

The Guidance Center of Westchester TIMES

Summer
2021

Funding for emerging crises during COVID-19

CCOVID-19 intensified many of the fragilities within our social safety-net. Among them, housing insecurity, homelessness, and the ever-present opioid crisis. The Guidance Center of Westchester (TGCW) is proud to work with community partners and city agencies to make a difference in changing lives of people impacted by these challenges.

Housing insecurity and homelessness

Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the City of Mount Vernon's Planning Department received Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19 among individuals and families who are homeless or receiving homeless assistance.

"We are proud to be working in partnership with the City of Mount Vernon and the Mount Vernon Police Department (MVPD) to address homelessness exacerbated by COVID-19," says Alicia Lore-Grachan, LCSW, deputy executive director for rehabilitative services.

In total, TGCW received \$1,050,000 in ESG funds. Ms. Lore-Grachan outlines a few ways that TGCW will make an impact:

Street Outreach: Funds will allow our renowned homeless street outreach team to add three additional staff members who will work specifically in collaboration with the MVPD to *(continued page 2)*



From the CEO



At the start of the French Open tennis champion Naomi Osaka announced that in order to protect her mental health she would not do post-match interviews (win or lose). While there has been much discussion about her decision,

in the eyes of all the mental health participants at TGCW her bold decision to speak out about her mental health needs demonstrates why she is a champion both on and off the court.

At TGCW we know too well the ever-growing need for mental health and substance use support to combat the ongoing stigma that still surrounds asking for help. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that 42% of U.S. adults experience symptoms of anxiety or depression, a six-fold increase during the pandemic.

I am delighted to share with you in this newsletter the many new ways, via new programs and new employment opportunities that TGCW continues to respond to community members when it comes to addressing their mental health and substance use needs.

Your support of our Gala helps us to continue this amazing work. Please read on.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Gelles".

Amy Gelles
Chief Executive Officer

The Guidance Center of Westchester

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(continued from cover) engage homeless individuals living on the streets. TGCW staff will provide food, masks, blankets, and the use of a portable sink to the homeless individuals they encounter.

Rapid Re-housing: Rapid re-housing places a priority on moving those experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible, ideally within 30 days of becoming homeless. Based on TGCW's previous success in providing rapid re-housing, we will be placing 11 homeless people in their own apartments. The funding pays for 12 months of rent and a full-time case manager to help stabilize and connect them to resources.

"We look forward to providing this much needed help to homeless Mount Vernon residents impacted by COVID and to getting people back in homes," concludes Ms. Lore-Grachan.

Homeless Prevention: TGCW staff will collaborate with the Mount Vernon Youth Bureau and the Youth Shelter to identify young adults that, with a little support, would be able to sustain themselves in their own apartment. Ten young adults will be identified, and TGCW will pay rent for several months while a social worker helps support independence and connects the young adults to employment and other resources.

Increased opioid-related deaths

During COVID-19, there was an increase in opioid-related deaths, both nationally and locally. In the first half of 2020, the last available numbers, Westchester County saw an alarming 32 opioid overdose deaths.

The Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) requested proposals to address the opioid crisis by increasing access to medication-assisted treatment, reducing unmet treatment need, reducing opioid overdose-related deaths, and providing a comprehensive continuum of treatment, prevention, and recovery. The grant required a network approach to care.

With Lexington Center for Recovery as the lead agency, and other members of the Coordinated Behavioral Health Services Independent Practice Association, TGCW applied for and was awarded \$330,000 over one year. The funding will enhance efforts for outreach and engagement of opioid users. Funds will cover the salaries of additional staff in our 24/7 Access call-in center. All staff will be specially trained to respond to individuals with substance use issues, especially those middle-of-the-night calls. The funds will also cover the salary of two staff people to work in collaboration with MVPD and accompany them on calls when substance use is involved.

ADDRESSING TRAUMA IN THE COMMUNITY

When gun violence tragically and fatally struck two New Rochelle housing complexes, TGCW partnered with the New Rochelle Housing Authority to conduct community meetings where residents were able to address their concerns and show their strength and resilience. TGCW staff discussed ways that people can help themselves, their families, friends, and the community by focusing on how to move forward together. Felice Harris, LMSW, MsEd, director of integrated services, Access, crisis and community-based programs, and Phillip Mallory, LMHC, CASAC-T, community engagement specialist, and Keshia Carter, Senior WIOA Counselor all took part.

Photos: 1. Felice Harris (TGCW) 2. New Rochelle City Council Member Yadira Ramos-Herbert 3. Community members 4. Community members 5. Executive Director, New Rochelle Municipal Housing Authority Angela Davis 6. Phillip Mallory (TGCW)



WIOA YOUTH SUCCESS



By Jade Pryce, WIOA counselor,
Center for College & Careers

KAYLA FRANCIS AND JOSEPH VELEZ are a unique pair because they both came from the food service industry. They joined the FutureWorks to FutureCareers program (funded by Westchester Community Foundation) at the same time and shared an interest in the electrical industry. Following their completion of the construction trainings and certifications program in March 2021, they both obtained full-time employment at Lippolis Electric Company, and have been touted for the amazing work they've done in such a short time. Lippolis has featured both participants on their LinkedIn page for their notable work ethic and achievements. Kayla's interest is in management, and Joseph's interest is in technical work. *(Pictured above: Joseph Velez, Kayla Francis, and Carmine Lippolis, President of Lippolis Electric, Inc.)*



KAYLA GARCIA can be defined as a goal-oriented and focused individual. Within six months of joining the Center for College & Careers (CCC) WIOA program, she was able to obtain her GED. Without stopping, Kayla went on to complete CodeWorks, a website

design and entrepreneurship course (funded by the Sills Foundation). She obtained employment at California Closets, a manufacturer of custom closets and storage for homes. This work experience gives Kayla the opportunity to explore home furnishings and design. It's a pathway to her ultimate dream of becoming a real estate agent and flipping houses. With her ambition and go-getter attitude, Kayla will be able to utilize her GED to pursue higher education and training. She will also be able to utilize her

web design skills and employment experience to propel her in the real estate industry and create a business of her own.



ZOE PACHECHO hails from the island of Puerto Rico and has dreams of becoming a nurse. She is a mother of two children and has a unique background in auto-mechanical engineering, a skill she developed in Puerto Rico. Zoe has lived in New Rochelle for a year

and has hit the ground running. With the support from the CCC WIOA program, Zoe participated in a career panel regarding pediatrics. She also completed CodeWorks, where she created her very own website. She is also taking English as a second language classes to improve her English and for overall professional growth. Zoe is now attending the Healthcare Academy at Westchester Community College, and she's in the process of obtaining her driver's license. Zoe is ready to fulfill her dreams for her future.

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TGCW cares about improving the lives of those challenged by mental illness, substance use, poverty, and homelessness

TGCW cares about hiring those who share our passion

TGCW cares about creating an environment where team members can learn, work, & thrive

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NOW HIRING

for positions with our integrated mental health & addiction services • therapists & director-level positions with our CCBHC

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The Guidance Center of Westchester • a great place to LEARN, WORK, & THRIVE

2021's Magical Gala!

We are grateful to everyone who participated in, watched, and supported our 2021 Virtual Gala. We thank our amazing honorees—Drs. Nancy & Sam Beran and Gwen & Kevin Reardon—who graciously stepped from behind the curtain to let us shine a light on their good deeds, compassion, and commitment.

Mitzi Ambrose-Washington, board chair, applauded the honorees and staff. “Our gala message is one of hope, wonder, inspiration, and magic,” she says. “While The Guidance Center of Westchester staff doesn’t perform magic like the illusionist, the way they change lives is just as magical.”

The evening focused on homelessness and housing insecurity, with Director of Supported Housing Cordetta Creighton explaining the many roles that TGCW’s housing team plays. “We currently provide services to 250 participants and their families, and our numbers continue to grow,” she says.

“Working together, we will all move ahead from this global pandemic, and with your help, TGCW will be able to keep providing their critical assistance to the people in our community who need it the most,” says honoree Gwen Reardon. Kevin, her husband co-honoree, wrote and produced a special musical video, “A Song of Hope.”

Drs. Nancy and Sam Beran, echoed their appreciation for being recognized by TGCW. “During this time of COVID when there is so much need and so many people who have been harmed, The Guidance Center of Westchester has really been a source of support for our community, helping those who need it most,” says Dr. Sam Beran. *(continued on reverse side)*



Drs. Sam and Nancy Beran



Gwen and Kevin Reardon



Keri René Fuller



Ken Salaz, Mitzi-Ambrose Washington, Amrika Sieunarine



Cordetta Creighton

2021's Magical Gala!

The evening included first-rate entertainment. Keri René Fuller, from Broadway's JAGGED LITTLE PILL, WAITRESS and CATS, mesmerized with two breathtaking performances. As she sang the song "Home" from the WIZ, formerly homeless participants in our program held up signs reading "Home." The performance reinforced the important role our supporters play in helping our program participants find the safety and security of home.

Master of Astonishment Ken Salaz lived up to his title and astonished us all.

We gratefully acknowledge Kelly Fowler Hunter, Kathy Hagendorf, and Matthew Searles for their congratulatory toasts and award presentations; County Executive George Latimer for his greeting; and housing participant John for sharing his inspirational story.

You can experience the magic again at www.TheGuidanceCenter.org. Both the Gala replay and journal are available for your viewing pleasure.

New playground coming!



Our Creative Learning Center (CLC) in New Rochelle is getting a new playground thanks to Assemblywoman Amy Paulin (pictured left). "The Creative Learning Center has been essential to the New Rochelle community where it provides high-quality preschool for both typical children and children with

special needs. I'm so pleased to have been able to assist in obtaining a grant to help restore their playground facilities that the children frequently use for recreation. Outdoor play allows children to learn about themselves and others. It also enables children to enjoy the natural environment, fresh air and exercise. It's wonderful that the Creative Learning Center emphasizes outdoor play as part of their program and I'm so happy to support it," she says.

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