

Insights

SPRING 2021

THE INSIDE STORY

Join the Friends of West Bergen and “Move for Mental Health” This May

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and this year the Friends of West Bergen are leading the way, helping us shine a light on the importance of ensuring that quality, affordable and accessible mental health services are available to those who need them.

Join us for our 2nd Annual Move for Mental Health Virtual 5K. You can run, walk, take a Virtual Yoga Class (with HoHoKus Yoga’s Jill McKeon) or sign your little ones up for a sweet, Yoga class and book event with Jenna Hammond (author of “Downward Mule.”) Registration for each option is \$25 (yes, you can choose all three) and 100% of funds raised will be used to update and renovate our outpatient therapy rooms to ensure that the environment we offer to clients and families is safe and socially distant. With your support, we can safely welcome back those who feel more comfortable with in-person therapy services (teletherapy services will continue to be available).

Our goal is to raise \$30,000. And thanks to the generosity of two donors, your registration fee and support can double the difference.

Every donation of \$100 or more will be matched! That means your gift of \$100 will increase to \$200!

Total donations up to \$10,000 will be matched in full! That means if we succeed in raising \$10,000, our donor will gift us an additional \$10,000!

Whether you run, walk, take a Yoga class or support us with a financial gift, your participation will make a difference.

➔ **Help us Move for Mental Health this May. Visit www.westbergen.org to get started!**

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Spend just a little time around **Robin Wittich Tarta** and you’ll see why she is a beloved friend and mentor to so many. Robin’s special brand of love and compassion is reflected in the many acts of love she spreads throughout our community and our West Bergen consumers are just some of the grateful recipients of her tremendous heart. Once a month, Robin bakes batches of her famous “Robins Cookies” to deliver to each group home for a special birthday celebration. For our consumers, many of whom don’t have families to celebrate with, this act of kindness makes them feel seen, valued and special. Robin, a busy Sales Associate at Prominent Properties Sotheby’s International Realty in Ridgewood often quotes Maya Angelou, saying that people may not remember what you said, but they will remember how you made them feel. Robin, you surely make all of us feel special!



Robin Wittich Tarta

COVID, MENTAL HEALTH AND TEENS

Article by Northern Highlands Senior (and West Bergen volunteer) Kiara Riley. Edited by Barbara Hand

Anxiety is a mental health disorder that is very common among high school students. Every student feels anxious at some point during their high school years, and my hope is that this feeling will be normalized and acknowledged more frequently going forward.

struggling with it, most are too afraid of being judged to ask for help”.

COVID-19 has worsened the situation. Freshmen, already trying to adjust to high school, have been forced to learn remotely. The lack of specialized attention that comes with in-person learning causes students to lose concentration and motivation.

I can relate. As someone who puts 100% into every assignment, I have noticed my own difficulty focusing. One student told me how difficult virtual learning has been for her and admitted that concentration has been challenging, causing her anxiety issues when it’s time for a test. “I have to constantly re-read the questions because I find myself forgetting what I’ve read and learned”.

What can schools do for students who are afraid to seek help for mental health issues? Students I spoke with all talked about the need to normalize these feelings by having school leaders initiate conversations about mental health, perhaps through assemblies, speakers or student/teacher committees. The goal is to get kids to talk about how they feel and give them a safe place to ask for help.

7.1%

of U.S. children between the ages of three and seventeen have anxiety.

A fellow senior at my high school acknowledges feeling anxious, and hopes that shedding a light on this topic openly in the school environment will help others feel more comfortable sharing their feelings. This student also serves on our school Wellness Committee and constantly hears feedback from students and teachers about mental health concerns. When asked if she believes mental health is discussed enough in school, she replied “sadly, not even close”. “Mental health is such a stigmatized topic, and even though so many kids are



CHANGING LIVES

Why Your Support Matters

Lindsay was 16 years old when she first came to West Bergen’s Center for Children and Youth (CCY). Lindsay refused to attend school, telling her therapist John that she routinely experienced panic attacks that left her nauseous and unable to breathe. John diagnosed her as struggling with high anxiety and depression. He recommended that she come for therapy twice a week to help her manage her symptoms and get back to school.

West Bergen’s mission is predicated on ensuring that income limitations are not a barrier to treatment.

Lindsay’s mother panicked, explaining that divorce had left her with a limited income and no health insurance. John explained that West Bergen’s mission is predicated on ensuring that income limitations are not a barrier to treatment. He worked with the admissions team to come up with a workable financial solution using the Sliding Scale Fee Payment System.

Within a few sessions, Lindsay began to share the severity of the family trauma including her brother’s recent death from an overdose. Through therapy and relaxation exercises she soon began to feel a greater sense of control over her anxiety. John also helped Lindsay explore her grief about her brother’s death.

Today thanks to West Bergen, Lindsay is back in school and feeling more confident every day. She now sees John once a week and with his help, is talking about ways she can honor her brother’s memory.



Message from our CEO

Mental health seems to be a hot topic these days and that’s a good thing! It means that the stigma about mental health issues continues to lessen. Collectively, though, we still have some challenges: as the pandemic enters its second year, researchers are tracking a “surge” in depression, anxiety and other related psychological issues. Mental health resources are being taxed as the numbers of people reaching out for help hits historic highs. Support, advocacy and funding for critical treatment will help a great deal as we all work together to meet the surge. Thank you for your support and for partnering with us as we work together to be part of the solution!

MICHAEL J. TOZZOLI, LCSW, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

COMMUNITY CORNER

HealthBarn Foundation Grant Helps Group Homes

Thanks to the HealthBarn Foundation and the Ridgewood Chamber of Commerce, West Bergen Mental Healthcare is one of the beneficiaries of a \$1M state grant to deliver 100,000 high quality, nutritiously balanced meals to Bergen County residents facing food insecurity due to the pandemic. The grant, awarded through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority’s (NJEDA) Sustain and Serve program also supports West Restaurants who will prepare the ready-to-eat meals. West Bergen group home and independent living units will receive delicious weekly meals delivered by volunteers through May.

A special thanks to Anthine, Barn Foundation Founder and Director Stacey Antone, and Bergen County Board of Commissioners Member Ramon Hache for extending this good work, first initiated in March as the Ridgewood Chamber of Commerce and HealthBarn’s “Feed the Frontlines” project.



BOARD SPOTLIGHT

MEET SYLVIA GOLDMANN, MSW LMSW CPC

Mahwah resident Sylvia Goldmann, a social worker trained in marriage and family therapy with a busy life coach practice, was first introduced to West Bergen through Senior Development Coordinator Chrissie Lijoi. “Chrissie and I met at a Ridgewood Chamber of Commerce meeting. I told her about the work I was doing with families who have a transgender member transitioning, and she arranged for me to meet Michael, as West Bergen does a lot of wonderful work in that area”.

Sylvia quickly developed a strong affinity for the agency, their work and the team, and became more involved, first as a volunteer, and then in 2019 as a Board Member. “The more familiar I became with the breadth, depth and quality of the services they provide, the more I became determined to become a strong advocate for the agency. West Bergen is such an incredible resource for individuals and families, and my biggest priority is for every person in the community to know who they are, what they do and how to reach them for help”.

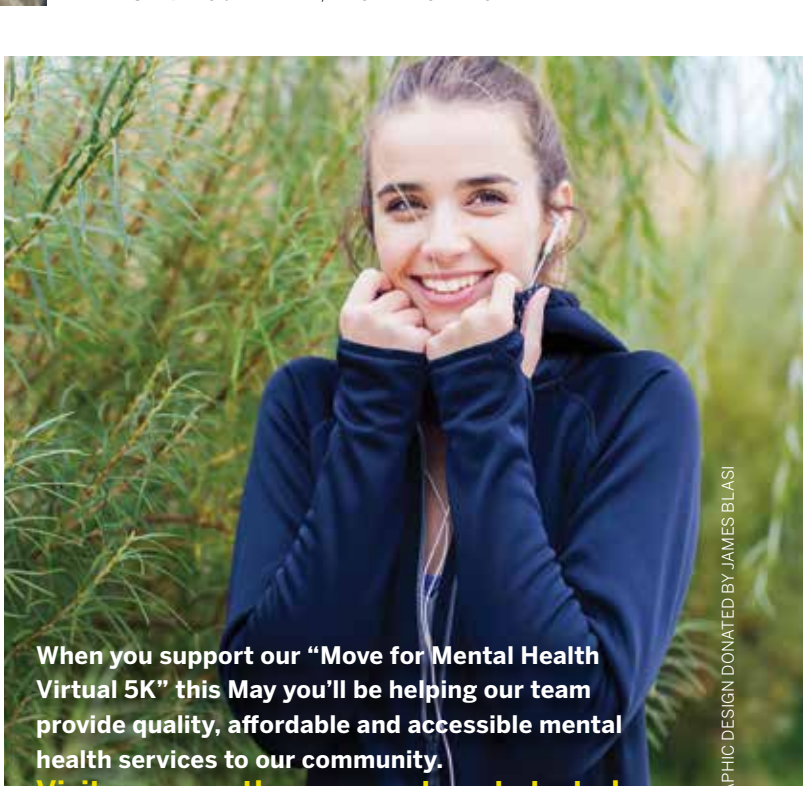


“My biggest priority is for every person in the community to know who they are...”

SYLVIA GOLDMANN, WEST BERGEN BOARD MEMBER

5 REASONS TO “MOVE FOR MENTAL HEALTH” THIS MAY

- 1 Aerobic exercise like walking or running can reduce anxiety by making your brain’s “fight or flight” system less reactive
- 2 Regular exercise of any form can reduce depressive symptoms and can be as effective as medication and psychotherapies.
- 3 For people with ADHD, a single 20-minute bout of moderate exercise has been shown to reduce feelings of confusion, fatigue and depression and can enhance motivation for tasks requiring focused thought.
- 4 Meditative movement has been shown to alleviate depressive symptoms by bringing awareness to bodily sensations. With Yoga, Qigong and tai chi in particular, you must pay close attention to your posture, breathing and rhythm, all of which can lead to a feeling of well-being.
- 5 Rhythmic, in which can lead to a feeling of well-being, a yoga class or a game of tennis can improve your mood – and your self-esteem.



When you support our “Move for Mental Health Virtual 5K” this May you’ll be helping our team provide quality, affordable and accessible mental health services to our community. Visit www.westbergen.org to get started.

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 Counselor and a trained West Bergen licensed therapist will return your call within 30 minutes. 201-688-7098