

The Guidance Center of Westchester

TIMES

Summer 2019

A Night to Shine:

Annual Gala Raises Funds, Awareness & Hope

Our annual Gala is the feel-good night of the year, with nearly 250 friends and supporters gathering to celebrate what makes TGCW shine. This year's Gala raised close to \$450,000 to support our programs and participants.

Our deepest appreciation to Sonny Hagendorf, Dawna Michelle Fields, and GEM Management Partners LLC (George, Edward, and Michael Nukho) all of whom graciously and humbly allowed us to put them in the spotlight as our honorees.

CNN's Erica Hill raised the star power as the night's emcee.

Guests enjoyed mixing, mingling, and voracious bidding in our live, silent, and mission auctions.

One of the most compelling portions of the evening came when TGCW participant David R. shared his heart-wrenching tale of addiction, homelessness, and recovery.

Please read David's speech inside this newsletter and be inspired.

We also thank our generous sponsors. For more photos and information, visit TheGuidanceCenter.org.



The Guidance Center of Westchester

256 Washington Street • Mount Vernon, NY 10553 • 914-613-0700 • TheGuidanceCenter.org



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From substance use to stability: One program participant's journey

David R.,
a TGCW program participant, shared his
personal story with Gala attendees. Below are his
own words, as taken from his deeply emotional speech.



I was 15 years old. The year was 1984. I was at baseball practice and I was a catcher in the team. The pitcher of the team was at his mount and all the team members circled around him. I was wondering what was going on; I walked over and was told I wouldn't want to do it "because I was a punk." Wanting to prove that I wasn't a punk, I said I would do it. They showed me, and told me I had to snort it.

This was the beginning of my addiction and of 30 plus years of misery. As time passed, my addiction to drugs got worse. I suffered through five heart attacks and one coma. I was living in the streets for a year and a half and then in a shelter for another year because of my drug abuse. The shelter connected me with The Guidance Center of Westchester, who then got me housing.

After about a year of having stable housing, I once again nearly risked losing it all because of drugs. On Christmas Eve after getting dusted off of PCP, something told me to go to Stop & Shop and put 15 bags of shrimp into the shopping cart and walk out with it. I got caught trying to walk out the store through the entrance door and was arrested. I was so high, I didn't know why I was arrested. The judge told me the charges, and he asked if I was planning a cocktail party.

The good thing about The Guidance Center is that they didn't give up on me. I want to say thank you to The Guidance Center for all the support they have given

me. I want to thank Joey, Camille, and Maureen in the housing program because I don't have to suffer and cry myself to sleep in abandoned buildings anymore.

The judge gave me the choice of two years of probation or one year in jail. I took probation, and I now realized this choice is what saved me because it held me accountable. So, I want to thank Officers Dickerson and Fernandez for their support.

"How long did it take for you to figure that out when I have been using drugs my whole life?"

I remember one day my probation officer kept saying over and over again that I had a drug problem and I told her, "How long did it take for you to figure that out when I have been using drugs my whole life?" That got me a violation of probation and thrown out of the building. This triggered me to use again, and I was headed to the spot to pick up when three-quarters of the way there, something (inside me) told me to call a rehab. When I called, they said they didn't have any beds. I told them, don't worry I'll just kill myself, and they told me to come in immediately. In that moment I knew I needed the help.

I started to see a therapist at The Guidance Center. The first day I met with my therapist Lilia, my intention was to manipulate and have her back me up so I wouldn't be arrested. But after the first few sessions, there was

something different, and it felt safe to feel safe. For the first time in my drug addicted life, I started to be honest. Lilia also gave a lot of good advice that started to stick in my head. At one point, I realized coming to therapy wasn't about avoiding jail but wanting to be healthy. I started to remember the person I was before drugs.

It has been over two years and it hasn't been an easy recovery. I went in-patient (hospitalization) several times, but today I can truthfully say that I have been sober for a year and even more amazing is that I have no desire to go back to that life.

I want to thank the (Gala) sponsors for supporting The Guidance Center in continuing to save lives. Even though we are addicts, everyone deserves a second chance. I never thought

I am standing here today, in front of all these people, to say I am living and ready to offer life a lot more. Thank you, mom. I love you.

that given the hell I gave Joey, Camille, and Maureen in the beginning, that they may be just amazed as me that I am here today giving this speech.

Hey Mom! I have been listening to you say for my whole life how bad you want to see me happy and successful during your lifetime. I am standing here today, in front of all these people, to say I am living and ready to offer life a lot more. Thank you, mom. I love you.

Chocolate makes everything better – even budgets



Chocolate makes everything better, including getting young people to think about and understand the importance of personal budgeting and finances. Using fun-sized candy bars as currency, teams comprised of students from our Center for College & Careers and led by **Neuberger Berman** employees made

“I learned more because of how it was taught.”

budgeting decisions about how much to spend on daily living items such as housing, healthcare, food, transportation, childcare, access to technology and more. While the debates among the team members were often spirited (how important is savings vs. unlimited cell phone plan?), students left with a better understanding of how their

spending decisions impact their long-term financial goals. “It was an education for me as much as for the students,” says Marshall Jaffe, managing director at Neuberger Berman and a TGCW board director. Mr. Jaffe was impressed not only by the number of students who turned out for the workshop but also by their focus on the future and their decision making skills.

Anishka White, a junior at Mount Vernon High School, says the day was fun and informative. “I learned more because of how it was taught.”

Eight Neuberger Berman employees spent a half day working with students from our Center for College & Careers programs. The employees participated as part of their company’s social responsibility initiative called Celebration with Service.



From the CEO



Learn. Work. Thrive.

This newsletter is a celebration. We start with our gratitude to everyone who donated to our annual Gala, the largest source of needed funds to support the work that we do. These funds cover the program components, such as tutoring, counseling, college tours, work readiness classes that are not part of a grant or government reimbursement but which, nonetheless, help our participants to reach their goals and feel special. We celebrate that very successful evening.

This newsletter also celebrates a life transformed and saved. We share a remarkable story of one of our program participants. He is just one example of why your support of The Guidance Center of Westchester makes a difference.

And we celebrate the magic that happens when people take the time to volunteer with our youth.

While it’s true that together, we thrive, we like to double the joy as together, we celebrate. Thank you for being part of our success.

Chief Executive Officer



The Guidance Center
of Westchester

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BACK TO SCHOOL BASH



Save the Date

Thursday, October 24, 2019

6:30 – 9:30 pm

Benefitting

**The Center for College & Careers
in New Rochelle & Mount Vernon**

The Davenport Mansion, New Rochelle

Events@TheGuidanceCenter.org