

The Guidance Center of Westchester

TIMES

Spring
2022



After 17 of the most rewarding and amazing years of my professional life, I have decided this is the right time for me to step away from my role as CEO of The Guidance Center of Westchester (TGCW). This has many implications—one being that this is my last newsletter note. So, I am packing a lot into it.

Fortified by the affiliation with Access: Supports for Living, the sharing of resources, talents, and expertise across TGCW and Access is already strengthening our programs, broadening our impact and enhancing our administration. Through our affiliation we are finding that we can allocate more dollars directly to the work with participants and where they are most needed. The affiliation opens us to so many opportunities. We are truly “better together.”

A good example of this is how we worked collaboratively with Access staff to respond to the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health’s request for proposals for mobile crisis response teams for adults and children experiencing a behavioral health need in the community. TGCW was awarded the mobile teams in Mt. Vernon and New Rochelle, and surrounding areas including Eastchester, Scarsdale, Pelham, Bronxville, and Tuckahoe. Access has been doing this work in other communities for more than three decades, and their knowledge and experience helped us better understand the

specific needs and challenges. We will be able to draw on their experience as the program moves forward. It is wonderful for me to be leaving TGCW with these programs happening, building on the current collaboration we have with the Mount Vernon Police Department. It has always been important to me to create and develop programs that respond to community need, and the mobile teams will do just that.

Since January, I’ve focused my time and energy into ensuring the best possible transition. Ron Colavito is now the president and chief executive officer of both TGCW and Access. Getting to know Ron, I have witnessed how fast his brain works and strategizes, how he deeply understands budgets, and how much he cares about the work that we do. Ron ties every idea he has back to wanting staff to have the tools and support they need to deliver effective and impactful work to participants.

Shawna Aarons-Cooke, LCSWR, CASAC has been leading our behavioral health programs for the past several years, and she will continue to do so as senior vice president of programs. Her thoughtfulness and deep knowledge of our programs, along with her intelligence in supporting staff, meeting participant needs, and working with community partners, continually impressed me.

Life is a revolving series of hellos and farewells; TGCW has its best days ahead, and I can’t wait to see what its future holds. It has

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A Note from Ron Colavito

President and Chief Executive Officer

Over the last 17 years, Amy's efforts have brought new and innovative programs to the communities served by The Guidance Center of

Westchester. Her work, alongside an outstanding team, has helped ensure that people, regardless of their circumstances, can live the healthiest and fullest lives possible. In this newsletter, there is an impressive list of just some of those accomplishments, and we thank her.

All of us at TGCW have a tremendous responsibility to the people we serve, to our community partners, and to the friends and supporters who show faith in our work. Despite the obstacles we face, working in this field is

more than a job. It's what we are built to do. Whether we are helping someone break from addiction, or transitioning someone from homelessness to supported housing, or giving a young person the opportunity to get a high school equivalency diploma and job training, the work we do changes lives.

With the backing of Access and our network of organizations, TGCW will continue to move forward as a leader. We will deliver high quality programs that improve individual lives and our community because we are truly better together.

Ron Colavito

PART OF THE SOLUTION

The nights of January 26 and 27, temperatures rested between 18 and 21 degrees and the sunset at 5:05 PM. They were the kind of nights that you were thankful to be indoors, maybe cozied up on your sofa with a hot beverage, a blanket, and a good book. They were not the kind of nights that you thought yourself, "You know what? I'm going out to wander the streets from 10 PM – 3 AM" But that's exactly what Lawrence Anokye, senior outreach worker, and Vijay Neerajan, outreach worker, did as part of the New York State annual Point in Time Count. Commonly referred to as the PIT Count, this is a grassroots effort to get a census of the street homeless. It's also a way to make contact to ensure they know about available resources. During the nights, Mr. Anokye and Mr. Neerajan distributed care packages which included a blanket, hand sanitizer, hypoallergenic cleaning wipes, sandwiches, healthy snacks, socks, a scarf and winter hat, and a pair of gloves. They also gave out a pocket-sized resource bulletin listing drop-in shelter locations, food pantries and soup kitchens, student resources, legal assistance, and emergency services.

When asked what would motivate someone to dedicate themselves to working with street homeless population, Mr. Anokye explains that growing up in the Bronx, he saw economic disparities right in front of him his entire life. "I just couldn't look the other way. I felt I could be part of the solution. Experiencing homelessness effects your overall health and wellness. This is more than just a count of homeless individuals in the area. We connect people to the appropriate services which will provide shelter and offer them a chance to improve their quality of life. It's amazing what people can achieve when given an opportunity," he concludes.



The cold temps did not deter Vijay Neerajan, Officer Jason, and Lawrence Anokye.

17 OF DEDICATION YEARS



On behalf of everyone involved at TGCW, we applaud Amy Gelles, our agency leader for the past 17 years. Under Amy’s guidance and vision, TGCW grew from a small office in New Rochelle to 34,000 square feet of program operations in Mount Vernon, from a \$7M to \$23M budget. Her ability to not only see community need but also respond to it in a creative and effective way led to many new initiatives and growth. One close to her heart is the Center for College & Careers (CCC), which this year celebrates 15 years of helping youth have a path to a better future. A social worker at heart, Amy lives the TGCW tenet of a “business brain with a helping heart.”

Prior to COVID, there were many times that program participants would visit Amy’s office—sometimes for a chat, sometimes for a snack, and always for a welcoming smile. She’s also known to dance up a storm at our annual Gala, the CCC Bash for the Future, or other agency events, motivating others to have fun alongside her, showing that strong TGCW spirit.

Thank you, Amy, for being a wonderful part of our 80 years of TGCW history.



Just a few Amy highlights from over the years...

- Created a diverse and inclusive senior leadership team.
- Received the first Early Step Forward grant for children's mental health consultation services in childcare agencies throughout Westchester County, thus creating Foundations in Feelings (also funded through the Frog Rock Foundation).
- Strategically relocated headquarters from New Rochelle to Mount Vernon, expanding agency footprint and bringing multiple programs and services under one roof and help reduce barriers to services.
- Led initiative to apply to be a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, which resulted in a \$1.9 million, two-year grant from SAMHSA. This enabled TGCW to offer 24/7 crisis response for the community.
- Established Westchester County's first Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS) which integrates rehabilitation, treatment and support services for people with serious mental illness.
- A nod to TGCW's beginning, opened the Creative Learning Center in New Rochelle, a fully-dedicated, stand-alone space for early childhood learning and social-emotional development.
- Received the award for a countywide Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team to work with people who are unable to receive treatment in a conventional setting.
- Pursued and received funding for Mobile Crisis Response Team for the New Rochelle, Pelham, Bronxville, Tuckahoe, Eastchester, Scarsdale, and Mount Vernon communities.
- Saved an outpatient substance use treatment program (Sunrise) from closing.
- Fought for the creation of NY State's first co-located mental health and methadone maintenance program.
- Established new and innovative programs to help recent immigrants receive care and treatment and increased the number of multi-lingual clinicians, teachers, and counselors.
- Founded the first OMH-licensed mental health clinic solely dedicated to children younger than five years old and their families.
- Expanded housing programs from 60 to 300 beds, including new funding to cover employment needs of housing participants.

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been my privilege to lead TGCW through an important period of transformation and growth. We have a remarkable staff. Both our former and the new board of directors are extremely dedicated. I am proud of what we have accomplished together. Thank you all for the many years of being able to work alongside you.

To commemorate my tenure at TGCW, I humbly agreed to be an honoree at our Annual Gala on May 3, 2022. It's an exciting time as we also celebrate TGCW's 80th anniversary and the bright future the agency has as part of Access. I hope you will attend so that I will have an opportunity to thank you in person for your partnership and commitment to TGCW. It's been a great run.

As always: together, we thrive,




Don't Mask ANXIETY in Young Children



Think about this: a child who turned 5 years old in March will have spent 60% of their young life in the age of COVID. Most, if not all, of the child's active memories will be a time when traveling outside the home means wearing a mask. Masks keep them safe. Masks protect us. Wearing a mask means that we care about other people's health and safety, too. Their first school experiences, if they had them, are all in the era of COVID.

As we enter the phase with indoor mask mandates being lifted, how is a young child—whose entire conscious recollection of life involves wearing a mask in public—supposed to process the “new,” sometimes mask-less world? How are they to interpret some people wearing masks and others not?

As an adult, we may welcome getting back to the “new old” ways; a child may have a harder time understanding it. As odd as it may seem, they may feel a loss of security, control, and comfort.



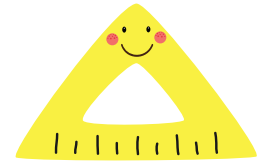
Parents and caregivers may see children exhibit a variety of behaviors: complaints of stomach aches or other pains when plans involve leaving the home; a regression with toileting, sleeping, or eating habits; acting out; crying for “no” reason; or other uncharacteristic behaviors.

Our experts at the early childhood mental health clinic are already helping families and children who experience anxiety and emotional stress due to COVID, change, and other circumstances.

Give us a call at **914-613-0700 x7031** or email: EarlyChildhood@TheGuidanceCenter.org.

The early childhood mental health clinic supports children (up to 5 years old), their siblings, and their families.

By: *Iva Jenkins, LCSW, director of early childhood behavioral health services.*



Find Joy in your Work

Participants in our supported housing program enjoyed some extra holiday magic this year, courtesy of two of Santa's helpers who just happen to moonlight as housing case managers. Both Pam Highland-Card and Jenn Corpas take the TGCW tenet of “find joy to your work” seriously, so having fun and donning a Santa suit was a natural for them. With gifts donated from the New Rochelle Seventh-Day Adventist Church and BJ's, they set out on their mission. “We

literally stopped traffic,” says Ms. Corpas. “It was a beautiful thing for our participants and for the whole community.” Ms. Highland-Card explains that gift was truly in the giving. “We felt like Santa for real.” Ms. Corpas says that gestures like this show the participants that they are not forgotten, and it helps strengthen the relationship between counselor and program participant, making for better outreach. “It can make having the harder conversations a little easier,” agrees Ms. Highland-Card.



Pam Highland-Card (left) and Jennifer Corpas (right) find joy in their work as they deliver gifts to housing participants.

Thanks to all of our community partners who made in-kind donations in the holiday: Family Community Church; Holy Family Church; Iglesia De Refugio Esperanza; New Rochelle Seventh-Day Adventist Church; Spencer Beran; Temple Shaaray Tefila; Toys for Tots, Westchester County; United Way of Westchester and Putnam.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Westchester Golf Outing

Tuesday • August 9
GlenArbor Golf Club
Bedford Hills, NY

Bash for the Future

Benefiting the Center
for College & Careers
Wednesday • October 19
The Davenport Mansion
on the Sound
New Rochelle, NY



SCAN ME

Cheers to **80** *Years*

The Guidance Center of Westchester Annual Gala

Honoring

Emilio DiMatteo

*Principal Owner,
Matteo Development LLC*

Marshall W. Jaffe

*Managing Director,
Neuberger Berman*

Amy Gelles

*CEO, The Guidance Center
of Westchester*

Matthew Searles

*Partner,
Merritt Healthcare Advisors*

Tuesday, May 3, 2022 • 6:30 PM to 9:30 PM

Glen Island Harbour Club
New Rochelle, NY 10805