

SURVIVOR IS PRIZED EXAMPLE

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Diane Gaines has every reason to rely on others, but instead it is others who rely on her. Gaines, 44, is a single mother who grew up in a drug-ravaged neighborhood in Jamaica, Queens. Twenty years ago, a blood vessel in her spinal cord ruptured, leaving her partially paralyzed. And in 1993, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy. Despite such adversity, Gaines is program director for the Education Assistance Corp.

The Women's Opportunity Resource Center (WORC), an alternative-to-incarceration program in Hempstead for female substance abusers. "I choose to concentrate on my abilities, and not my disabilities," she said. Gaines' fighting spirit in the face of overwhelming odds has been recognized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's largest private health philanthropy. The organization, set up by one of the founders of Johnson & Johnson, recently awarded Gaines \$100,000 through the Boston-based Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Program. Each year for the past 10, the program has given \$100,000 awards to 10 people who have overcome substantial obstacles to deliver quality health care to underserved communities. Gaines is the first from Long Island to receive such an award. "To be recognized for something that you love to do working with the women is rewarding," she said. WORC offers a second chance to women who face their own adversity: poverty, drugs, AIDS, crime. Most of the women are black. They receive social, medical, educational, legal and vocational services while they are enrolled in the nine-month program. Eight hundred women have graduated from the center in the past 10 years. Said Gaines: "They see me and see what I've overcome, and it's helped them to overcome what obstacles they have to face. I'm not going to sit here and say I'm a role model, but if I can act in that fashion, I'm going to."

" Gaines said she would use the \$100,000 to hire a part-time nurse/counselor and to upgrade the center's computer system. Gaines said a decrease in state funding last year forced the center to eliminate the nursing position. Gaines was hospitalized for nine months after her spinal cord illness. Afterward, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees in correctional counseling in California, where she had gone for treatment. She has been WORC's program director for 10 years. Her illness left her with only limited use of her hands and legs. Gaines said she is able to get around using a walker or a wheelchair. Since being diagnosed with breast cancer, she helped start the Long Island chapter of the Sisters Network, a support group for African-American breast cancer survivors. Her cancer surgery resulted in swelling in her left arm, forcing Gaines to wear a brace. Gaines has been an inspiration to the women enrolled in the center, which is on Clinton St. near downtown Hempstead. "It's inspirational," said Sandra Raye, 32. "If she can get up every day and dedicate her life to doing something good, I can, too.

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