

## ECMH: Providing Mental Health Support to Babies and Young Children

When Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray wanted to ensure that ThriveNYC — the most comprehensive mental health plan of any city or nation — wouldn't leave behind the city's youngest citizens, they asked qualified mental health providers to join its Early Childhood Mental Health Network. One of those providers was The Child Center of NY.

A year later, The Child Center is the sole Queens provider in the Network, and we have provided over 200 services to families and schools.



"Sadly, national and state statistics show that infants and young children are at the highest risk of suffering from trauma caused by abuse and exposure to domestic violence," says Child Center ECMH Director Michele Neuhaus. "We also know that persistent 'toxic' stress, such as extreme poverty or maternal depression, can damage the developing brain, leading to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. Additionally, there is an alarming rate of kids being expelled from preschool. Providing a systemic approach to early childhood mental health prevention and treatment is more imperative than ever."

Our ECMH Initiative addresses both sides of the coin: On the treatment side, we offer psychotherapy to children ages 0-5 and their families; and on the prevention side is our Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMH-C) unit, through which we partner with child care providers (such as Head Start/EarlyLearn) to help them respond appropriately to behavioral challenges and promote students' social-emotional development. We also serve as a place to which they can refer families for mental health support.

People often wonder what mental health services for 0-5-year-olds entail, especially since our idea of therapy focuses on "talk."

"We use a model called Child-Parent Psychotherapy," Neuhaus explains. "The goal is to strengthen the relationship between child and caregiver as a means for restoring the child's sense of safety, attachment, and affect."

Using the child's language of art or play, parent and child learn to become more attuned to each other's needs. This helps them restore trust and work through feelings of guilt, shame, and anger. The result is a child with improved cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning, and a better foundation from which to meet future challenges.



**THE CHILD  
CENTER OF NY**

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

### On the Record:

Across our  
Child Abuse  
Prevention and  
Family Support  
programs, only

**1.5%**

of children were  
placed in foster  
care, for a  
prevention  
rate of

**98.5%**

## From the Chief Executive Officer

In business, putting collaboration above one's own brand is folly — unless your “business” is the welfare of children. Take the case of Kenneth, who came to us with multiple challenges, including ADHD, asthma, and self-destructive behaviors. Specialists from different organizations needed to work together for Kenneth's overall well-being.

Kenneth enrolled in our Health Homes program, which embodies this collaborative spirit. A health home is a model (not a physical place) for coordinating the care of kids with multiple chronic conditions. In addition to our ongoing collaboration with Cohen Children's Medical Center, we're now also partnering with the Children's Health Home through Northwell Health. Through this partnership, our children will get excellent medical care, and families enrolled in Northwell Health's Children's Health Home can access top-notch mental health services through The Child Center. Each child is assigned a resource coordinator to ensure communication among providers.

The difference in Kenneth has been amazing. His resource coordinator, Joseph, worked with a tutoring organization, a recreation program, and Kenneth's doctors. We also connected Kenneth to therapy, where he's learned techniques for dealing with emotions. He is socializing more, and his academics are soaring.

Collaboration often looks like it does with Kenneth; but sometimes, collaboration entails taking ourselves out of the picture entirely and referring a family to an organization better suited to their needs. That's because we actually advance our agency-specific mission — strengthening children and families — by being collaborative, even if we don't serve that child ourselves. The more all social impact organizations do this, the stronger we'll be as a sector, and the more of a large-scale impact we'll make. Behind nearly every success in this newsletter is a story of collaboration, of various entities doing their part for each child.

CEO Traci Donnelly with Elisa Pimentel, winner of the 2017 Russell L. Carson Visionary Award. See “A Night To Treasure” for details.



*Traci Donnelly*  
Traci Donnelly

View NY1's reporting on Redfern at [childcenterny.org/in-the-media/](http://childcenterny.org/in-the-media/)

## The Closing and Opening of Redfern

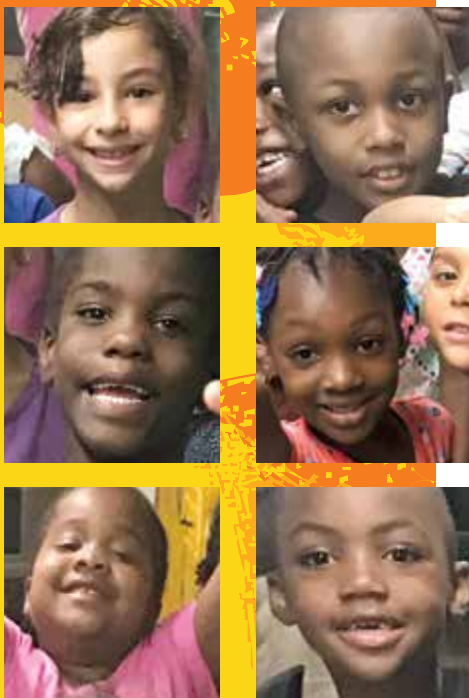
It had the makings of a made-for-TV movie, but the drama was all too real for parents of the Redfern community: In March, the Redfern Community Center, a Cornerstone program of the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development in an underserved section of Far Rockaway, was forced to close abruptly. Children were literally stranded on the doorstep when they went there after school, and parents worried about where to send their kids while they worked.

That's when DYCD turned to The Child Center of NY and asked us to become Redfern's new provider. CEO Traci Donnelly put the question to staff, knowing their plates were already full (some might say overflowing!) — and they unequivocally agreed to help.

Since then, The Child Center has been working tirelessly, with the support of the NYC Housing Authority and DYCD, not only to reopen the center, but also to revitalize it, with improved facilities that include a state-of-the-art computer lab and a weight room for teens and adults, as well as programming to meet the needs of the community as expressed by its members. While afterschool enrichment is a core function of Cornerstones, it's not the only one. They also offer adult programming, teen activities, and a sense of community, providing residents a safe, fun place to come together.

Community spirit was palpable last month when Redfern opened for summer camp, welcoming 52 campers, and celebrated with a cookout, DJ, and games. An official ribbon-cutting is planned for September.

The children were relieved and excited to have their center back. “I was very upset when the center closed because I thought it was gone forever. I played in the park, but my friends weren't there,” 6-year-old Karina told us. “Now that the center is open again, I feel happy because I can make new friends.”



Opening Day

## Noteworthy

Thanks and congratulations were in order this spring and summer.

- On July 19, COO **Jaime Angarita** was honored by **New York Nonprofit Media** as a 40 Under 40 Rising Star in recognition of his outstanding work in the nonprofit sector.
- Clients of our **Jamaica Family Center** participated in a playwriting residency with the acclaimed **Manhattan Theatre Club**. The clients, all of whom are adolescents with a criminal record, wrote performance pieces based on their experiences and saw their words come to life in a performance by MTC professional actors.
- A big thanks to the **van Ameringen Foundation** for its gift of \$100,000 to support **Health Homes**, a new division of The Child Center dedicated to meeting the needs of children with multiple chronic conditions or SED (serious emotional disturbance).
- Special thanks to **NYC Ferry** and its operator, **Hornblower**, for its gift of a ferry ride and tickets for our **Far Rockaway RBI** little leaguers to attend Bat Day at Yankee Stadium.

## A Night to Treasure: Our 2017 Annual Gala

Our Spring Gala at The Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers was a one-of-a-kind event for over 300 guests. The entertainment featured Grammy- and Oscar-winning composer Alan Menken, our honoree, performing a history of his songs, including Disney favorite “Be Our Guest.” To add to the magic, our P.S. 182 students lent their magnificent voices to the *Beauty and the Beast* classic, creating an unforgettable rendition. Speakers included Program Director Carolyn Johnson-Daire, who shared her journey from Child Center client to staff, and eighth-grader Christina Clarke, who spoke movingly about being Johnson-Daire’s student. Afterschool Program Director Elisa Pimentel received the Russell L. Carson Visionary Award for employees who regularly go above and beyond for the children in their care.

We are grateful to our board members and major sponsors, including Pat and Dick Jay; The Ficalora Family Foundation; Greenberg Traurig, LLP; HighBrook Investment Management; Chasity and Peter Santoro; Barbara Deli and Neeraj Bewtra; and gala co-chairs Jennifer Milacci and Marc Scher, and Katie and Jim Brennan. We also thank our gala host committee members for their time, talents, and commitment: Anna Aguilar, Anna Quintana, Chasity Santoro, and Sher Sparano.

## Supporter Spotlight: Ashley Dean

### Doing the Most Good

Ashley Dean, an audit associate with the firm KPMG in its asset management division, is only 25 years old. But having grown up in a poor, immigrant, “socially oriented” family, she already knows the intrinsic value of giving back.

“I believe we should do the most good with what we have,” said Ashley. “When I finished college, I immediately starting asking how I could help.” That’s when her brother, COO Jaime Angarita, introduced her to The Child Center of NY.

Last fall, Ashley found a niche in her company and got her entire division on board with a toy drive for the holidays. KPMG became The Child Center’s #1 sponsor, benefitting nearly 250 children. The effort had special meaning for Ashley, whose own toys growing up were often gifted from similar drives.

Her next project was even more successful. Piggybacking off the KPMG “Families for Literacy” effort, she helped direct nearly \$13,000 worth of books — 5,006 volumes and counting — to Child Center programs.

Nicholas Ferreira, Vice President of Youth Development, was ecstatic about the donation. “When school is out for summer, so many of our youth drop off academically,” he said. “This gift is an important step in combatting that loss by promoting literacy and helping our youth return to school ready to learn.”

To further assist, Ashley is working to make KPMG one of The Child Center’s annual backpack drive sponsors, providing book bags and/or books to go inside them for students attending our partner New York City public schools.



The Child Center of NY is a 64-year-old social impact agency that helps disadvantaged children compete and succeed. To make a donation, visit [www.childcenterny.org](http://www.childcenterny.org) or call 718-651-7770 ext. 6890.



## In Their Own Words: LS' Story

When you're a single mother, small challenges can get magnified — and big challenges can push you over the edge if you don't have the right support.

I was facing enormous challenges last year. I had escaped domestic violence with my three kids, and we were on our own in a new place. My eighteen-month-old daughter, Lulu, wasn't verbalizing and was tantruming an extreme amount.

Early Intervention came to do an assessment and told me Lulu had selective mutism, meaning she was opting out of talking, and I should wait until she was 3 before doing anything. I wasn't satisfied with that.

Thankfully, I had met Telva Rivera, from The Child Center's Parent-Child Home Program, at a P.S. 111 fair. Telva had spoken about how PCHP works: A trained professional comes into your home with books and toys and provides guidance on supporting your child's development. I said, "That's what I need — sign me up!"

From the start, Telva elicited a big change in Lulu. Telva was amicable and spoke to Lulu not just clearly, but also in a very organized way. She'd say, "This book is *Yellow and Yummy*. Do you want to read *Yellow and Yummy*?" She would guide Lulu to say, "Yes, I want to read *Yellow and Yummy*."

I began to mirror what Telva was modeling and saw a vast improvement in Lulu's relationship with me and her brothers. She's now saying more words than expected for her age!

But the positive changes in Lulu didn't only have to do with Lulu's verbalizing. Telva looked at what else was going on, with Lulu and with our whole family.

With Lulu, she helped me discipline in a way that led to less frustration for us both — specifically, she helped me use redirecting as tool, and to hold Lulu accountable for her actions with consequences. I learned to not dwell on the negative, because if I did, Lulu would stay there. Instead, I could say, "I don't like that choice, would you please do this?" — and offer an alternative.

For our whole family, Telva recommended The Child Center's Woodside Clinic, where we got individual and family therapy. Our therapist helped me deal with my frustrations and be more consistent in my parenting; I can be a little flaky, but she helped me see how that bred inconsistency in my home, and how a few changes could improve that. She helped empower my kids with language skills to express their feelings, instead of having a tantrum.



We graduated from PCHP in the spring, and I left feeling confident that I have tools in my arsenal to deal with all sorts of challenges.

It's not easy in the beginning to have someone come into your home, but Telva wasn't judgmental; she didn't come in wagging her finger. She just came with energy and a fresh pair of eyes, which was a great benefit, because sometimes you're too close to something, and your frustration

prohibits you from seeing the possible outcomes — all you see is the negative. With PCHP, I gained an understanding of Lulu that helped me parent her effectively. I don't think I would have gotten there as quickly or fully without it.

I'm glad The Child Center helped me make changes — and to see that change was possible in the first place.



## Staff Spotlight: New Agency Controller Brings "Better Communication" to Finance Department

Since Cheryl Moody's arrival in February, numerous changes have affected the agency's staffing, organizational structure, and budget. Cheryl's key position as Controller, elevated to the Vice President level, required someone who could hit the ground running.

As CFO Steve Donowitz put it, "She's a tremendous asset... and she couldn't have started a day too soon."

Cheryl had her work cut out for her, but she was inspired by our mission and executive leadership team. "I can contribute toward better communication, ensuring that we meet outside funder requirements, and more adequate training so that programs are aware of what expenditures are allowable vs. unallowable," said Cheryl. "I'm lucky that I get to do that with like-minded colleagues who care as much as I do about our clients and our financial goals. My heart is here."



# Field Notes: An Award-Winning Season

## Middle School Program Wins City-Wide Contest

The United Federation of Teachers organizes a yearly BRAVE Video Contest that recognizes students who make a positive impact in their schools. Staff members of The Child Center's afterschool program at the Waterside School for Leadership worked with its young scholars to create a video showcasing how our program promotes a positive school community. The resulting video, "Rockaside Bravery," was selected as winner of the 2016-17 BRAVE Video Contest, and students, staff, and Principal Linda Munro were honored at the fifth annual BRAVE conference.

Program Coordinator Mya Haley said of the experience: "The children definitely experienced a boost in self-esteem. The whole bus ride there, they talked about how something so impactful was going to be screened to other schools, and they were so excited to be honored, out of all the schools in the city. Almost everyone wanted to get on stage and talk about their experience, which was unlike their behavior before this — they usually run from public speaking! But they gracefully accepted their award and said a few words. They felt really good to have almost a whole event dedicated to them."



## Little Artist Earns Big Recognition



Mamun (left) with his mother and twin brother

The Child Center's three Head Start/EarlyLearn Programs were pleased to participate this year in the sought-after Studio in a School program, in which students are taught by a professional artist, and teachers learn how to continue lessons on their own. During the residency, each artist chooses one art piece for consideration in the Studio in a School Association's Littlest Learners Exhibit. Only about 15 percent of submissions are selected; one of them was by four-year-old Mamun of our Ficalora Family Foundation Head Start Center! The exhibit was open throughout March and April at the Studio in a School Gallery in midtown Manhattan. The experience clearly had an effect on Mamun, who told his dad, "Everyone looked at my art and said, 'Beautiful!' They took pictures of my art and me. My art must be good, right, Dad?"

## Aspirations High School Project Selected for Youth Conference

On May 13, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development hosted its Young Citizens Conference, honoring youth activists for their efforts to ignite change within their communities and showcasing their leadership projects. The DREAM Factory Peer Leaders, from our very own Aspirations Diploma Plus High School, were selected to present their winning project. The group learned how to facilitate workshops about sexual health for their peers and wrote two songs on the theme of sexual health — one from a boys' perspective and one from a girls' — and recorded music videos for each song. They facilitated a workshop at the conference where they also presented the videos. The group members learned a lot through the experience, not just about sexual health, but also about the writing process, advocacy, and themselves. One student, Murlisa, wrote a moving first-person account of her experience, which you can read on our website at [childcenterny.org/murlisas-story](http://childcenterny.org/murlisas-story).





# THE CHILD CENTER OF NY

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

## Main Office

118-35 Queens Boulevard, Sixth Floor  
Forest Hills, NY 11375

tel: 718-651-7770

fax: 718-651-5029

[www.childcenterny.org](http://www.childcenterny.org)



Rain didn't put a damper on our first RBI Volunteer Day. Little leaguers like 7-year-old Khasir had a great time learning and playing ball with Child Center supporters.



# THE CHILD CENTER OF NY

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

## Inside This Issue

ECMH program offers therapy for babies and toddlers

Students earn city-wide recognition

Redfern Community Center reopens

Spring Gala honors legendary Disney composer

# Strengthening Family. Building Community.