

## **2014 Social Worker of the Year**

### **Sister Janet Di Pasquale, SSJ**

Executive Director of Teaching and Restoring Youth (Try)

Sister Janet DiPasquale graduated from Mt. St. Joseph Academy in 1964 and entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in September of that same year. After completing her undergraduate studies in education at Medaille College she earned a Master's degree from Canisius College in School Counseling. In 1973 she became principal of Mt. St. Joseph Academy, a private grade school on Agassiz Circle Buffalo, NY, where she implemented the first elementary guidance program for grades K-8. During this time she also coordinated with the staff and Board of Directors the plans and design of a new elementary school building.



In 1982 she received a degree in social work from the University of Buffalo and immediately took a position with Catholic Charities as a marital and family therapist. In 1985 she received her NYS license in social work.

In 1986 she opened her own private practice under the name Buffalo Counseling Associates and worked there full time until 1999. She continues doing this part-time. In 2000, upon completion of a sabbatical year, she accepted the position of Executive Director of the Teaching and Restoring Youth (TRY) Program a residential, transitional housing program for at risk adolescent girls 16-21. She holds this full time position today.

Janet's career has always focused on working with the less fortunate and those marginalized by society. She has worked with many faith-based organizations. She holds membership on various boards and has received numerous awards among them from the commission on Women and Church in Society and Canisius College Department of Counseling and Human Services *2010 Counselor of the Year*. In 2003 she was recognized as Buffalo News Outstanding Citizen. In March 2013 Janet received the *Social Worker of the Year Award* from the WNY Division of NASW and in April the *Community Leadership Award* from the UB Alumnae Association. She presently serves on the Leadership Team of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Buffalo.

**Bonnie Collins, EdM, LCSW-R**  
**2014 Social Work Award**  
**For Lifetime Achievement**



UB Adjunct Instructor Emeritus Bonnie Collins (MSW '80), EdM, LCSW-R, chuckles when she recalls that she “did not choose social work, social work chose [her].” At 12 years old, while visiting a Buffalo psychiatric center with a church group singing Christmas carols, a patient “attacked” her, wrapping his arms around her as the nearby nurses peeled him away. She never forgot how the nurses were careful to make her feel safe, telling her, “He just likes your yellow skirt.” This experience informs her astute awareness and understanding of the emotional well-being of others, an attitude that has guided her through a lengthy and fruitful career in human services and social work.

With sights initially set on a therapy career and a UBSSW BA in psychology and a master’s in education in hand, Collins began in the field working with Buffalo City School District male students who were labeled “emotionally disturbed.” She also volunteered as a crisis counselor at the Hamburg Counseling Center. Citing the versatility of the degree, Collins, with the support of her family, went on to earn her MSW in 1980. “I couldn’t have done it without them,” she recalls. Currently a private practitioner in mental health, Collins is a family therapist and social work educator in Hamburg, NY where she specializes in working with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse in addition to facilitating groups for women in transition and working with couples in conflict. Her expertise in this area is imparted in two influential co-authored books: *Healing for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (with Kathy Marsh) and *The Power of Story* (with Trina Laughlin). Collins’ adeptness of this population and her determination to keep abreast of and influence best practice lends itself to her continuing influence of future and current social workers, as she provides training and consultation for practitioners working with trauma populations. Since graduation, Collins’ connections to UB are stronger than ever. She has worked as an adjunct instructor, Cares Program supervisor, and mentor in the School’s mentoring program. “Everyone should have a mentor—it is especially beneficial to social work students,” Collins advises current and prospective students. “The students gain a realistic view of the profession and don’t have to reinvent the wheel—kind of like built-in career counseling. And I have the opportunity to pay it forward, to share my experience with the next generation of social workers and leave a legacy.” Her many contributions to the School and the community also earned her the 2011 Distinguished Alumni Award.

## 2014 Agency of the Year Award

Vera House, Inc.

Randi K. Bregman, LMSW

Executive Director



Vera House, Inc., a human service agency based in Syracuse, New York, is dedicated to providing direct client service, community education and community planning, with a

focus on domestic violence and sexual assault services. Our mission is to “end all domestic and sexual violence, to assist families in crisis, to support those affected by domestic and sexual violence to live safe, self-sufficient lives, to empower women and to promote a culture of equality and respect in relationships”. Vera House has offered services since 1977, steadily increasing the size and comprehensiveness of the programs to meet the community’s need.

On January 1, 2005, Vera House merged with the Rape Crisis Center of Syracuse, maximizing the strengths of both agencies and ensuring a more comprehensive range of services to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Today Vera House continues to bring a strong commitment to a coordinated community response to all forms of abuse, advocating for victim safety. The merged Vera House, Inc. continues a decades long tradition of quality service to the Central New York community. The mission statement reflects the history of both merged agencies.

Vera House provides core services to domestic and sexual violence victims such as emergency shelter, advocacy and therapeutic counseling. Since initially opening its first 12-bed emergency shelter, the agency has increased its sheltering capacity by expanding to a 27-bed facility and adding a second 9-bed location. The main shelter is fully accessible and can accommodate persons using wheelchairs, male clients and/or individuals who identify as transgender. Vera House’s Emergency Shelter Program provides comprehensive support services including: case management, crisis and short term counseling, domestic/sexual violence education and safety planning, on-site support groups, transportation, child care and parenting assistance.

Vera House outreach and advocacy services include: a 24-hour telephone crisis line, short-term counseling, weekly support groups, and advocacy with the legal, social, and medical systems. Our Advocacy Program places an emphasis on critically needed short term support services and case management while responding to the safety needs of victims and their families.

Our therapeutic counseling program provides individual, family and group counseling to survivors of sexual assault of all ages.

Over the years, tens of thousands of women, children and men have come through our doors to find hope and healing. Other programs Vera House offers include:

- The Syracuse Area Domestic Violence Coalition, which works to change the community standard in responding to domestic and sexual violence.
- Alternatives, a domestic violence education and accountability designed to challenge the beliefs and attitudes of individuals who have been abusive to their partners and/or ex-partners.
- Prevention and Education Programs, which reach thousands of youth and community members annually and gives participants information about recognizing abuse and building healthy relationships.

In 2012, Vera House sheltered approximately 400 women, children, and men, received almost 5,000 calls on our 24-hour crisis & support line, provided advocacy services for over 1,500 individuals, counseled approximately 400 women and men through the sexual assault counseling program, and counseled close to 400 youth. We successfully reached almost 20,000 individuals in 2012 through our education and prevention program, which are school-based, community and professional programs.

Looking ahead to the future, our vision is to have a world in which domestic violence and sexual assault no longer exist, where every person is honored and respected in their relationships, and every child can trust the adults in their life to keep them safe.

## 2014 Public Citizen of the Year Award

Avi and Julie Israel

### Avi Israel

Avi Israel is a retired electrician, turned full time advocate. Avi has 30 years industry experience, and most recently was a General Foreman working for Frey Electric Construction Company Inc. Avi is the father of Michael David Israel and with his wife Julie Israel, is co-founder and President of Save The Michaels of The World. Avi is the recipient of several recognitions and the *2012 WNY Chemical Dependency Consortium Community Award* for his activism. Some of Avi's accomplishments to date are; he was a driving force behind the I-STOP Legislation and the Michael David Israel Laws. He worked with US Attorney Bill Hochul on a Call to Action Public Awareness Forum at the University of Buffalo, which included the NY Attorney General, DEA and local law enforcement agencies. He testified before the US Senate on the dangers of prescription drug abuse, and gave testimony in front of several FDA Panels on the dangers of prescription drug abuse. Avi has constant communication and collaboration with local and federal legislators on advocating for a full range of improved services for the community, and was an initiator of local CME classes for the 8 Counties of WNY. He is currently working with National Groups like ARPO (Advocates for Reform of Prescription Opioids) and PROP (Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing) on a National Awareness Campaign, while simultaneously collaborating with Blue Cross & Blue Shield on Doctor's Education & Public Awareness in New York State, and Integrated Health System's informational call centers. Avi's mission is altruistic in that he never wants another parent to experience what he and his family have with the needless passing of his son.



### Julie Israel, CIC, CPIA

Julie Israel is an Account Executive with First Niagara Risk Management Inc. In this role she is responsible for coordinating services and risk management, handling commercial insurance and safety issues that may expose a company to litigation or insurance claims. Julie is the mother of Michael David Israel and along with her husband Avi Israel, is co-founder and sits on the board of Save The Michaels of The World. Having lost a child to an opioid addiction, Julie is living life with a purpose, investing in her community and honoring her son's legacy. Julie stands shoulder to shoulder with her husband of 27 years in their commitment to making a difference in the lives of others by sharing her personal experience on the perils of prescription drugs.