

Teen Time

"It's very difficult to go into people's homes and gain their trust in the most stressful of circumstances," says The Child Center of NY's CEO and Executive Director Traci Donnelly.

Yet that's exactly what case managers accomplish through The Child Center's home visiting programs, which offer 24/7 crisis intervention, case management services, and coping skills training for youth at risk of psychiatric hospitalization.

"It can be awkward at first," says Lucy Burgos, intensive case manager for the Blended Case Management program. "But people are usually grateful for the assistance." That assistance focuses on helping families access services in the community and teaching parents how to advocate for their children.

Parents also appreciate help with monitoring teens' academic progress. "We often go to parent-teacher conferences with parents. I translate for those who don't understand English.... Kids tend to only translate what they want parents to hear,"



says Brenda Ramos, case manager for the Step-Down program. By the time children leave her program, "they almost always improve academically and behaviorally."

Sometimes case managers arrange trips with multiple teens together, to expose them to activities that can be cost-prohibitive and to help them with social skills. As an extension of that, Miriam Valero, mental health worker for Home-Based Crisis Intervention, helped launch Teen Time nine years ago. Teen Time brings together teens from the various home visiting programs for monthly meetings to discuss concerns in a non-judgmental environment.

Meetings frequently include a fun activity that illustrates a larger point. At the December meeting, teens were split into teams to build miniature holiday homes. The exercise led the teens to discover how they could work together while respecting each person's role. That resulted in a conversation about the right to personal beliefs.

"People's opinions are important, and we have to learn to respect them even if we don't agree," said Sean Fernando, who was referred to HBCI following a hospitalization.

Developing communication strategies in the face of disagreement has been a focus of Sean's home visits. "Before I started seeing Miriam, if my girlfriend and I disagreed, I'd yell my opinion, she'd shout hers, and one of us would walk out crying. Now, we're able to say, 'Okay, this is what I don't like....' And we talk about it."



**THE CHILD
CENTER OF NY**

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

**In our juvenile justice
and intensive family
interventions for teens
at high risk of out-
of-home placement:**

**non-compliance with
family rules fell from**

87% to 6%

**parent-child conflict
fell from**

45% to 2%

**and school attendance
problems fell from**

57% to 18%

From the CEO and Executive Director Traci Donnelly

As the world changes, so must our management and prevention of challenges and crises. Being innovative in adapting to help children thrive is part of why The Child Center of NY is successful. Chuck Caputo, associate executive director for behavioral health, talks in these pages about changes afoot in societal perception and governmental handling of mental health treatment. His vision for a future of “health and wellness centers,” which treat the whole child, is exactly the kind of innovative thinking that sets The Child Center apart from other like organizations in the field.

Treating the whole child and the whole family is paramount to ensuring that young people are socially and emotionally healthy and can do well in school. At our Head Start programs, we teach academic concepts in creative ways that get children excited to learn. We encourage physical health through healthy eating initiatives: raising vegetables in the classroom, serving meals that are cooked on the premises and exceed nutritional standards, and our Farm to Preschool Program.

Luciano Rosendo, whose child benefitted from Head Start and who is learning with our help to cope as a single parent, is another example of a positive outcome from managing challenge with innovative thinking. How can we approach the problem from a different angle? How do we make this work? And once we find those solutions, how can we sustain and replicate them? It's not sufficient to merely be different; we must also deliver concrete results.

Every child is unique, so there will never be a set “manual” on how to solve problems. When one tactic doesn't succeed, we try another. From the executive level to volunteers in our afterschool programs, at The Child Center we are all working creatively, with open minds and hearts, to help our children prosper.

Traci Donnelly with David Song,
Asian Outreach Program client



A handwritten signature of Traci Donnelly in black ink, written over a yellow background.

Introducing: School-Based Mental Health Clinics

In 2014, we were pleased to report that Deepmalya Ghosh, The Child Center's associate executive director for youth development and community engagement, was appointed to the mayor's Community School Advisory Board. Today, The Child Center serves as the community-based organization for three community schools: August Martin High School, P.S. 197, and M.S. 72.

The community school movement helps youth thrive in their own neighborhood schools by providing high-quality academic instruction; emphasizing family and community engagement; and offering a comprehensive range of services—including behavioral health.

In November, clinical and social work coordinators from The Child Center began working in our community schools, offering clinical services in three tiers. The first is targeted and intensive and

includes individual psychotherapy; the second involves skill-building groups; and the third entails broad interventions to inform the school community about the value and function of behavioral health services and help students think about social-emotional outcomes.

“By partnering with our community schools, school-based mental health staff get to know students who would otherwise refuse therapy or to go to a clinic,” explains Micki Segel, The Child Center's director of school-based mental health. “By seeing our clinicians in school each day, students are learning to trust and accept therapy as part of their education.”

Principals and faculty are on board, too. “They appreciate the opportunity to say, ‘I’ve noticed you’ve seemed depressed.... There’s a person here who can help you,’” says Ghosh.



Micki Segel

Because The Child Center has a long history of providing quality behavioral health services, several CBOs have reached out to us, and we're now collaborating with SAYA, Zone 126, Center for Supportive Schools, SQPA, and Urban Arts to develop school-based mental health clinics at Richmond Hill High School, Long Island City High School, Flushing High School, I.S. 8, and Pan American International High School.

“We feel honored that they felt comfortable bringing us into their family,” says Ghosh.

Noteworthy

- The Child Center has partnered with Reading is Fundamental to provide books to our families, and we were selected as a recipient during book drives hosted by Macy's. In Flushing, Tanya Krien, director of Early Head Start, spoke about the program at a Macy's staff meeting, explaining the lack of books in our clients' homes. At the Macy's in Elmhurst, Elisa Pimentel advocated for P.S. 89, where she is site director of the COMPASS after-school program. Because of those efforts and this partnership, The Child Center was awarded 2,816 books!
- Amanda Etienne, our associate director of youth development community programs, has been selected by the Partnership for After School Education as a PASEsetter Award Winner. The award honors after-school educators whose commitment, energy, and creativity have had an indelible impact on NYC youth. Amanda was honored at a banquet on February 25, and \$5,000 will be donated to The Child Center in her name.
- We are proud to announce the release of our newly redesigned website. It's now easier for families to find the right program, see how we're helping the community, or make a donation. Please visit us and see what's new at www.childcenterny.org.

We encourage all our donors to check with their company's personnel office to see if there is a matching gift program. If your company has one, fill out the appropriate form to ensure your gift to The Child Center is increased by 50 percent or even doubled. To learn more about matching gift programs, please contact:

Jennifer Dudley

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Innovation in Giving

"Not everybody has the same advantages that I had. I am lucky to have parents who supported me at every step of the way," says Alan Stein, Head of Americas Advertiser Technical Support Operations for Google.

Alan believes in giving back—but not merely in traditional ways. As a frequent donor to The Child Center of NY over the years, he has also participated in a number of events "hands on," such as acting as a referee for dodgeball and organizing a Google cafe fundraiser attended by board members, and has encouraged his three children to give back as well. His kids, learning the importance of philanthropy by his example, have held bake sales and lemonade stands to raise money for The Child Center.

But the Stein family doesn't just raise money for us; they also encourage friends and coworkers to donate as well—to The Child Center and other worthy recipients. At Google, where Alan works, up to \$6,000 a year per employee is matched in giving to charitable organizations, and Alan does not let that benefit go to waste.

In addition to maxing out his own annual Google contributions, he also sponsors a "Holiday Triple Match," with his colleagues, matching up to \$150 of their donations out of his own pocket. In five years, they've raised a combined \$72,000.



"The Child Center of NY helps children grow and develop, and I want to support that by creating opportunities for kids to be able to make their own opportunities. Giving them the resources they need to work toward their own goals makes me feel like I'm making a difference in their lives, and for the next generation as well," says Alan.

Staff Spotlight

New Vision: Health and Wellness Centers



According to Chuck Caputo, The Child Center is poised to be at the center of major changes in the world of behavioral health—and addressing it as part of a larger context is becoming more widely recognized as critical in managing the cost and effectiveness of primary healthcare services. “My vision for the future is that we help reduce the stigma that still persists about getting help with mental health and substance abuse services by offering ‘health and wellness’ centers that include behavioral health services along with primary medical services,” the new associate executive director said. “Over the many years of my career, these are changes that were often talked about, but never implemented.”

Case in Point

A Family Copes with Abandonment

The Child Center’s Prevention and Family Support programs have long been a beacon of hope for families at risk, stopping abuse and violence before they begin by helping children through situations known to precipitate such abuse.

Two years ago, Luciano Rosendo’s wife and the mother of his three children, Guillermo, Cecilio, and Luciano (now ages 7, 5, and 4), went out for an errand and never came back. Distant relatives say that she moved out of state and started another family. Since then, Mr. Rosendo and his young boys have been trying to pick up the pieces and rebuild.

At the time, Cecilio was attending The Child Center’s Head Start program in Woodside, where his therapist and teacher both were instrumental in helping him deal with the trauma of losing his mother. Like everyone enrolling at one of our Head Start centers, the Rosendo family had been assigned a family assistant, in this case Mercedes Jiminez, who recognized what a tough time Mr. Rosendo and all his sons were having and helped them get the support they needed. With Jiminez’s assistance, the family has received help in the form of SNAP (“food stamp”) benefits through our Single Stop program, as well as individual therapy for each son. When Mr. Rosendo had to move to Corona to share living

space with a relative, Jiminez referred him to our Elmhurst Family Center’s General Prevention Program, where he could get what Program Director Yolanda Vega summed up in one word: “coaching.”

“Mr. Rosendo, who works long hours as a laborer and currently resides in his sister-in-law’s home, had not previously had experience with tending to his children’s physical and emotional needs on a daily basis and, before he sought our help, didn’t know where else to turn,” said Vega.

The three children frequently asked when their mother was coming back, along with other questions to which Mr. Rosendo had no answers. His middle son, Cecilio, continued to experience some behavioral issues: problems following his aunt’s directions due to the conflicting caregiving styles, and displaying sadness in school.

The more resources that became available to Mr. Rosendo, the more he opened up and, at the suggestion of his

case manager, Andrea Piskunov, he developed specific routines with his children—like preparing for the next day of school each evening—and had those difficult, frank conversations he’d been avoiding, whereby he told his children he was going to be filling the roles of both parents. These routines and the increased ability to communicate more effectively with his children have helped Mr. Rosendo become more capable and confident in his parenting, which, in turn, have helped the children feel more secure.

With The Child Center’s ongoing help, Mr. Rosendo says he now feels prepared for the next step: He plans to acquire full custody of his children and move with them to an apartment. He’s also going to learn how to read and write.

“I am ready, because everything I do is for them,” he said.

The Rosendo family with their case manager, Andrea Piskunov



Field Notes: Excited about Education

Happy Book Bag Recipients

Just in time for the beginning of school, 1,348 children at 18 Child Center programs were presented with backpacks, filled with school supplies, donated by the High Water Women organization.



Like the other kids who received book bags that day, Alaina Kindred has faced many challenges. Recently reunited with her mother, she is currently living in a shelter. But despite setbacks, Alaina is a straight A student who enjoys reading and coloring. When she received the treasure-filled bag, she was so excited to see what was inside that she immediately began removing the supplies—and she couldn't wait to start using the crayons. The case planner ran into her a week later; Alaina was happily wearing her new backpack.

"School supplies can run into the hundreds of dollars for families with school-aged children," says Yolanda Vega, program director for the Elmhurst Family Center. "These donated school supplies not only add sparkle to the children's eyes, but they indeed help the entire family, as the parents can now spend these dollars on other necessities, such as school clothes."

When School's Out, STEM Is In

Our SONYC (School's Out New York City) after-school program at the Waterside School for Leadership was selected over the summer as one of 15 educator teams to participate in the STEM Educators Academy. Two group leaders and our STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) instructor attended the Academy to learn about and construct hands-on STEM-related activities, which don't get much emphasis in schools today but play an important role in helping youth understand complex academic concepts.



Teens Meet the Mayor and Make Policy

The Child Center of NY is partnering with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development and the Youth Development Institute on a new initiative called the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council. The MYLC enables teens to work on a specific policy and present a plan to the mayor.

Together with YDI, The Child Center is providing MYLC members with training in such areas as public speaking, policymaking, research, problem-solving, and networking and a mini-grant of up to \$10,000 from DYCD to promote their cause.



January was a busy month for MYLC members. They attended the first "Super Saturday," where the discussion focused on such issues as racism, gun violence, and underfunded schools. A few days before, they were sworn in at City Hall.

Just as we're beginning to teach STEM the right way with hands-on experimenting, the MYLC is teaching government and citizenship through hands-on policymaking. "The teens are really gearing up and ready to make an impact in their community," says Youth Development Coordinator Rachelle Valbrun.

The program has been going so well that SONYC Waterside has now been selected to send three educators to become certified DoS (Dimensions of Success) observers through an initiative led by such organizations as Expanded and PEAR (the Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency) at Harvard University. The goal is to train the educators in STEM best practices.

As part of the effort, Expanded evaluated the Waterside program. The report was delivered with the following note: "Your site had one of the strongest STEM activities that we've seen. Both educators were adept at presenting STEM content while allowing students to do the cognitive work for themselves. Keep up the fantastic work." We couldn't have said it better ourselves!



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Joe, our newest addition to Early Head Start,
with his mom, Maria, and big sister, Lizzy

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