



# NEW BEGINNINGS



## Steven Noordwijk, Chief Chef New Beginnings/Foundation Chances for Life

*"I have found a safe space at New Beginnings and I am enjoying it!"*

**New Beginnings/ Chances for Life** is a civil society organisation (CSO) in Paramaribo that operates a drop-in center for key and vulnerable populations - commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender persons, persons who use drugs, the homeless and migrants. They also provide services that range from HIV/STI education and clinical services (HIV testing and referral to clinics) to economic empowerment to their clients. New Beginnings/ Chances for Life addresses HIV through social determinants, such as substance use, alcoholism, homelessness and poverty, violence, and sex work.

**Steven's passion is cooking.** He considers himself a self-taught chef, even though he only took a few cooking classes and lessons. He enjoys experimenting with different cuisine. He worked with a catering service as a Chef and catered mainly for community events. But, life has not been that simple and straightforward for Steven. For the most part of his adult life, he was addicted to drugs and lived in a small wooden house in a cemetery in Paramaribo. He had no water, no light, sold drugs and sex, and was regularly involved in crime and violence. His life has been difficult and he shares, *"about two years ago, I became very depressed."* When New Beginnings/ Chances for Life visited the cemetery as part of their outreach programme, Steven approached them and sought help. The organization made all arrangements and supported him during his detox programme. Steven is now drug-free and is employed by the organization, serving as the Chief Chef.

Steven is happy at New Beginnings/ Chances for Life and feels that he has been given a chance to get his life back on track. He plans to stay at New Beginnings/ Chances for Life as the Chief Chef and sees this as his contribution to the organization in return for helping him and many others like him. As Chief Chef, he routinely prepares three meals a day and also cooks for special occasions and events, such as the weekly Kelly's Café where transgender persons meet, discuss issues affecting them, and provide support to each other. He uses his culinary skills in preparing cultural meals for the migrant clients from Guyana, Columbia, The Dominican Republic, and elsewhere, who visit the organization on a weekly basis for support. As the Chief Chef, Steven is paid a salary that goes directly to the bank.



*"I don't take any money from the bank, I don't need to. All of my needs are taken care of by this organization. I will wait until I have enough money to open my own café."*



In addition to cooking, Steven, who now lives on the premises of the organization, takes care of the building and assists clients coming to the drop-in center in the evenings, when clinical and other staff are off-duty. He was trained by the organization to care for and address immediate needs of clients. He ensures that clients are fed, showered, and have a place to rest. For medical needs, he calls the relevant healthcare personnel. He reflects on the persons who access services at the drop in center. *“All kinds of people come here, with all kinds of problems. I try to give them good advice. I tell them, they need to be on the right track and not to look at other persons and what they are doing, because they could very well be doing the wrong thing.”*

*“Working at New Beginnings/ Chances for Life was meant for me. It is a motivation for me. I see and address the real needs of the clients because I myself know what clients who come to the drop-in center are going through. That is why I offer my own experience to motivate them and I am motivated when they make progress. This is my journey.”*

Steven is grateful for the help that New Beginnings/ Chances for Life provided him, because in doing so they brought his family and friends back to him. On his last birthday, his family and friends visited him and brought a cake. They celebrated his birthday with him, which he deemed a treat as this was the first after many years. *“It felt good, to know that after everything I have put my family through, I am now able to celebrate my birthday with them.”* Steven and his family are grateful and want to give back to the organization. *“We have some children properties. I would like to give some land to the organization. Once my siblings and I can sort out the papers, I will donate some land to the organization.”* In this way, Steven sees that he can have a bigger kitchen where he can be more creative, the organization will have a larger kitchen garden that can grow enough vegetables to fully cover their needs and grow more fruits, and that clients can have a beautiful flower garden to enjoy.

Steven’s dreams for the future are big. He likes surprising people with his creative culinary skills and dreams of owning his own café somewhere in Paramaribo where he can create and prepare exquisite food, like no other. He smiled, *“it will be one of a kind.”* Steven currently has few expectations. *“I want to make enough bread for everyone at the drop in center, so we don’t have to buy and we could even sell some,”* Steven explained. He wants to always remain with New Beginning/ Chances for Life, while at the same time own and operate his personal café on a part-time basis.



*“I will stay as long as Ms. Kambel and the organization will have me. This is home, this is family, this is where I belong.”*

**For additional information, visit the PANCAP website: [www.pancap.org](http://www.pancap.org)  
December 2018**

This article is made possible by the support of the American People through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Knowledge for Health (K4Health) Project (AID-OAA-A-13-00068). The contents of this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Government, PEPFAR, USAID, or K4Health.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**K4Health**  
Knowledge for Health