

“Contact tracing requires an individual to meet contacts where they are and exercise compassion, patience, respect, equality, as well as being understanding, flexible and accommodating,” she says. “It is extremely difficult to inform someone that they have been exposed to COVID-19 or tested positive, but we are creating a new sense of community within this pandemic, to let people know that we care and there is always support, especially if they live alone.”

Fighting the Invisible Enemy

ISAAC TWUM

Community Engagement Supervisor

Nearly 20-years-ago, Isaac Twum left his native home in Kumasi, Ghana and settled in the Bronx in search of new opportunities. He earned a master’s degree in Public Health and started a family.

But the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the life he built as more people throughout the city he came to love became ill. Fear spread among his neighbors, friends and family. He knew he had to do something to help.

“We are battling an infectious disease that can affect my children or even me,” he said. “For all people, this virus is a common enemy that we cannot see. We must work together to stop the spread.”

He found his opportunity working as a Community Engagement Supervisor with the Test and Trace Corps, where he will supervise a team that contact and visit New Yorkers who test positive for COVID-19. Together, they will speak with patients in their home to help NYC Health + Hospitals continue monitoring their health and social needs.

In his position, he’ll draw on knowledge from past experiences as a project assistant at New York City’s Department of Health and working with NGOs in Ghana. He also received training from the health system and public health experts around the nation. It’s a great help, Twum said, as he and his team will work together to build trust and rapport with the patients they meet.

The program and position are new, he said, so he’s open to seeing how his role may evolve to help the health system and community defeat the virus.

“It’s my passion, and sometimes it requires a lot of sacrifice but it’s so rewarding to see the impact I have on community,” he said. “You have to do something to improve where you live. Think about it - when your community is healthy, you are healthy.”

Seeking Honesty to Fight COVID-19

DR. OMOBOLANLE ALLI-BALOGUN

Contact Tracing Supervisor



No stranger to contact tracing, Dr. Alli-Balogun served on the frontlines in her native Nigeria during the Ebola outbreak in 2014. As the district medical officer for Yaba, Lagos, she went door to door to reach the most vulnerable community members, part of an effort that quickly curbed the outbreak through intense footwork and follow-up.

Three years ago, she emigrated to New York City with her family. While seeking her medical licenses to become an infectious diseases specialist, she worked as a telehealth technician in a nursing home. As COVID-19 hit, the role required her to enter patients' rooms with a monitor to facilitate remote examinations, giving her firsthand appreciation of the uncertainty and concerns experienced by New Yorkers who will be engaged by the Test & Trace Corps.

"Everyone is scared of the new disease and doesn't know what to expect. Our role is to reassure people and calm their fears," she says. "But contract tracers also need people to be open and honest with us. That is the only way we are going to stop the spread of COVID-19."

Motivated After Loss of Loved Ones

LISA ABRAMSON, BS, MPA

Contact Tracing Supervisor



Lisa Abramson comes to the Test & Trace Corps from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The former dental assistant transitioned to a career in emergency and disaster management career after living through Hurricane Sandy in Rockaway, Queens, where she saw the impact on her older and vulnerable neighbors and was inspired to help them recover.

A Bronx native, she previously worked for a decade and a half at the NYU College of Dentistry and Nursing, serving in roles including clinic management and operations, and as a patient service representative. She brings to any situation a calm demeanor and the ability to interact

with people at all levels. She is motivated to join the fight against COVID-19 following the loss of loved ones and friends in her community to the virus.

"I know there is suffering and I wanted to help people in New York," she says of the new role. "I'm a born New Yorker. I'm hoping that we can nip this virus in the bud and really be able to contact and trace the people who have it so that they don't spread the disease to others."