

## VOLUNTEER STORY: MILDRED

"When you find your purpose in life, and you are satisfied with it, then everything else is gravy," said Dr. Clarke from the dining room of the Prospect Heights brownstone where she has lived for over 65 years. From starting her pioneering gynecologic practice back in 1970, with evening hours to accommodate the schedules of working women, to now leading her church's medical missions to the Mississippi Delta, where they help communities address such staggering health issues as chronic obesity and diabetes, Dr. Clarke's purpose is discovering the potential in others, and doing everything she can to help raise consciousness and mentor new leaders. After a lifetime of service to Brooklyn and medical missions around the world, and her 15 years of service on the BCS board, Dr. Clarke still has work to do.

"I would like to do more for the women of TLC (Transitional Living Community), particularly when it comes to educational attainment," says Dr. Clarke, herself a graduate of the New York City public schools. For the past three years, Dr. Clarke has focused on BCS's shelter for homeless women diagnosed with mental disorders, and every February she has supported a graduation ceremony for those who transition to permanent housing. "You would be surprised what some of these women can do, and what they know. I would like to see what is possible."

Education has been central to her life from her early days as one of six women to graduate from Howard University Medical School, to her mentoring of young women through the American Association of University Women. Driven by a work ethic she

attributes to her working-class parents, for Dr. Clarke, education was not only a way to have a better life; it was also a way to help those around you in the process. As she sees the growing economic disparities in Brooklyn, Dr. Clarke is characteristically frank.

"I've seen this borough turn over five times. I grew up in a population of mostly Blacks, Italians, and Irish. None of us had any money. The great equalizer was poverty. That's what bound us together. There is migration in, but it's no different than when the Irish and Italian moved out and Latino families and others moved in." Reflecting on the rise of gastropubs and wine stores in her neighborhood, Dr. Clarke said, "There is as much liquor on Franklin Ave as when I was growing up. The only difference is back then guys carried it in a paper bag and called it Cold Duck. More renters are moving in but what has been persistent has been the poverty."

After 40 years of practice—and over 5,000 babies delivered—Dr. Clarke retired in 2001. Shortly before then, in 1999, she joined the BCS Board of Directors with the goal of tackling the stubborn issues of poverty in her home community. As an active Board member, she has helped BCS better inform Brooklyn's multiracial professional class of its important mission and work. She has led strategic planning efforts as BCS moved to expand its services to families. Perhaps her greatest contribution is her steadfast commitment to Brooklyn and those who lack the voice to speak. "I joined BCS because they were helping the people who society misunderstood. They see the potential in people, and that's what I am all about."

**Dr. Mildred Clarke, BCS Board of Directors**

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