

Insights

WINTER 2021

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

The holidays, a time of joy for so many, can often be a time of sadness and struggle for those suffering with mental illness. Add COVID social isolation to the mix, and you've got a recipe for increased melancholy, particularly for West Bergen group home consumers already struggling with chronic mental illness. But Mary Meakem and Wayne Angelbeck, West Bergen's very own Santa and Mrs. Claus took their show on the road this year and paid special visits to each one of our group homes to hand deliver holiday gifts so generously donated by our wonderful volunteers. Thanks to the kindness and generosity of so many, our consumers felt the joy of Christmas in the safety of their very own home!



THE INSIDE STORY

The Mental Health Aftermath of COVID-19 What's Next?

With so much attention directed towards the physical impacts of the pandemic, it's easy to overlook the fact that this crisis is behind a surge in depression, anxiety, PTSD and other mental health struggles. For these issues, there will be no "cure". Care is needed. And West Bergen is prepared.

Early on we understood that the issues of COVID would escalate and the demand for our services would continue well beyond the life of the virus. Our shift to teletherapy, necessary back in March for safety reasons, now allows our services to be widely accessible, and is a key factor in our ability to respond and treat more clients. Many of the issues therapists are seeing are unique to COVID, so our traditional "team" approach to care is more important than ever. Therapists work one-on-one with clients, and report back to a team of professionals who provide advice, support, insight and guidance.

West Bergen has also developed a strong arsenal of tools to support the community at large. Free outreach programs via Zoom were launched in March to address feelings of stress and anxiety, and have quickly evolved organically. "We're adapting and evolving our services to meet the "new norm" says CEO Michael Tozzoli. "For example we offer grief workshops that not only address the loss of a loved one, but also encompass other losses such as job loss, under-employment, relationship loss and financial strain". The agency is also developing programs to help individuals and organizations prepare for the inevitable stress and anxiety of returning to their "pre-Covid" life after many months of isolation and remote work and school.

"The needs of our clients and communities will dictate our treatment programs and services" says Tozzoli. "Wherever you need us to be, we will be".

COMMUNITY CORNER

Friends of West Bergen and Chestnut Deli Partner for Pizza

The Friends of West Bergen teamed up with Chestnut Deli and Catering for a December DIY Pizza fundraiser. Participants were able to purchase custom Pizza kits complete with homemade dough, sauce, cheese and toppings of their own choice, then assemble and cook their masterpieces in the safety of their own homes. Chestnut Deli generously donated 20% of their profits to West Bergen Mental Healthcare! Owners Billy and Luana are longtime supporters of West Bergen, so please support those who support us.



Pizza lovers Angela Blasi and her son James

BOARD SPOTLIGHT



Meet Christine Kearney

Christine Kearney joined West Bergen's Board in 2018, but her involvement with the Agency dates back to 2007, when she was President of the Junior League of Bergen County.

"Michael Tozzoli was part of our Junior League Community Advisory Board and introduced me to West Bergen and the work they were doing to provide quality, affordable and accessible mental healthcare to our communities."

A former Vice President of International Equity Trading for Merrill Lynch, Christine and her husband Declan moved to Upper Saddle River 21 years ago to start a family. "As a Mom of two teenagers, I understand the many stresses that kids face balancing school, athletics, friends and family demands, all in the glare of social media. The drive to excel often comes at a price and many kids are not equipped with support systems to help them handle the pressure". Because teens in particular have a difficult time asking for help, Christine is very involved in reaching out to schools speaking about the programs and services West Bergen offers. "I want families to understand that it's ok to not feel ok, and there is help".

CHANGING LIVES

WHY YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

When COVID first hit last March, the West Bergen team sprang into action to ensure that our outpatient client treatment services would continue to be available through teletherapy. But our most "at risk" population, our chronically mentally ill group home and partial care consumers posed a more challenging problem for our Residential Care team. Thanks to dedicated teams of Residential and "PC" counselors, a creative program was put in place that allowed them to remotely continue treatment. We recently asked for their reflections on how the Pandemic has impacted them.

WHAT THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC HAS TAUGHT ME ABOUT MYSELF

- I am more resilient than I thought, which shows me I can be more independent.
- I am able to adjust to different things and be ok.
- I learned how much I love to write and I want to get better at it.
- I've learned to take one day at a time.
- I have accepted where I am now, and have become more patient.
- I know I am safe.
- Now I know I can solve problems and give advice to my friends.
- I am learning to be in the moment.
- My housemates have become my friends.
- I enjoy the structure and support of the video groups. It feels like we are back at the Agency.
- I think of my strengths and know that I am capable of success
- I've learned that I enjoy cooking for my housemates.
- I know I can handle adversity and that helps me think of my future in a positive way.



WEST BERGEN IN THE NEWS - NORTHWEST BERGEN LIFESTYLE, JANUARY 2021

Taking the Temp of Mental Health

Article Kris Pepper and Photography Jean Terman

The staff of West Bergen Mental Healthcare in Ridgewood is taking the temperature of our community's Mental Health and setting the bar high in terms of awareness and care. "Recognition of mental health is a big part of the story", says CEO Michael Tozzoli. This is true. As America pulls through the COVID "warmlines", the needs for mental health treatments and awareness are apparent and demand for services at historic levels.

"Our role is not just with clients, but with the entire community" says Michael. This was apparent when West Bergen kicked off their COVID "warmlines", similar to a traditional "hotline".

"At the beginning, our warmlines focused on front-line workers and first-responders" says Michael. "We then began addressing teachers and educators who were dealing with their own stress and now we offer this free service to the entire community. The initial conversation with a caller may include tips for next steps and suggestions for treatment. This was a major initiative that we launched very quickly at the onset of COVID."

"We understood the issues of COVID would escalate and would need to be mitigated quickly", says Development Director Barbara Hand.

Currently, all of West Bergen's services are handled through teletherapy, a new process that needed to be explored when COVID broke out. "We turned the agency around in days to manage our clients through teletherapy" says Michael. "We didn't have a choice and we pivoted rapidly. I'm proud of our staff."

"We offer a very holistic treatment plan", adds Barbara. "We can provide any type of service, including medications, if appropriate, through our psychiatrists. We assess each client and figure out what's best." Program fees are built on a sliding scale so that they are affordable to everyone. "We consider our clients' financial and insurance issues" says Michael. "Our therapists have no idea how much the clients are paying, which is the way it should be."

The organization's grief programs have seen an uptick since the pandemic. Grief counseling encompasses death

"We understood the issues of COVID would escalate and would need to be mitigated quickly"

-BARBARA HAND, CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

and the loss of loved ones, but there are other facets, including relationship loss, under employment, and financial stress. It can affect individuals who are missing their day-to-day connections, like being unable to visit family members.

To address these challenges, the organization introduced free community outreach programs via Zoom. By partnering with schools, Valley Regional, libraries and churches, West Bergen presented workshops sharing tips and strategies to manage anxiety, dealing work-life-home-school issues and dealing with stress and heightened emotions during these challenging times. Reprinted with permission from Northwest Bergen Lifestyle Magazine

Message from our CEO

A New Year is upon us, and I think I can safely say that we are all ready for a healthy dose of optimism. The effects of COVID have touched all of us in one way or another, and finding our way back to a life that may look and feel different will be a challenge. We are grateful to so many of you who reached out to help us this past year, even as you were experiencing your own struggles. It's that support and evidence in us and our work that fuels our determination day after day to provide hope and healing.



YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

Thanks to so many who generously gave "The Ultimate Gift of Mental Health" this holiday season, West Bergen exceeded our goal and raised over \$165,000. Your gifts will help us address the mental health challenges our communities face in the days and weeks ahead.

Your gift will support a full spectrum of critical psycho-therapeutic treatments for children, adolescents, adults and families suffering from trauma, depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, including those resulting from COVID-19.

30%
OF OUR CLIENTS APPLY AND QUALIFY FOR A REDUCED FEE

We know that the crisis continues, and will for some time. Our team is prepared. But your support will continue to be critical to us and those we serve. Please continue to support our mission of hope and healing. Over 30% of our clients apply and qualify for a reduced fee because of income limitations. Your tax deductible gift helps to underwrite our sliding scale fee structure, ensuring that those who need treatment are able to receive it.

GRAPHIC DESIGN DONATED BY JAMES BLASI

West Bergen Covid Warmline

West Bergen has launched a free, "Warmline" support service for anyone in the community who is experiencing stress and anxiety as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Available Monday through Friday from 9am - 5pm, calls will be received by a West Bergen Access Clinician and a trained West Bergen licensed therapist will return your call within 30 minutes.

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