

Reversing Troublesome Trends

By Deep Ghosh, Senior Vice President
External Affairs and Community Engagement

The Child Center of NY is on a path of self-assessment, taking a serious look at our customers, where and how many there are, how we are doing in delivering services, and most important: Are we making a measurable impact?

These questions are at the root of Results-Based Accountability and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Fellowship, which I received in February 2016. The Fellowship is the Foundation's signature investment toward addressing the systems impacting America's poor children and families. Fellows must make a major contribution to the broader population within 16 months. I completed my Fellowship in July.



Partners for District 27. Clockwise from back left: Deep Ghosh; Community Affairs PO Kevin Campbell; Commanding Officer of the 101st Precinct in Far Rockaway, Vincent Tavalaro; and Brandon Jeffries.

I concentrated on NYC District 27, encompassing South Queens and Far Rockaway. School District 27 had one of the city's lowest graduation rates. In seeking to reverse this trend, I disaggregated the data — a practice the Fellowship encourages — by ethnicity. A disparate social system was identified for children of color: The graduation rate for black students in 2015 was under 50 percent. To turn this around, we addressed chronic absence and aligned ourselves with both the Community School movement and like-minded leaders and organizations, including Brandon Jeffries at the Queens Library, UFT Community School Director at Far Rockaway High

School Rasahn Staley, and NYC Council Member Donovan Richards. I employed a leadership style that challenged internal and external resources to move toward greater alignment and common focus.

We worked intensely at August Martin High School, where the graduation rate was 24 percent in 2015 and historical patterns of segregation, economic disparity, and racial inequity persisted. We engaged students on two levels, surrounding them with incentives and changing school culture with social-emotional learning opportunities. Staff conducted home visits, got to know students and families, and linked them to resources like success mentors and counseling. I am pleased to report that the graduation rate increased from 24 percent to 64 percent in 2017. This figure represents individual young people who now have a better shot at a bright future, and it reflects the truth that these students have had the potential all along; they just need the support to overcome obstacles personal and systemic. It also represents the tremendous work of our youth development and school-based mental health teams. Please visit our website for updates.



**THE CHILD
CENTER OF NY**

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

On the Record:

In our HALE I program to reduce the risk of abuse and out-of-home placement for families involved in the child welfare or criminal justice system:

91%

of youth were
violation-free since
treatment began

98%

remained in the home

100%

were enrolled in an
educational/vocational
school setting or working

From the Chief Executive Officer

If someone had told me at this time last year that in 2017, The Child Center would take on four new Beacon and Cornerstone community centers and begin providing primary health services for clients across our programs, with everything we already had on our plates, I would have told them ... I hope you're right.

I am proud of so many things about The Child Center, but chief among them is the dedication of our staff and our commitment to offer services in the toughest, most underserved neighborhoods — places where crime is high, gang activity is widespread, opportunity is lacking, and services to address those issues are almost nowhere to be found. There is just no substitute for serving the underserved in their own communities, discovering their strengths and building on them. There's the practical aspect: It's tempting to say that when one community center closes, families who depended on its afterschool program can send their kids to the center a few blocks away — but that may require children to go where they are not welcome or safe. At The Child Center, we understand these realities, not only because we make a point to do so, but also because we prioritize hiring people from the neighborhood and hearing what members of the community have to say.

Of course, it isn't just the practical aspect: It's also important to serve the underserved in their own communities because it builds respect, and shows the people living there that they, and their communities, have value. Regardless of all they face, we are met by parents who love their children and want what we all want for our children — a better life defined not by terrifying statistics, but by a future of endless possibilities.

Here's to a 2018 that holds as many busy and wonderful surprises as 2017!

CEO Traci Donnelly with award-winning chef Lidia Bastianich. See our "In the Field" page for details.



Traci Donnelly
Traci Donnelly

Partnership with Northwell Health Provides Missing Piece of Puzzle

November 8 marked a milestone in The Child Center of NY's history: We began providing on-site primary medical care to our clients. Pediatric residents of the prestigious Cohen Children's Medical Center, Northwell Health came to our Corona Head Start program to perform physical exams; vision, hearing, and nutritional screenings; and other services. Residents will visit our programs monthly for a year at no additional cost to the clients we serve.

Since its founding, The Child Center has been committed to the mental health of children and gradually added other services, such as internships and early childhood education.

Adding physical health services to the list is a big deal to our clients. Our families often live below the poverty line, in communities with poor access to high-quality health care. Offering medical services at The Child Center allows clients to get quality care in a place they trust — and alerts them to any issues so they can catch problems early.

Dr. Omolara Uwemedimo, Northwell's Director of GLOhBAL (Global Learning. Optimizing Health. Building Alliances Locally) at Cohen Children's Medical Center immediately clicked with the families, according to Corona Head Start/EarlyLearn Director Lillian Rodriguez-Magliaro: "Parents appreciated how she took the time with their questions. Usually their health care experience is one of rapid care. ... Now imagine that you are a three-year-old and a doctor engages with you in play. They now see a doctor through the lens of care, compassion, and communication."

Residents also worked with children in their classrooms and facilitated an asthma workshop. Such services will be provided in two-week rotations by Northwell residents for a year.

"Rotating through The Child Center has been an amazing experience for our pediatric residents," says Dr. Allison Driansky. "Together, Northwell and The Child Center of NY are training our future physicians to be advocates and true community partners."



Noteworthy

- Congratulations to **Latoya Mann**, the first recipient of The Child Center's new **Assembly Member Vivian E. Cook Scholarship**. The scholarship provides a student of color graduating from a public high school in Southeast Queens with \$1,500 to pay for books, a computer, or other educational needs. Visit The Child Center's website to read the full interview with this promising college student — and what the scholarship means to young people like her.
- Thank you to the **New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services** for awarding The Child Center a grant of more than \$300,000 to operate an **Alternatives to Incarceration Program**, which aims to reduce recidivism for clients ages 18–35 through targeted interventions and evidenced-based practices.
- Our **Health Home Program**, which began in December 2016, is now serving 200 children and families. The program coordinates health care and other services for low-income children with multiple chronic conditions. Our staff manages communication among providers and makes certain children's needs are met in the first place — whether that means connecting them to therapy or ensuring the family's home has heat in the winter.

Our supporters play a crucial role in advancing The Child Center mission to strengthen children and families to build healthy, successful lives.

Please contact Gaby Infante in our Development Office at fundraising@childcenterny.org or 718-651-7770 ext. 6890 to learn how you can:

- become a board member, like Jennifer Milacci.
- contribute to the Vivian E. Cook Scholarship Fund to support students like Latoya Mann.
- fund our South Jamaica garden (see Field Notes).
- join a committee, sponsor a social event, or introduce us to other people who are passionate about helping children.
- bring your own idea to fruition for 1–30,000 young people who look to The Child Center to help them turn a rough start into a bright path. Your impact on these kids will literally last a lifetime.

Supporter Spotlight: Jennifer Milacci

Broadening Our Fundraising Reach

Ten years ago, Jennifer Milacci, then expecting her second child, was looking for volunteer opportunities that championed issues close to her heart. "I was drawn to organizations which help children and families," Milacci recalls, and that's when The Robin Hood Foundation matched her with The Child Center of NY, where she quickly became a board member.

Milacci's acuity in sales and marketing — she operates in such a role for a hedge fund — has come in handy as central player on The Child Center's Gala Committee, an event during which, Milacci explains, "We often feature our young beneficiaries. ... Their energy and success stories are inspirational and heartwarming."

Such individual successes are what drive Milacci. "We have thousands of children and families in NYC who don't know about or have access to basic resources so many of us take for granted," she says. "Providing early preschool education so parents can work for a decent wage or offering afterschool programs to keep adolescents off the streets is a very fulfilling opportunity."

Milacci has been integral to devising new events to reach an ever-increasing set of donors, including a dodgeball tournament a few years ago which she recalls fondly. Next up: a shopping event this month at Milacci's apartment, from which a portion of the proceeds will go to The Child Center.

Milacci's dedication to our clients is evident. "A single success story from one of our programs fills me with pride and keeps me engaged and wanting to do more," she says, "whether by spending my time or money, both of which help make a difference."





Staff Spotlight: New VP Joins Senior Administrative Team

Dr. Anderson Sungmin Yoon has been with The Child Center of NY for over 14 years as a program manager and behavioral health specialist, serving in a variety of capacities — to include expanding the Asian Outreach Program, training and supervising all interns, and developing evidence-based group therapy models. This summer, Dr. Yoon joined the senior management team and is now serving as the Vice President of Integrated and Value-Based Care. His latest project — creating a Family Assessment tool to measure outcomes and connect clients with the full range of services available to them — has been a labor of love. “I’m proud of this work — we are really helping people,” he says.

In January, Dr. Yoon was accepted into Harvard Medical School’s Global Clinical Scholars Research Training Program. See our website to learn how this will benefit his work at The Child Center.

Case in Point: A 4-Year-Old Finds Security After Trauma



It used to be a common belief that babies and toddlers could not remember trauma. Research now shows it was wishful thinking. As we reported in our last newsletter, The Child Center is the Queens provider in NYC’s Early Childhood Mental Health Network. Rosalie and Madison’s story illustrates how we help.

Madison had a rough start in life. Her mother struggled with addiction and mental illness and would often leave her daughter alone in her crib, sometimes for hours, while she went out to buy drugs.

This had a lasting effect on Madison. By age 4, she was living with her grandmother, Rosalie, in a more stable environment. Though her living conditions had improved, problems persisted, manifesting in the form of attachment disorder, boundary issues, severe separation anxiety, and an insatiable need for affection — even from people she had just met. With a referral to The Child Center’s Early Childhood Mental Health program, Rosalie and Madison began therapy with Michele Neuhaus, ECMH Director. Neuhaus worked with the family using the evidence-based Child-Parent Psychotherapy model, which aims to restore security and trust between caregiver and child.

“We worked to deal with fear on both ends,” Neuhaus explains. “Madison feared losing a mommy again; and Rosalie feared being a mommy again.”

With Madison, therapy focused on working, through play, on the metaphor of “losing Mommy.” “Because Madison got extremely upset whenever her grandmother left, even if just to go to the grocery store, we did a lot of role playing to help Madison learn how to cope with people leaving,” Neuhaus says.

Madison and “Dr. Michele” also talked about Madison’s feelings so she would have language to express them; this allowed Madison to identify her emotions and deal with them appropriately. They also explored Madison’s feeling about her mother.

“We discussed, ‘what is mental illness?’ What does it look like?” says Neuhaus. “This helped Madison understand what happened — and that it wasn’t Madison’s fault.”

Therapy was equally helpful for Rosalie. “They took the hardest thing for me and made it simple: how to be a parent again,” Rosalie explains.

Now in her 60s, Rosalie had stopped cooking in recent years and reported “flying off the handle” more easily. Neuhaus helped her break down the daunting tasks of parenting into practical strategies, such as beginning to cook dinner three times a week. She also helped Rosalie manage her emotions — as Rosalie says, helping her “learn patience all over again.”

Another issue was that Rosalie felt like she’d failed with her daughter (Madison’s mother) and worried about how she would raise Madison. This manifested in Rosalie being overprotective with Madison, which fueled Madison’s already intense separation anxiety. Neuhaus worked with Rosalie to recognize when it was time to step in, and when to step back.

After five months of therapy, both Madison and Rosalie are feeling significantly more secure in their relationship and with themselves. This has had an immediate positive effect (for example, Madison no longer puts too much trust and affection in people she doesn’t know well, and she puts herself in a “time-out” when she needs to calm down). Equally important is that this will likely benefit Madison into adolescence and adulthood: “Unaddressed boundary and attachment issues leave children vulnerable to abuse later on,” Neuhaus says. “They believe they have to please the person they’re with at any cost, because the fear of losing another person is too great.”

But Rosalie is confident that Madison’s experience with Dr. Michele will help her grow into a secure young woman with a strong sense of self-worth: “That is one ‘doctor’ my granddaughter will never forget.”

In the Field: Good Things Are Growing

Head Start Students Get Visit from Famous Chef

Preschoolers at our Ficalora Family Foundation Head Start Center have been learning about gardening, so they were ecstatic when an internationally renowned chef dropped by. Lidia Bastianich — award-winning television host of *Lidia's Kitchen*, proud Queens resident, and children's book author — read from her children's book series, "Nonna, Tell Me a Story," which depicts Nonna Lidia and her grandchildren in gardening and cooking adventures. The children were enthralled as they listened to an author read her own stories, and they were fascinated by her demonstrations using fresh herbs. She taught everyone the words for all the herbs, let the children smell and taste them, and gave the Center's cook a suggestion of what to do with the leftover herbs (make pesto!) and gave her a recipe. "As a grandmother and children's book author, as well as a promoter of gardening and healthy eating, I loved seeing firsthand what The Child Center of NY has been doing for 65 years," Bastianich told us. "If I can contribute to that work in any positive way, it is a good day!"



A Garden Grows in South Jamaica



Many clients of our Jamaica Family Center and South Jamaica Clinic reside in apartments or shelters, giving them little opportunity to experience gardening. So when families began admiring the colorful flower boxes of social worker Diane Menzel, fellow social worker Aracelis Cabrera raised funds to buy seeds for eggplants, tomatoes, cucumbers, and flowers and got families involved in the caretaking. "Families would come early in the morning or late in the afternoon with their children to water the plants," says Cabrera.

"Children, especially, took on a nurturing role," adds Menzel. "It has been therapeutic for them in many ways." While the last vegetables were picked in September (making for a delicious cucumber salad!), families and staff alike are looking forward to planting again this spring. "Providing our clients and their young kids the chance to care for a garden in our clinic and see the process of life is just amazing," says Cabrera. "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."

Three New Community Centers Open

The Child Center became the new provider for three more Beacon and Cornerstone programs this fall: Ocean Bay and Hammel Houses Cornerstone Community Centers in Far Rockaway and Roosevelt Island Beacon in Manhattan. These programs of the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development have long been a vital part of underserved areas of NYC, put in place to offer afterschool enrichment, adult programs, and a safe and fun place for the community to come together. The Child Center is now the sole Cornerstone provider in Far Rockaway. We are once again grateful for the support and trust of DYCD, New York City Housing Authority, and especially the people of Far Rockaway and Roosevelt Island. The children of these communities are particularly happy: "I love coming to Beacon because my counselors are fun and they care about me," says first-grader Nylah. No garden there yet, but stay tuned!

Fourth-grader Emily draws what she loves about her Beacon center.





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New York Giants' Geno Smith hosted Leesel, a client of our Young Adult Borough Center program, at a game at MetLife Stadium for #SundayHeroes.



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