



On the red carpet with the young filmmakers.

At the Tribeca Film Fest, a Big Debut

"There were three of us at first," said Beatrice Winston, 18. "We were freshmen, all shy and scared." The three girls, each struggling with her sexual identity, felt very alone in their new school.

But they found courage in each other and decided to start an LGBTQ club. One by one, other teens joined. A social worker at their school agreed to facilitate the club, which became a safe haven.

When the club had the opportunity to make a short film, through a partnership between The Child Center of NY's Beacon Center in Far Rockaway and The Tribeca Film Institute, they knew exactly what they wanted it to say.

For months, the students met with a professional filmmaker to learn the nuts and bolts of filmmaking. The result of their hard work is *What If?*, a PSA that asks the question, How does it feel to be in the minority? The film presents a high school where homosexuality is the norm, and students are bullied for being straight. When a boy and a girl are caught holding hands, their classmates taunt them, "Go home, nasty heteros."

The film ends with a sobering statistic: 9 out of 10 LGBTQ students report being bullied because of their sexuality.

Today the group is as close as family. The teens finish each other's sentences and often burst into laughter. To see them together is to believe in a world where kids can be themselves. "If I hadn't joined this group, I'd still be living like a hermit with no confidence," says 17-year-old Diamond Persaud.

On April 25th, the group traveled from Far Rockaway to the internationally known Tribeca Film Festival, which screened their film. It was a big moment, and a big statement. "Here we were in this school all together. We struggled. And now we did something good," said 18-year-old Millie Rios. "For us, this is a very big deal."



congratulations

James Taylor, Beatrice Winston, Kumar Somra, Katherine Varn, Monica Miller, Milliane Rios, Taylor Maurasse, Alexis Camp, Diamond Persaud, Damion Smith, and Melissa Roberts.

thanks

Jacqueline Gutierrez, the Tribeca Film Institute, and teaching artist Beth Miranda Botshon.



Melanie McNeil, at our Escalera Head Start, will arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

For Every Child, a Strong Start

The Child Center is thrilled that Mayor DeBlasio and the state are investing in universal pre-kindergarten. "If we want our most at-risk children to succeed in school, go to college, and find work at a living wage, we must begin their education early," says Linda Rodriguez, associate executive director of our early childhood programs. The Child Center annually serves nearly 400 children, from birth to age five, in its early childhood programs.



From the CEO and Executive Director Traci Donnelly

How do we choose our path in life? It's an important question, and I thought some of you might like to know why I am here as the new CEO of The Child Center.

For more than a decade, I'd worked in the field of substance abuse, where most people don't seek help until a crisis. I wanted to join an organization that reaches out to children early in life, before they go down the wrong path. I also loved that The Child Center works so closely with families and communities and that it serves 18,000 young people each year.

But more than anything, the mission of this organization and the staff's dedication to that mission drew me here. I saw The Child Center's impact on children and families, thanks to the passion and professionalism of our amazing counselors, teachers and youth development leaders. Their hard work and deep sense of purpose inspires our senior management and board, and it inspired me, too.

The Child Center is more than an agency—it's a community. As I visited our locations over the last few months, I met employees who had begun as after-school participants or volunteers. I met social workers and educators who are profoundly dedicated after two decades of service. And our donors provide the loyal, ongoing support that sustains our programs.

It's an exciting time in New York City, with renewed focus on investing in early childhood education and after-school programs. We plan to be a big part of it and I look forward to working with you to make a difference. Feel free to write me at tracidonnelly@childcenterny.org. Or follow me on Twitter @traci_donnelly, where I regularly share my thoughts about children and our work.

Warmly,



*"Pop Art" by
Izamar Perez,
fourth grader
at PS 182.*

Keeping the Peace

Middle school can be toxic, especially if bullying goes unchecked. That's why the young people at our MS 226 Beacon Center launched a widespread effort to make their community feel safe.

Recently the Peace Keepers, as the students call themselves, were featured in an anti-bullying segment on NY1. Among other activities, the Peace Keepers created a youth council that studied tolerance, presented anti-bullying messages to the community, and learned techniques for conflict resolution.

Angelika Peacock, director of the Beacon Center, said the youth council helped kids put themselves in each other's shoes. "Always, by the end of the mediation sessions, the tensions are resolved," she said.

One of the council's biggest successes was with a kid who was constantly teased. Over time, he became a leader in the group, helping others understand what it felt like to be an outcast. The project has become a permanent part of the Beacon program at MS 226. Thank you to the Aline and Leo Jacobsohn Foundation, which makes this program possible.

*The youth
council at
MS226
Beacon Center
poses with their
anti-bullying
banner.*



BIG NIGHT



Sergio and his family along with Child Center Board President Richard Jay and honoree Robert Altman who described The Child Center as a "bridge of hope."

Israel Cortes, whose two children attended our Head Start programs, was a special guest and speaker at The Child Center's annual gala, held in Manhattan on April 23. He told guests that our program not only helped his kids, but also helped him be a better parent who was more involved with his kids' lives at home and at school.

"Without The Child Center's coaching, I don't think I would have had the confidence to be that kind of dad," Cortes said.

Roger Altman, was the gala's honoree and David Faber of CNBC was master of ceremonies. Head Start alumnus Sergio, age 5, his sister, and mother Delia, presented Altman with his award. Step dancers from PS 223 performed an original piece called "Hopes for the Future."



Israel Cortes, along with his wife and two children. Israel told the crowd that The Child Center transformed the lives of his family and ultimately helped him open his own small business.

THE NEW GIVING



MAKING A DIFFERENCE, ALL YEAR LONG

As a business student at Columbia University, Benjamin Bahr was plowing through the standard slate of classes when something different caught his eye: a program that partnered students with area nonprofits. Bahr signed up, and was soon helping The Child Center Board President Richard Jay and then-executive director Sandra Hagan explore new initiatives for the agency.

Because he was a business student, Bahr's project focused mostly on the agency's budgets and bookkeeping. But in the middle of the number crunching, he made a visit to a program site.

"To see the dedication and commitment of everyone involved—staff, kids, and families—it was really a crystallizing moment," Bahr says.

When his work with The Child Center ended, what Bahr had seen stuck with him. He and his wife Anne—who shares his concern for the hardships faced by New York City's poorest children—wanted to keep helping. But they weren't sure how.

Bahr knew that most nonprofits fundraised only once or twice a year and could never be sure of how much they would raise. He and Anne hit upon a solution: a monthly donation that would give The Child Center a regular amount to depend on. The process was easy and gave the couple the satisfaction of helping year-round. By donating through his employer-giving program, Bahr discovered another benefit. His employer would not match above a certain dollar amount—as with a large annual gift—but it would match smaller monthly amounts.

"Kids born into poverty face a huge uphill battle," says Bahr. "We chose this method so that we would have the most impact."

HOW TO GIVE MONTHLY

Giving monthly makes it simple to provide steady support for our work with kids and families. To set up an easy monthly donation, visit The Child Center's website, or contact Jennifer Dudley, Director of Development, at (718) 651-7770 x301.

CASE IN POINT



The Child Center's new walk-in hours allow families in crisis to get help right away.

Vanessa helped Alexa learn techniques to defuse her anxiety and reduce stress.

“I couldn’t handle it.” *A destructive habit, hidden from her parents*

Excelling in school seemed to come easily to Alexa, the 12-year-old daughter of immigrants from El Salvador. Her parents, who badly wanted their talented daughter to have the opportunities they didn’t have, never had to nag her to study. She even helped her brother—three grades above her—with his schoolwork.

But last Thanksgiving, as the family was preparing for dinner, Alexa slipped off the bracelets she always wore, and her mother caught a glimpse of what her daughter had been hiding. Feeling anxious and overwhelmed, Alexa had been cutting her arms and hands to relieve her stress.

“I felt so bad,” said her mother. “I knew she needed a therapist. But I didn’t know how to find one.” Frightened, her mother took Alexa to the emergency room, where she was evaluated and discharged with a referral for counseling at The Child Center. When Alexa and her mother arrived at The Child Center, they were checked in immediately. Within a short time they were meeting with Vanessa Morillo, a licensed master social worker. To Vanessa, Alexa admitted that she was working too hard in school. “I couldn’t handle it,” she said. “But I was too hardheaded to ask for help.”

Alexa’s mother struggled with guilt, fearing that in wanting the best for her daughter she might have pushed the girl too hard. In individual and group sessions, Vanessa encouraged Alexa’s mother to show Alexa love and support, and to encourage Alexa simply to do her best. And she helped Alexa understand that taking care of herself came first.

“I had this insane idea that it was so important to my parents that I do well in school,” Alexa said. “But the pressure I was feeling—that was from myself.”

Vanessa gave Alexa relaxation techniques to use when she faced situations that triggered her anxiety, like tests. “I like to think of a summer morning,” Alexa says. “How the grass is all dewy and the air smells really nice.” By screening the whole family for mental health issues, Vanessa discovered that Alexa’s mother and father also suffered from anxiety. Alexa began teaching the relaxation exercises to her mother, who found that they helped her a lot. “They make me like I am floating on a cloud, like nothing can bother me!” Alexa’s mother exclaimed.

Their work made the whole house calmer. Within a couple of months, Alexa had stopped cutting herself. She would still rather read a book than hang out with kids her own age—but with Vanessa’s encouragement has agreed to try more social activities, like yoga and swimming. Without intervention, Vanessa says, kids like Alexa often continue to seek out destructive ways to deal with their stress, like substance abuse and risk-taking.

“Vanessa helped us so much, all of us,” said Alexa’s mother. “There is such a big change in Alexa.”

“School is still my priority,” Alexa said. “But I try to give myself some leeway with it now.”

The Child Center of NY is a 61-year-old nonprofit agency whose mission is to help at-risk children and youth succeed in life. To make a donation, visit www.childcenterny.org or call 718.651.7770 ext. 301.

Ready for the Future: HELPING KIDS DREAM BIG

Preparing for 21st Century Jobs

"All the boys wanted to build websites about sneakers and basketball," laughs Adrianna Rodriguez, a youth counselor and tech whiz, who recently taught a class on computer coding at our Parsons Beacon Center.

While sneakers might have gotten the kids interested in making a website, only hard work made it happen. "Coding really taught them attention to detail," said Adrianna, an undergraduate at Devry University who grew up in Jamaica, Queens. "If one line was messed up, the whole thing wouldn't work."

Seeing the end result got them hooked. Soon, the kids were trying to squeeze in extra hours to finish their work.

"These classes expose kids to potential career paths," said site director Oswald Araujo, who plans to make coding workshops a permanent feature at the Beacon. "There are high paying jobs in the tech industry, and it's important that our kids have access to these opportunities."



Adrianna Rodriguez helps Justin Hu, 12, with a line of code.

Getting in the Spirit of College



Banners, school songs, mascots: Kids at the Beacon Center at MS 226 invented all of these to stage a mock "homecoming" recently. According to site director Angelika Peacock, this is just a small step at getting college into the kids' psyche.

"Kids in this neighborhood don't picture themselves at college," says Angelika. "Most don't even know anyone who has gone to college. This is just a fun activity. But it's part of a much bigger effort to get kids thinking seriously about their futures."

For the last two years, The Child Center's youth development programs have been on a major push to prepare kids for college. Beginning in middle school, students can get tutoring to improve grades, go on college visits, take "college knowledge" electives, and get opportunities for volunteer work and internships that build resumes and skills.

Says associate director of youth development Amanda Etienne, "We want them to know that they can go anywhere their ambitions take them."

Going Straight to the Top



Students tour the set of BET's show, 106 and Park.

Q: How do you get to CBS Studios?

A: Start your own YouTube channel.

That was the advice from CBS staff to students in The Child Center's service-learning program at August Martin High School, who recently toured the studios. "They suggested that students interested in a career in broadcasting create commentaries on the news, and make PSAs," says program director Brian Davis.

Although August Martin High School has a communications program, none of the students in the service-learning program participates, so part of the purpose of the studio tour was to spark interest. It is also part of a wider effort at The Child Center's youth programs to introduce students to possible careers.

Other advice from CBS staff: Students should look for internship opportunities in the fields that interested them. Nakiema Perry, 16, who loves to write, said she had originally thought about being a novelist. "But now," she says, "I am considering a career in production or directing."

MAIN ADDRESS:

60-02 Queens Boulevard
Woodside, NY 11377
tel: 718.651.7770 fax: 718.651.5029
www.childcenterny.org

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Paper-plate art by children in our Head Start program

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