplify the process of evaluating and obtaining supports and protective arrangements for individuals, family and friends, health and social service providers, and other affected parties, while also using new data to bolster our advocacy efforts.

## ADVOCACY



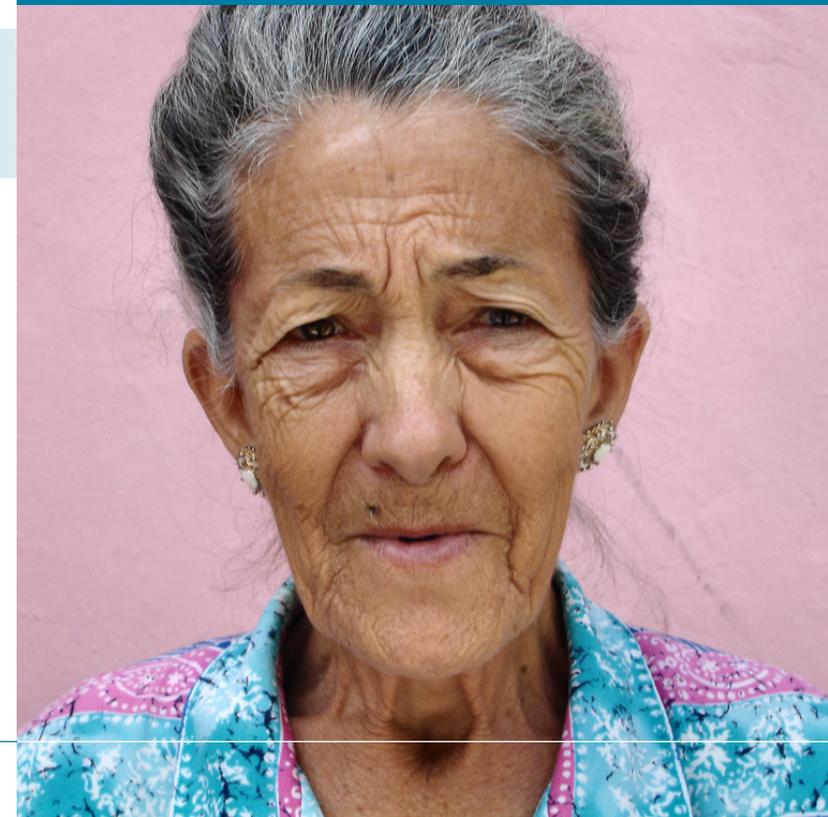
**With the data and partnerships to effectively demonstrate and communicate the need for statewide guardianship reform, PG will pursue the following policy priorities:**

- 1) Fund Nonprofit Guardianship Services
- 2) Designate a State Agency to Govern Guardianship
- 3) Establish a Guardianship Database
- 4) Support Lay Guardians
- 5) Promote Alternatives to Guardianship
- 6) Improve Oversight of Guardians
- 7) Normalize Guardianship Termination and Restoration of Rights

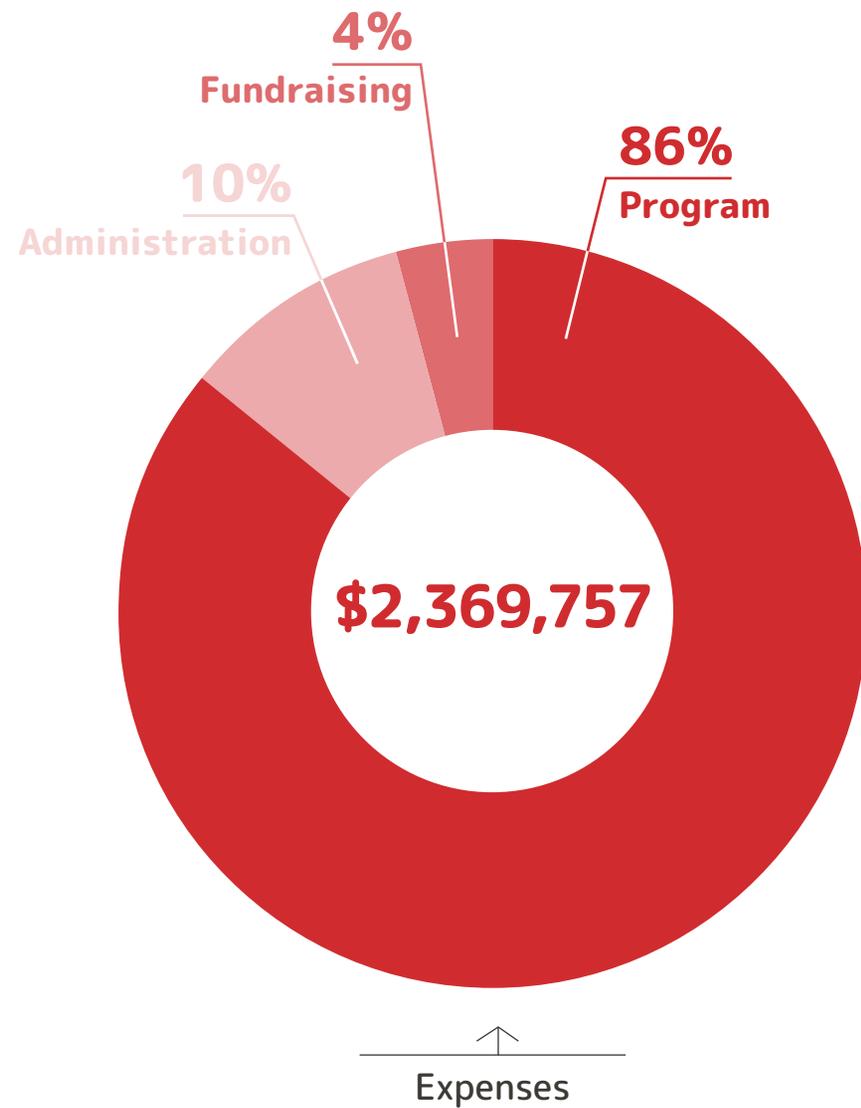
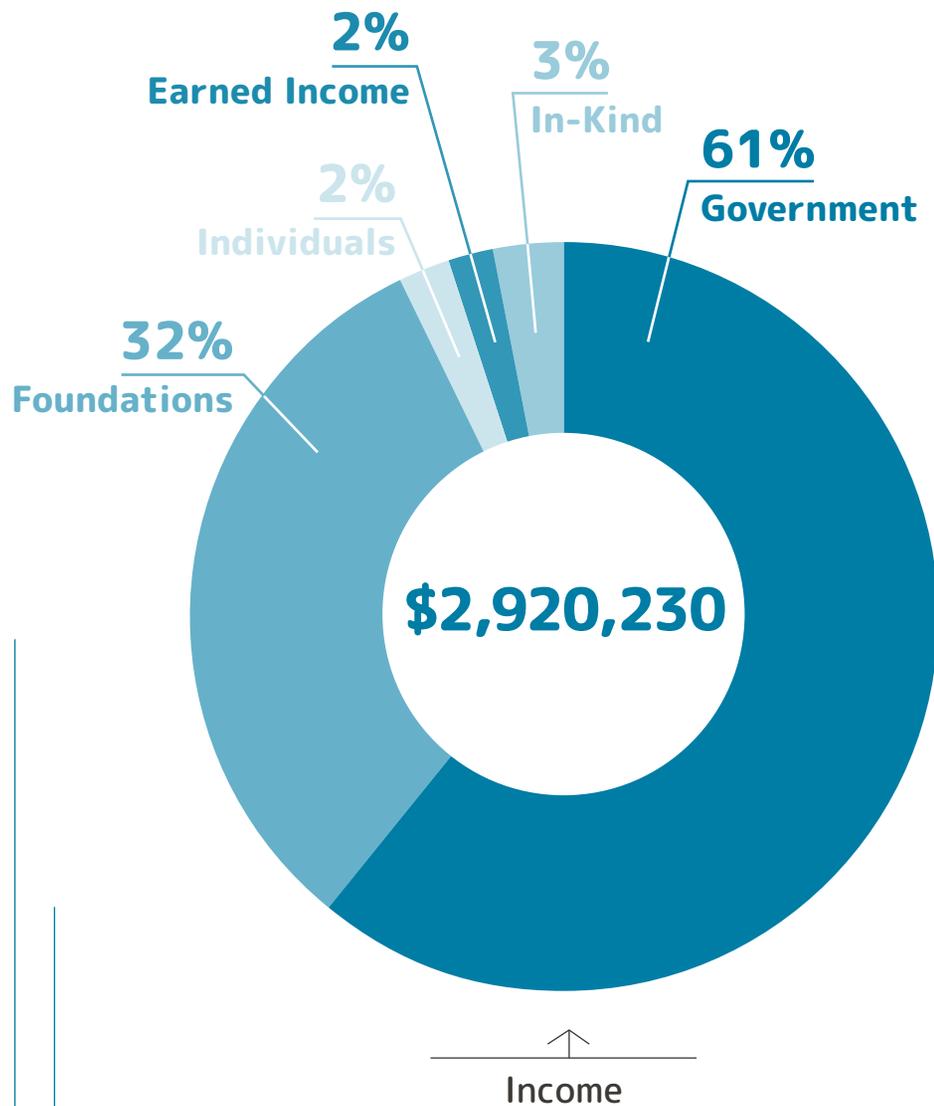


In addition to guardianship reform, PG will advocate for greater investments in areas such as home care, fair pay for home health aides, entitlements, cross-sector collaboration, and a better continuum of care to reduce the need for guardianship.

# LOOKING FORWARD



# 2021 FINANCIALS



# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

## Grants and Donations Received in 2021

### \$1,000,000+

NYS Unified Court System

### \$500,000+

Vera Institute of Justice

### \$100,000+

NYS Department of Criminal Justice Services

### \$50,000+

FJC—A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds

NYC Council Speaker's Initiative

### \$25,000+

Brooklyn Community Foundation

Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation

### \$10,000+

New York Foundation for Elder Care

NYC Council Member Carmen De La Rosa

NYC Council Member Keith Powers

NYC Council Member James Gennaro

NYC Council Member Lincoln Restler

NYC Council Member Christopher Marte

NYC Council Member Shaun Abreu

Elizabeth Gilmore

Ivan Jourdain

### \$1,000+

NYC Council Member Shahana Hanif

Judith Hall

David Hochman

Elizabeth and Jon Hochman

Gregory Klemm

Franziska Laskaris

David Lenefsky

Wendy Mackenzie

Joan Malin

Obi Orjih

Eliza Rossman

Victoria Stanhope

### \$500+

Janel Callon

Blake Foote

Kevin Keenan

Diana Kyrwood

Ellen Rautenberg

Shaheen Rushd

Frank Schneyger

Judy Willig

Barbara Wynne

## Leadership

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joan Malin, *Chair*

Victoria Stanhope, *Vice Chair*

Marjorie Cadogan, *Treasurer*

Jane Levine, *Secretary*

Kimberly George

Kevin Keenan

Charles King

Greg Klemm

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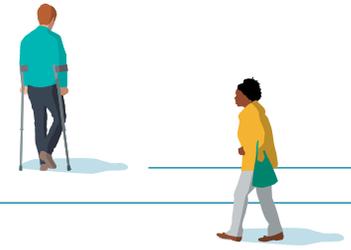
Eliza Winans Rossman

Frank Schneyger

Judy Willig



# GET INVOLVED



**Together, we can do so much more.  
Help change the way we care for people.**

## **Volunteer**

We are always looking for partners in this work. You can get involved by joining our advocacy efforts: reach out to your elected officials and encourage them to support older adults and people with disabilities, or attend a lobby day at City Hall. You can also volunteer to spend time with our clients.

## **Donate**

Those who are able to can donate to advance our vision of a world where our older neighbors and those with disabilities are celebrated and provided with the support and care they need to thrive and live with pride.

**Visit our website for more information on how to donate.**

## **Follow Us on Social Media**

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