

Happy 20th Anniversary, YD!

Twenty-one years ago, when The Child Center of NY was the Queens Child Guidance Center and focused solely on mental health counseling, QCGC Clinical Social Worker Deepmalya Ghosh presented at a conference on childhood trauma. Someone mentioned Beacon centers.

"I didn't know what they were talking about," Ghosh, now VP of External Affairs and Community Engagement, recalls. "But I learned Beacons are all-purpose centers open to the community for recreation, arts, afterschool — all different things — for all ages. And I thought, I hope we get one."



The original members of our Teen Impact Prevention Program

The hope came true, and on December 28, 1998, with the expertise and persistence of Executive Director Sandra Hagan, QCGC opened Parsons Beacon in Flushing with nine participants and donated supplies and games — and our Youth Development division was born.

At The Child Center, many people equate YD with afterschool, but these programs offer so much more than supervision: connection to the school day, relatable role models, opportunities for youth to explore their strengths, and character building. True to our roots, mental health is an integral component. In fact, our background in mental health was a main reason we were chosen for that original Beacon, and a couple of years later, we received a grant from the NYC mental health department to engage the most at-risk youth. "I thought we should worry about the kids hanging out *outside* the center — including those involved in gang activity," Ghosh explains. "We made our Beacons a place they wanted to be and made clear they couldn't come in with signs of being in a gang. It happened organically." Before long, our success made us a go-to agency, and we acquired additional Beacons and other afterschool programs.

By 2007, partly to reflect our evolution into a multiservice organization with a thriving YD division, the QCGC became The Child Center of NY. We branched out to provide internships, serve as lead CBO (community-based organization) for alternate high schools, and conduct "street outreach" on such topics as HIV prevention. Under the visionary leadership of current CEO Traci Donnelly, we've expanded even more into NYC community schools and some of the city's most under-resourced neighborhoods. Today, YD serves 10,000 young people annually — and counting!



**THE CHILD
CENTER OF NY**

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

On the Record:

In our

Home-Based

Crisis Intervention

program for youth at
serious risk of psychiatric
hospitalization,

96.15%

were able to be main-
tained in the community
without the need of
hospitalization or a
higher level of care.

From the Chief Executive Officer

Virginia Woolf famously said, “One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.” If she only knew how many “not wells” exist for our clients. She was right on the money with the “dined well” — decades of research confirm that children can’t learn well in school without proper nutrition. But children also can’t “think well” if they are not seeing well and can’t afford eyeglasses, or if they aren’t living well because their neighborhoods are plagued by violence. These factors affect not just kids’ academics, but also their overall health.

That’s why today we have a phrase for these “not wells”: social determinants of health. The Child Center is piloting a program called the Health Improvement Project to address them. You can learn more about it in the article below, but a vital component is breaking down the silos that separate the interrelated parts of children’s well-being so we can offer truly integrated care. We don’t just look at presenting problems, but rather at the whole picture and root causes. That’s at the heart of what we mean by social determinants of health, and it’s at the heart of The Child Center’s mission.

I’m grateful that we can count the Altman Foundation among the incredible partners we’ve had in these efforts. A recent grant from the Foundation is allowing us to grow the Health Improvement Project, and it stands as a shining example of the instrumental role foundations like Altman play in our ability to take bold, innovative approaches to entrenched problems — so that we can discover what actually works and then expand and replicate those solutions.

We are thankful to all our supporters who help us ensure that children of any socioeconomic background are “well enough” to work toward their dreams and reach their full potential.




Traci Donnelly



Introducing: The Health Improvement Project

The Child Center of NY took a big step toward providing integrated care when we partnered with Northwell Health in 2017. Today, we’re taking things to a new level, thanks to a generous award from the Altman Foundation.

The award is funding our Health Improvement Project, which involves two interrelated components: hosting resident doctors from Northwell Health; and rolling out a new screening tool developed by The Child Center and Northwell, with support from New York Community Trust. Called the Health and Well-being Questionnaire (CC-HWQ), it identifies clients’ physical and/or behavioral health challenges, as well as socio-economic factors impacting their health — such as unsafe housing conditions — known as “social determinants of health.” On-site Northwell resident doctors provide primary health services and use the screening tool to guide conversations and workshops. A Resource Navigator, funded by the grant, connects families to other services that the questionnaire reveals they might need. The project is at seven sites, with the goal to expand.

“When a family comes to us through one portal — say, a Head Start program — we can assess their needs and connect them to appropriate providers — to the point where they no longer require our services,” says Robert Cizma, our VP of Health Homes and Integrated Care. “Think how many services any family needs. You have medical issues, educational issues. ... To find out what’s going on, you’ve got to ask the questions. Ask, ‘Where are you living?’ and you might discover the family is living in a car.”

“Partnership between health systems and community-based organizations can be critical to improving health and quality of life for low-income New Yorkers,” says Rachael Pine, Altman Foundation Senior Program Officer. “We are pleased to support this collaboration between community social services and medical residency training. We expect it will strengthen and broaden the services The Child Center provides its clients, while deepening sensitivity in the next generation of Northwell-trained physicians to the lives of vulnerable individuals and the ‘social determinants of health’ they confront on a daily basis.”

Noteworthy

- We are pleased to announce a new home visiting program, **Children and Family Treatment and Support Services** (CFTSS), which provides clients facing some of the toughest mental health challenges with in-home therapeutic services, psychiatric support and treatment, and skill-building services, as well as aid with self-advocacy. Stay tuned for more details!
- Thank you to the **Early Childhood Partners NYC** and the national **Parent-Child Home Program** (PCHP) for their generous grant to expand our South Jamaica and Astoria PCHP programs to include a new model of working with family child care providers. We received \$48,000 to work with eight providers, allowing us to reach approximately 50 additional toddlers from low-income families.
- 100% of our **COMPASS afterschool program evaluations** for elementary school students exceeded standards set by the **NYC Department of Youth and Community Development**. Congratulations to the extraordinary staff and students who contribute every day to the programs' success.

Children's Holiday Party Brings Cheer

The holidays can be a stressful time for our families struggling to make ends meet, so every year, we host a party for them. This year's event was at the Sheraton Flushing, and about 200 kids and their families attended. Staff gave gifts to the children, and guests enjoyed a DJ and dancing, photos with Mr. Met and Santa, crafts, and a balloon artist. The biggest hit: a portrait artist from Drawn Together NYC painted watercolor sketches of the kids.

A huge thanks to Rite Aid Foundation: KidCents, First Eagle Management Foundation, Sunshine Farm Trust, New York Community Bank Foundation, The Ficalora Family Foundation, Richmond County Savings Foundation, and Ridgewood Savings Bank for helping to sponsor this special event. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for next year's party, contact Gaby Infante at fundraising@childcenterny.org.



Supporter Spotlight: Board Vice President Adam Schwartz Moving the Needle on What Matters in Social Services

"It is a calling of sorts ... a calling to help," says Adam Schwartz, Managing Director with First Manhattan Bank, and he walks us through the network of teachers and social workers in his family tree. Having been introduced to The Child Center more than six years ago by Board President Dick Jay, Adam's longevity with the organization is of great benefit, as he's served as a representative at site visits with funders and at meetings with high-level partners.

"I have to give myself some credit for helping to bring Traci [Donnelly, CEO] on board as COO five years ago," he states. "That was for me when the pendulum really shifted, the agency M.O. changed, and we started hiring more of the best senior talent to support her."

A member of the board's development committee, Adam takes his giving philosophy home with him; his three children — ages 2 to 8 — all know the importance of social activism and of being generous with those less fortunate. He proudly recounts that his kids participated in donating toys over the holidays to our Escalera Head Start program in Manhattan.

"Adam's the best kind of board member, because he really digs in, knows our programs, and is motivated solely by the clients," says Donnelly. "He always wants to understand better and do more. That's who we want in our Child Center family."



The Child Center of NY is a 65-year-old social impact agency that helps children from under-resourced communities to compete and succeed. To make a donation, visit www.childcenterny.org or call 718-651-7770 ext. 6890.



Staff Spotlight: Julia Floyd-Ventura

Senior Program Director, Behavioral Health

"Life in full circle" is how Julia Floyd-Ventura describes her journey through addiction to her new position managing The Child Center's substance abuse programs at our Stuart and South Jamaica Clinics. Prior to her joining us in October, Floyd-Ventura worked at Phoenix House, beginning as a counselor in 2000 and ultimately serving as VP and Director of Mental Health and Military Services from 2012-2018.

"What drew me to The Child Center was a yearning to pay it forward," Floyd-Ventura explains. "I wanted to let parents of children who suffer from this disease know that they can recover, they can change. ... I want to make sure that we continue to provide quality services that help save many lives in our community." Read her full story at childcenterny.org.

Case in Point: Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for PTSD

Asian Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in New York City, and they often face unique and difficult challenges, including an unfamiliar language and culture; poverty; and conflict between immigrant parents and American-raised children. The Child Center of NY's Asian Outreach Program helps families handle these challenges by providing mental health screening, information, and counseling to low-income Asian American youth and their families. AOP's bilingual and bicultural therapists are steeped in the culture of their clients — enabling them to reach troubled young people before they slip through the cracks.

Meiling is a 17-year-old AOP client who began therapy at our Flushing Clinic after nearly losing her life during what should have been a simple surgery. The flashbacks, excessive worries, and other PTSD symptoms — on top of the stresses of being a recent immigrant — became too much for Meiling, and she was admitted to Elmhurst Hospital Center, which then referred her to our Flushing Clinic for therapy.

"Meiling felt a lot of fear about going back to school and walking in crowds," explains her current therapist, Yezi Qiu. "She experienced depressed mood and worries that impacted her home, school, and social functioning. She didn't feel comfortable sharing her worries with family or friends — and withdrew from both. She became anxious about how other students and teachers would judge her, to the point that she didn't attend school for quite a long time."

Qiu and Meiling's previous therapist, Cathy Wu, provided Meiling the space for her to verbalize her fears and develop coping skills using cognitive behavioral therapy, a form of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and changing destructive patterns of behavior. Using this method, they

helped Meiling identify unhelpful thinking patterns (for example, her tendency to jump to conclusions, disqualify the positive, and overgeneralize) and practiced challenging them. Meiling also identified and utilized her support system — which she discovered included her family. "Cathy helped my father and cousin understand what depression is. Having family's understanding and support gave me more motivation to change," says Meiling. Exploring her hobbies and dreams and reengaging in school and social life was also part of therapy, and Meiling began learning to play guitar, taking an SAT prep course, and spending time with friends.



"It's very hard for people with depression to go back to daily activities," Qiu says. "Meiling challenged herself and made it happen. She even chose to work a part-time summer job at her uncle's restaurant, which required her to interact with all kinds of people. By summer's end, she reported having significantly improved mood."

Of course, the road to recovery wasn't entirely without roadblocks, and Meiling had a relapse in September, triggered by her annual health check-up, after which she withdrew from school for a week and had suicidal thoughts; but she was willing to continue talking with Qiu in therapy. "She talked about her fears and learned more facts about PTSD. We also actively involved her family more," says Qiu. **With support from family, friends, and therapist, Meiling practiced processing and coping with her feelings, and she has been attending school regularly ever since.**

"It was a very dark period; I felt hopeless," Meiling says of her time before therapy. "But Cathy listened and provided a lot of support. She helped me identify my problems and taught me how to break down my goals into baby steps. I survived from my depressed mood because of her help, and then with Yezi, I became more independent and found my true self."

In the Field: Getting Ready

PCHP Reads for the Record

"What good can a splash of color do in a community of gray? As Mira and her neighbors discover, more than you might ever imagine!" So begins *Maybe Something Beautiful: How Art Transformed a Neighborhood*, the children's book written by F. Isabel Campoy and Theresa Howell and illustrated by Rafael Lopez. The book was read across the nation as part of Jumpstart's 13th annual Read for the Record, a yearly event that brings together millions of people in classrooms, libraries, community centers, and homes across the country by encouraging them to read the same book on the same day. The campaign was launched more than a decade ago to highlight the importance of building early literacy and language skills. About 35 young children and caregivers gathered for the event, sponsored jointly by Queens Library and The Child Center's Astoria Parent-Child Home Program.

"The theme of the book really connected with families who live in communities that may be marginalized, but who know that there is strength and beauty in all communities, including theirs," reports Telva Rivera, now Director of our Early Head Start. "We all want to build communities that are resilient and for families to have equitable opportunities for success."



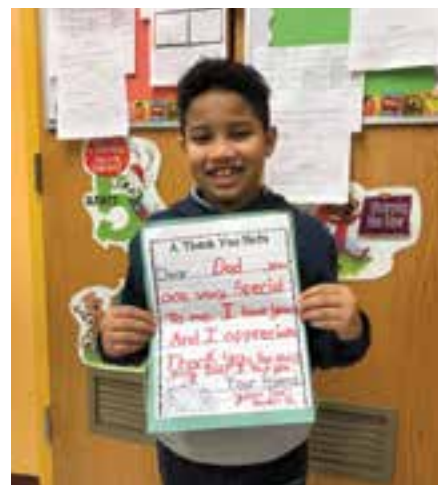
Back-to-School Bookbags



On average, back-to-school items cost families \$85 per child, which is far above what most of our families can afford. That's why The Child Center partners with High Water Women to purchase bookbags filled with school supplies at the beginning of each academic year. One of the programs that received supply-filled backpacks was our Preventive Program at the Trude Weishaupt Center in Flushing. Staff distributed the bookbags at its Back to School event, which got kids ready for school in other ways, too. There were workshops for families on such back-to-school topics as the importance of routines, study times, reading to children, and nutrition, and medical residents were on hand to present on stress and bullying. Staff presenters spoke in Mandarin, Spanish, English, and Hindi. The room was filled with books donated by supporters so that parents and children could take home a book that appealed to them.

Seasons of Service and Gratitude

It began as the Summer of Service at Redfern Cornerstone Community Center, where our middle schoolers won a grant from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development to help others in whatever ways they thought they could make the most difference. Participants pitched in where needed around the center, assisted seniors with the food pantry, and, most notably, joined forces with fellow Far Rockaway-based organization Humans 4 Humans NYS to pack and deliver food and other necessities to homeless New Yorkers near Port Authority. The Summer of Service quickly turned into the Fall and Winter of Service, as programs throughout our Youth Development division remained committed to giving back to their communities. At our afterschool program at P.S. 273, that took the form of a canned food drive, a bake sale to raise money for baby items for the River Fund, and writing letters of gratitude. Our young people are getting ready to begin adulthood as community-minded, grateful citizens, and we couldn't be prouder.





THE CHILD CENTER OF NY

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

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First-grader Leah shows off her science project. Leah is a participant in our afterschool program at P.S. 273 in Richmond Hill. The amazing students of this program also engaged in service projects this winter. Read the full story inside.



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