

## From the Chief Executive Officer

There's just something about walking into one of our community centers, located in what some people might call a "poor" neighborhood, and seeing the children there enriching their lives in so many ways — playing with friends, getting homework help, and participating in activities, from sports to STEM, that help them find their strengths. But there is also something special about seeing the adults, too, enjoying programs to enrich their own lives.

It may sound ironic, but The Child Center's focus is larger than the children. Since children don't grow in isolation, our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and education that exist in targeted neighborhoods where historical patterns of poverty and racial inequity persist. That's why, when we enter a community, we commit not just to the young people, but to building a full continuum of care and programming. This approach ultimately helps and supports children — we would never have it any other way — but through a collaborative, place-based impact strategy.

The Child Center actually has been serving adults for years. For example, our substance abuse clinics are there for people of any age who are struggling with addiction; our Single Stop program counsels adults on health insurance and social services; and, of course, parent education has always been an integral part of our programs.

When I walk into a community center or afterschool program or Head Start classroom, I love knowing that we are helping the children there to grow up in a place that can support them as they strive to reach their full potential. I love knowing that they understand how much we value the community they call home, filling them with pride instead of shame, possibility instead of resignation. And I love knowing that this is why so many of our kids become adults who give back to their communities, making it stronger for generations to come.



CEO Traci Donnelly with supporter Amy Rappaport at our annual gala. See inside for gala details.

  
Traci Donnelly



## THE CHILD CENTER OF NY

Strengthening Family. Building Community.

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## Spring/Summer Newsletter

2019

### YABC Students Visit NYC Recording Studios

When David Dadon, 19, stepped into the legendary Quad Studios in Manhattan this spring, he saw a new side of himself as an artist. "I was in the booth recording, and it was like I was on stage. It was a dream come true."

David is a student at Young Adult Borough Center (YABC) at Flushing High School. YABC is specially designed for over-age and under-credited students who need extra support to reach their goal of earning a high school diploma. Eight musically inclined YABC students were selected to participate in the Quad Studios visit, chaperoned by Assistant Program Director Alain Cedeño and Advocate Counselor Jonathan Aguilar. Students were given a history and a tour and met with Engineer Fermin Fuero, who introduced them to the equipment and software used to record, mix, and master the music that gets produced. Students recorded their own work, had it mixed on the spot, and received a copy to take home.

Field trips are part of Flushing YABC's overall philosophy of offering students insights into possible career paths, as is one of the school's signature programs: the Learn to Work (LTW) program. "LTW assists students in overcoming obstacles that impede their progress toward a high school diploma and leads them toward rewarding employment and educational experiences after graduation," explains YABC Program Director Robin Youmans. "The program offers career and educational exploration, work preparation, and internships." LTW has placed students as interns in such varied fields as finance, retail, and IT.

Simon Sanchez, an LTW participant and member of YABC's Leadership Council who graduated in June, was thrilled to have the opportunity this spring to visit YouTube Space with other members of the Council and chaperones Jonathan Aguilar and Linet Peña, both advocate counselors. The trip included not only a private tour, but also a panel with YouTube Space employees. "It was extremely interactive, and students asked many questions pertaining to employment in the entertainment and tech industries," Youmans says.

Simon left inspired and hopeful. "The YouTube trip allowed us to see a technological world far more advanced than we're accustomed to," Simon told us. "I'm deeply appreciative for the experience."



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### Children's Book Author Inspires Students through History

When Hasan Davis, former Commissioner of Juvenile Justice for Kentucky and Annie E. Casey Foundation Fellow, was in third grade, he discovered his social studies textbook had just one image of an African American. It was a photo of a beaten, elderly man, and the caption read, "American Negro slave."

"When I saw that photo," Davis says, "I thought, 'This is all there is to my story.'"

Davis never wants children of color to feel that way, so he's made it his life's work to get stories of African American contributions into the hands of young people. Most recently, he's written the children's book *The Journey of York: The Unsung Hero of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, about the little-known slave who played a pivotal role in the success of the famed journey. In April, Davis made the story come to life for students of our COMPASS afterschool program at P.S. 223 through a powerful reenactment — followed by equally powerful dialogue with the children. "We discussed how York was able to prove he was

more than a slave ... and each of us can find the courage to be who we want in this world." Davis adds that it's crucial for young people of color to know such stories of the past so they can imagine themselves as contributors in the future. "Young people of color feel disconnected because they don't believe they have ever been a part of making this nation great. ... When you change the way you see yourself ... that changes everything."



Davis as York

Students received their own autographed copy of the book, but they clearly took home much more. "I really liked the event," says fourth-grader Thashon. "It taught me never to let the color of your skin define you."

Special thanks to Assembly Member Vivian Cook and Council Member Adrienne Adams for funding this extraordinary visit.



Barbara and Elaine are active in the Senior Program at our Redfern Cornerstone Community Center in Far Rockaway. They also assist with the food pantry that distributes food to the Redfern community.



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### Inside This Issue

Students visit NYC recording studios

Young Debaters put their passion to work

Kids collaborate with NY Mets Foundation and community partners to build the playground of their dreams

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On the Record:  
Out of **1,103** children  
in our general and intensive Prevention and Support programs,  
**4** children  
were placed in foster care for a  
prevention rate of  
**99.637%**



Fifth-grader Malachi was one of many students who told us he was inspired by the event.

## Noteworthy

- Congratulations to the eighth graders from our **Preparatory Academy for Writers (PAW)** program who were at the SVA Theatre in June for the DYCD Youth Connect Film Festival. Their documentary “What About Us?” was accepted into the finals out of thousands of submissions.
- Thank you to **City National Rochdale** and **Carolyn Rodriguez**, who oversees CNR’s “Reading is The way up” program, for surprising our Woodside Head Start with a \$5,000 gift certificate to purchase books through Barnes & Noble. The gift is worth \$6,000 when coupled with City National Bank’s corporate discount.
- Thank you to the **Phyllis Backer Foundation** for a generous \$300,000/ three-year grant to expand quality services at our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. See our “Supporter Spotlight” for more details.

## The Child Center celebrated service to 35,000 children and families at our Annual Gala on April 8 at The Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers.

More than 400 guests joined us for a night of celebration and common purpose. Acclaimed chef, author, and restaurateur Lidia Bastianich was our host, and dedicated Board Member Jennifer Milacci was our honoree, along with Michael J. Dowling, President and CEO of Northwell Health, and Omolara Thomas Uwemedimo, MD, MPH, Northwell’s Co-Director of Community Health and Social Medicine Initiatives. Musical entertainment was provided by clients from our programs at Preparatory Academy of Writers and Parsons Beacon, and by Broadway stars Jessica Fontana and James Snyder, whose rendition of “Here Comes the Sun” perfectly captured the evening and The Child Center’s work. Speakers included former clients Giselle (now a Child Center board member) and Davier, whose stories you can read on our website, [childcenterny.org](http://childcenterny.org).

Many thanks to our board members and major sponsors, including the Altman Kazickas Foundation, Patricia & Richard Jay, Garrett D’Alessandro & Amy Rappaport, Bob and Trudy Gottesman, Northwell Health, E & L Petracca Assoc., Jennifer Milacci & Marc Scher, Greenberg Traurig, NY Community Bank Foundation, Barbara Deli, M.D. & Neeraj Bewtra, David & Aliana Spungen, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Kimberly & Glen Davis, Flushing Bank, Jackson Lewis, Lidia Mattichio Bastianich Foundation, Loeb & Loeb, NY Mets Foundation, The Nicolosi Law Firm, Pond Family Foundation Trust, and TD Bank. Special thanks to our gala host committee: co-chairs Jessica Fontana and Pat Jay, Katie Brennan, Anna Quintana, Sher Sparano, and Gelvina Rodriguez Stevenson.



## Staff Spotlight: Saran Shields Earns Russell L. Carson Visionary Award

Thanks to generous supporter Russ Carson, The Child Center is able to honor an outstanding employee every year at our annual gala. The award is presented to a staff member who goes above and beyond for clients and epitomizes The Child Center’s innovative approach — qualities that perfectly describe Saran Shields. As Senior Program Director and Community School Director at August Martin High School, Shields and her team helped AMHS’s 24 percent graduation rate shoot to 73 percent in three years. In addition to crafting overall strategy, Shields works directly with students, knowing their names before they walk through her door, making home visits, participating in meetings with scholars and their families, and personally seeing to it that each one has what he or she needs to graduate and begin a bright new chapter. She also manages internship programs at AMHS and our community school programs at P.S. 197 and M.S. 72. Above and beyond, indeed!

## In Their Words: Daniel’s Story

*Daniel is a client of The Child Center’s school-based mental health clinic at Richmond Hill High School and our Health Home Program, which serves Medicaid-eligible youth who suffer from multiple chronic conditions. The program ensures coordination of care so that services are not duplicated or neglected and the client has access to the resources that will help him lead a healthy, fulfilling life.*



I came to The Child Center because my mom made me. I was getting in trouble, fighting, and being wild. I was lost in drugs. I was a real knucklehead. My mom talked to my student counselor at school and informed me I was starting therapy. I thought it was weird, and I was mad she made the decision without me, but she told me I didn’t have a choice.

Therapy was weird at first, but after a while, I started learning what was going on with me. I am from Colombia and grew up there until I was 13. I saw drug dealers, violence, friends getting killed right in front of me. There was a lot of stuff going on in my life at a young age that took its toll on me. I didn’t know it at the time, but it left me with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. I was always thinking someone was

looking for me and felt like I had to watch my back. I needed to learn how to deal with this constant anxiety instead of denying it. My therapist, Juana Subi, taught me to recognize my triggers and taught me coping strategies that help me remember I have nothing to worry about — that no one is after me, and those things are in the past.

As I started to get better and think about practical things, Juana introduced me to another Child Center program: the Health Home Program. I met Esperanza Torres, the program director. She is a great support regarding what I want to be in life. I told her that I have wanted to be a doctor ever since I performed first aid on someone following a car accident and helped save the person’s life. Knowing CPR is a requirement for being a doctor, so Esperanza enrolled me in a CPR class, which I’ve successfully completed. She helped with so much my senior year, like my senior dues, which pay for things like my cap and gown, the senior breakfast, and so many other things that I didn’t know cost money and which my family couldn’t have paid for on our own. She helped me secure employment, which helped financially and with job skills, and to get my driver’s license. She followed up with my school to make sure I was doing well and met with my parents to make sure we were all communicating and that they were able to support me through this crucial year.

I graduated in June and was accepted to four colleges. I’ll be attending Medgar Evers College in the fall. I’m overcome with gratitude for the support that got me here, and I know I wouldn’t have gotten this far without The Child Center of NY.

People think children don’t have problems — that all we have to worry about is school. But that’s not true. Depression and anxiety had a big impact in my life. Some kids have other problems, like ADHD or a learning disability. I’m telling my story so I can be a role model. I want other kids who are having serious problems to know there are people at The Child Center helping kids like us.

## In the Field: Speaking Up

## Operation Parenting: Caregivers Speak Up for Support

A core principle of The Child Center is that providing services to parents is key to children’s development. It also benefits the parents. In June, our Woodside and Flushing Clinics began offering Operation Parenting, an evidence-based, 16-week parenting group that equips parents with skills to cope with their children’s behavioral challenges. The goals are to improve the parent-child relationship, help parents problem-solve, increase their sense of competence and self-efficacy, and reduce abuse and neglect. Through weekly sessions, parents who are experiencing similar challenges can speak freely and understand how the stress of their situation may affect their parenting — and their own lives.

“Instead of suffering in silence, parents can speak up in an environment that offers both peer support and professional guidance,” says Dr. Anderson Sungmin Yoon, our VP of Integrated and Value-Based Care. “The group serves as a safe learning space for immigrant parents who struggle with adjustment issues while promoting improved communication, attachment, and strength-based perspectives in their parenting.” Groups are run by licensed mental health counselors — Diana Michelena in Woodside and Benito Green, Yohana Plester, and Yezi Qiu in Flushing — under the training of Operation Parenting’s developer, Chris Kam, LCSW, and Dr. Yoon.

## Young Debaters Put Their Passion to Work

Like Flushing YABC (see page 1), Aspirations Diploma Plus High School in Brooklyn aims to help over-age and under-credited students earn a high school diploma. Our staff also help them prepare for life after graduation. For members of Aspirations’ new Young Debaters Club, that may include not only college, but also law school. The club, created by attorney Richard Celestin, introduces debate and public speaking to NYC students, particularly students of color, and fosters proficiency in evidence-based research and persuasive writing. Students learn essential lawyering tactics in meetings and then participate in a mock trial competition. The Aspirations competition focused on the controversial practice of stop-and-frisk. Seventeen-year-old Davonne Liaping took home the first-place trophy, but, according to Celestin, all participants rose to the occasion. “The students were able to put together thoughtful and persuasive legal arguments ... and to cite legal cases, as well as use real-life examples, with complete fluidity. While the students demonstrated visible nervousness, the sense of accomplishment at the end of the competition, along with the smiles, made the process all worth it.”



## Far Rockaway Kids See Playground Dreams Come True



In just six hours, more than 150 community volunteers transformed an empty site at the Dix Avenue Apartments into a kid-designed, state-of-the-art playground. “What could possibly be more uplifting to the young people in a community than to have a playground built for them?” asked Deepmalya Ghosh, The Child Center’s SVP of External Affairs and Community Engagement, who helped spearhead the project. “The kids in Far Rockaway are in need of quality places to play, and we’re grateful to the Mets Foundation, KaBOOM!, and the Workforce Housing Group, as well as the NYPD 101st Precinct, Denean Ferguson, and Council Member Donovan Richards, for their support in bringing this home.”

The playground was built off of drawings by community kids, who spoke up about what they wanted the playground to include. When the day arrived, it was a moving experience to see the children’s drawings come to life. Mets brass, including Fred and Jeff Wilpon and Saul Katz, spoke about their contribution and how it connects to Jackie Robinson’s legacy, and Mr. Met was on hand to help build. We are confident that the fun is only just beginning!

## Supporter Spotlight: Samuel Freed

It’s been nearly three decades since Sam Freed first joined the Child Center board, handpicked by its then-president, the late Hank Auffarth, to “help the kids” by contributing pro bono legal work, primarily pertaining to the agency’s commercial real estate, leases, and insurance. Hank and Sam had been dear friends; one day, Hank simply informed Sam that he was going to be a board member.

It turned out to be a serendipitous selection. Nowadays, as one of the most engaged members of the board, Sam serves as Executive Vice President and sits on the Golf; Risk, Compliance, and Legal; and Queens Outreach Committees. It is the implementation of those committees that has kept the board on its collective toes, Sam says. “It’s very exciting to see how we’ve grown from a sort of ‘mom and pop shop’ to something more sophisticated; I’ve learned a lot.” That openness to learn, even with as much experience as Sam has, always yields incredible benefit and partnerships for The Child Center. Recently, his longtime friend — a trustee of the Phyllis Backer Foundation — procured a \$300,000/three-year grant to expand quality services at our Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Woodside and Astoria, enabling some of our youngest clients a better chance at a brighter future.

“Sam’s institutional knowledge has been key in leading the board toward new opportunities, and he sets a hard-to-follow example of engagement,” says Dick Jay, Board President. CEO Traci Donnelly agrees. “We never have to ask Sam to help; he just does — quietly and without expectation.”

The Child Center of NY is a 66-year-old social impact agency that strengthens children and families with skills, opportunities, and emotional support to build healthy, successful lives. To make a donation, visit [childcenterny.org](http://childcenterny.org) or call 718-651-7770, ext. 6890.



Board Member Sam Freed and his wife Philomena at our annual gala