

What does it mean to sponsor a child?

When you sponsor a child you help us support one child at a time...intervening before parental anxiety turns to child abuse...mentoring a fatherless teenager at one of our after school programs...providing therapy for a child suffering from neglect and depression...making room for an impoverished toddler at our Head Start.

Every child deserves a childhood. But for some children the cumulative risk factors are too great to overcome without outside intervention. The Child Center of NY supports children and families when and where they need it most, at 70 sites, in 30 languages and with hundreds of programs.

Sometimes we help children stay on track—providing homework help, childcare, a safe place to go after school and peer education to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Other times, we provide a lifeline to children

facing grave problems such as being raised by drug addicted parents, experiencing depression and thoughts of suicide or being the victim of neglect or domestic violence.

The stories on these pages provide just a small glimpse of the work we do. We hope you will be inspired and motivated by these stories and help us do this transformative work.



*Sandra Hagan,
Executive Director*

Warm wishes for the holiday season,

A handwritten signature of Sandra Hagan in dark ink, written in a cursive style.

\$4 million is the aggregate shortfall between government funding and program needs. With a donation of \$250 you can help close the gap for one single child in one single program. We welcome donations of any size to bring us closer to this goal.

In NYC

526,083
children live in poverty

41% of single mothers have income below the poverty level

28% of children have an unmet need for out of school services

257 children are reported abused or neglected every day

39.3%

of high school seniors will not graduate or have a diploma

11.8% of high school students seriously consider suicide each year

HOME VISITING

Home visitors help prevent psychiatric hospitalization for seriously disturbed children and teens, with 24/7 crisis intervention, referrals, and communication and coping skills education that keep children on track and families together.

By the time they were less than one year old, William and Catherine had lived in seven foster homes. Catherine was unable to sit up by herself and could not turn herself while she slept, and William would spit and bite when he was touched. Cynthia Lodge became their eighth foster mother. A woman, then in her mid-fifties who had already raised five of her own biological children, she believes that love can conquer all.



Catherine, Cynthia and William Lodge

But she was not prepared for the depth of the troubles that these children, whom she soon discovered had been born to two substance-abusing parents, would experience. After three years, Mrs. Lodge adopted the two children but, as they grew into toddlers, the problems became overwhelming. When he was six, William was admitted for the first time to a local inpatient psychiatric hospital, after turning on the stove in the middle of the night because voices in his head told him to do so.

Mrs. Lodge was referred to The Child Center after this first hospital admission.

The Home Visiting program at The Child Center is very special because workers actually visit homes during families' most intimate and vulnerable moments. It is at times like these that problems and dysfunction become most apparent.

For the last three years, home visitor Valeriana Brown has visited the Lodge family once a week. She helped enroll William in a special needs school where he has learned new coping skills to deal with teachers and peers, and referred both chil-

dren for therapy at YAI, which works exclusively with children who have developmental disabilities.

Valeriana also works with the children to modify their behavior, showing them how to express feelings and thoughts without aggression. This was especially important for William who had been the butt of fights in school and would act out regularly--cursing the teachers and turning over benches. Valeriana has become an intermediary for the family, visiting the school and ironing out the seemingly endless issues which arise. She has referred Catherine, who at age 10 is only able to get to K in her ABC's, to a special needs school and regularly works one-on-one with her to reinforce basic skills.

For Mrs. Lodge, case manager Valeriana is "there when I need someone to talk with. When I feel down, she helps me get up and get the children to therapy and the doctor. She helps them with homework and takes them to the park to play," providing much needed respite.

CHILD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Mike Fleury is one of the lucky kids. He grew up in a safe, caring home. But his mother who worked as a nurse and his father who was a cargo agent were not always home right after school. Mike was only ten when he saw what some other kids were up to during this time—hanging out on the streets, joining gangs, going nowhere.

The Child Center's Beacon Program at MS 226 in his neighborhood of South Ozone Park offered Mike a community home, a sense of direction and a chance to be mentored by older youth who became his role models. It was the leg up he was looking for.

Mike grew up at The Child Center. Now nine years later, at age 19, he has become a role model for kids like himself and others at risk. A full-time sophomore at Baruch College, Mike works 20 hours a week refereeing basketball games, doing database entry, community outreach and sports planning.

"We consider our high school and college-age interns as equal participants in the Beacon program," says Associate Director of Youth Development Jackie Cohen. "For many of them, this is their first job and when they see someone like Mike they strive even harder to contribute at work and learn skills that will serve them well in future work environments."



Mike Fleury

"My philosophy is to stay patient with kids because you never know what's going on in their lives," says Mike. "Just by giving off positive energy and keeping them busy and off the streets you may be saving the life of someone on the verge of going down the wrong road in life. At The Child Center's Beacon programs, kids learn how to work as part of a team and interact in healthy ways."

The Child Center's five Beacon Programs are some of its 15 after school sites which, together, provide hundreds of options for kids looking for enrichment, support, and a safe place to be after school. The Child Center's Child and Youth Development program also includes dozens of activities for pre-schoolers.

Beacons are comprehensive. They target middle school students but offer programming to community residents of all ages, and are open in the evening and on Saturdays. Beacons serve youth with many different needs. For some it is a refuge—a safe place away from troubled homes. For others it is a place where they can build on their strengths, and be mentored by adult and college-age role models.

The Child Center recently opened two new Beacons in areas of great need: PS/MS 43 in Far Rockaway and in the Latimer Gardens NYCHA Housing Project in Flushing. Three others have been serving the community for up to a decade: Parsons Educational Complex, MS 72 and MS 226. The programs are partnerships between public schools, the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development and The Child Center.

Counseling for Children and Families

A year ago, the Sanchez family, was a “broken entity,” in the words of father and husband Fernando. They had just moved to a small town in Georgia with the hopes of fulfilling a longtime dream of Fernando’s: building a small restaurant of his own. The move, however, was not a happy one for their once “sunny” daughter Sheila.

“Suddenly she just stopped” says her mother, also named Sheila. “She walked with her face down, she cried all the time; she didn’t talk to us.” Husband and wife argued all the time and talked about divorce. Many of their marital issues stemmed from the high costs of paying two mortgages—one in Florida and one in Georgia (where the family had bought and converted an old building for their restaurant)—and the cultural isolation the move caused the entire family, particularly their daughter.

As a child of Dominican background, Sheila looked different from the other youngsters in her new suburban neighborhood. She was bullied relentlessly; she lost interest in her passions of painting and singing. She just retreated.

After the restaurant failed, the Sanchez family came to New York to reunite with relatives and find a new, more culturally diverse life. But the mortgage problems remained and financial issues escalated since they were also paying rent in New York. Young Sheila was placed in a big public school and felt lost and friendless. Mother, father, son and daughter were all consumed by their own



Drawing by Sheila Sanchez was created as part of her therapeutic treatment

When childhood depression and family dysfunction are left untreated, families fall apart, children become despondent and are at risk of becoming chronically depressed as adults.

For low-income families, cost makes therapy options limited or nonexistent. If the family is also newly immigrated, the possibility of therapeutic help may be further limited by cultural and language barriers, and a sense of mistrust toward strangers outside their community.

The Child Center’s therapists, who collectively speak over 30 languages, improve child and parent coping skills effectively, in part, because they bring their life knowledge of families’ cultures to the work.

the guidance so that my husband and I could really hear each other. We needed to solve our problems so we could help our daughter.”

Through her own individual therapy, 10-year-old Sheila was taught techniques to relax, and think better of herself, to get positive reinforcement from her parents and to gain confidence through pursuing her interests in art and cooking with her father. She is now enrolled in a Catholic school with smaller class sizes and is better able to find new friends and feel secure and settled.

As young Sheila came out of her shell, it was as though she had landed in her own version of Disneyland, reports her mother—with all the art museums throughout the city she visited in her spare time.

“I feel like another person,” says Fernando, brimming with words to express his transformation. “We had lost a lot of the love and respect we had established as a family largely because of the strain we experienced following my dream of owning a restaurant. It no longer has to be about me, it is about my family.”

“I cannot express how grateful I am to The Child Center to have my family back; not everyone can say that.”

Fernando Sanchez



Daughter Sheila, mother Sheila, father Fernando and son Raoul in front of Sheila’s original mural at The Child Center

worries, and family communication came to a halt.

Then came the referral for therapy at The Child Center of NY. “It was like our therapist, Ana, put us in front of a mirror and we became aware of what we were doing wrong,” says mom Sheila. “She never imposed, she talked to us like we were friends. Ana gave us

The Child Center of NY serves more than 15,000 at-risk children annually from birth through early adulthood.

Our programs empower children to make good decisions... help parents build skills to become better providers and nurturers...

...and create connections to the mainstream through Family Intervention, Child and Youth Development, Counseling and Home Visiting to prevent psychiatric hospitalization.

Family Intervention

Families that are severely dysfunctional and destructive require a special kind of intervention. The Child Center's Family Intervention program protects children and adolescents from the risks of abuse and neglect present in these environments. This transformative program educates parents to reduce the risk of child abuse and/or domestic violence and prevents the need to protect the children through foster care placement. It provides intensive home and office-based intervention to address family problems such as substance abuse, family dysfunction and inadequate coping skills in children.

At 49, Alicia has been a crack cocaine addict and alcoholic for more than half her life. She has been in treatment six times. Despite this, her sense of humor is palpable and she maintains a strong sense of hope that she can now finally turn her life around.

After a 28-day stay in a residential program, which she completed last spring, Alicia and her daughter were referred to The Child Center's Jamaica Family Center. Alicia now attends a five-day-a-week, one-year substance abuse treatment program, and she and her daughter, Anjalía, are enrolled in a child abuse prevention program for families with substance abuse issues.

When Alicia was four, her mother died, and she was passed around from her dad to maternal grandmother to two maternal aunts, and then, at age nine, back to dad and his new wife, who physically abused her—beating and burning her. She was convinced it was all her fault until she found refuge with her mother's eldest sibling, a school principal, who believed in her and raised her to adulthood. But Alicia never addressed the emotional impact of her early life of loss and abuse.

Alicia graduated from high school and community college and began a successful career as a Medicaid expert at a local hospital, where she worked for 17 years. Although she continued to work, she began using drugs, which gradually took over her life.

Both Alicia and her daughter have found comprehensive treatment at The Child Center. Mom's treatment program includes group therapy for her substance abuse, parenting skills and anger management training, relapse prevention and individual therapy to address her loss and pain. She attends a unique program called "A Deeper Look," a trauma group that "peels away the onion skin," as Alicia describes it. "Every time you go you discover a little bit more about the things that started you in your addiction," she says.

Through the group, Alicia learned that her daughter also has experienced trauma because she grew up with an addicted mom. "I was afflicting emotional pain, and I understand that now. I am working on loving myself; if I don't, I project that to my daughter. All those years, I took the blame that it was my fault, but I understand now that I didn't cause that woman to beat and burn me."

Anjalía is in a group called Children of Alcoholics, for teens whose parents are substance abusers. She is also enrolled in a program to help her get her GED at the Queens Library, a referral arranged by her Child Center social worker. The family's social worker also makes home visits, where she monitors mom's ability to take care of her daughter, helps the two work on their relationship, and makes referrals

Next step: Alicia, who has always wanted to be a comedian, performed in a local showcase in November and will be appearing in a talent show at a Masonic Lodge in March.

"Because of The Child Center my relationship with my family is more trusting. As an addict, you lie, you manipulate. That's not happening anymore. I talk about my addiction honestly and I work on it everyday."

—Alicia Bunken

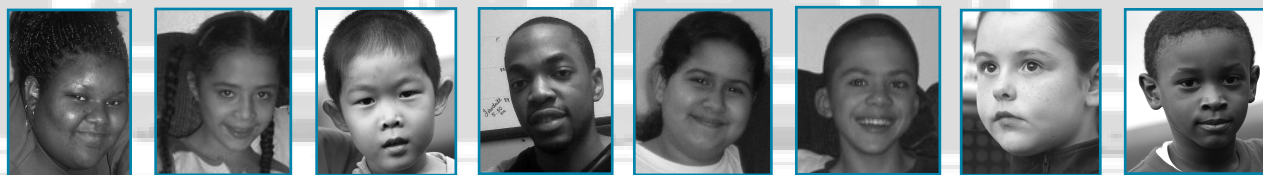


Anjalía and Alicia Bunken

for other problems such as Anjalía's obesity.

The challenges for this mother and daughter are steep, but Alicia believes that "The Child Center offers a safe haven...a way to learn about yourself and what started you in your addiction."

Sponsor a Child Today...



the child center of ny
NURTURING CHILDREN. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES.

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SAVE THE DATE

**JOIN US ON
Saturday, March 20th
for our
Annual Dinner Gala
at Terrace on the Park
in Flushing Meadow Park.**

**For more information,
please call
Susan Gleason
at 718-651-7770 X204.**

Details to follow.