

Dan's Papers

You & Your Pet



ARNIE THE WELLNESS DOG

CN Guidance and Counseling Welcomes Furry New Employee

YOU & YOUR PET

Meet Arnie: The Wellness Dog Bringing Comfort and Connection to CN Guidance

BY MICHAEL MALASZCZYK

He's the embodiment of "man's best friend."

CN Guidance & Counseling Services recently welcomed Arnie, a specially trained facility dog from America's VetDogs, to support wellness efforts across its programs on Long Island. A 4-year-old black Labrador Retriever, Arnie is trained to provide comfort, grounding, and emotional connection for clients, families, and staff navigating mental health and substance use treatment.

Dan's Papers spoke with Jeffrey Friedman, CEO of CN Guidance and Counseling, about how the venture with Arnie came about and what Arnie does.

Tell us about CN Guidance and Counseling and how Arnie came to join your staff.

CN Guidance and Counseling services have been around for over 50 years. We are a provider of mental health and substance use services, and we have a full array of services to support people who have mental health and substance use challenges, from clinic services to crisis intervention, to residential services to prevention education, and services all to support individuals who are struggling. Each year, we touch over 20,000 individuals on Long Island. And what we have found is that obviously having a mental health or substance use issue is very challenging on a whole bunch of levels.

We have seen people turn to drugs and alcohol because of traumatic events, or because of that they have a mental health issue that they're trying to self-medicate. And often when people come to our door, they're at their lowest moment. So when people are at their



ARNIE THE WELLNESS DOG, A NEW STAFF MEMBER AT CN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING.

lowest moment, what better than having a wellness dog be around to help you? So back in 2025 the beginning of the year, we started talking with the Guide Dog Foundation and AMVETS, and said we were really interested as we were launching a new crisis intervention, crisis stabilization program that's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365, days a year, as part of our continuum of care services.

And having this idea of having a wellness dog be part of that, and also part of the many other programs that we have would be just an amazing opportunity to help people get down on the path of recovery. And so we started the process of applying for for this wellness dog, and in November, we received Arnie. And Arnie is a four-year-old black lab who just loves people and really wants to just be around people and comfort. And

so what we have seen is him spring into action the first few weeks that he was here, and he's transitioning into our agency. He had encounters with people who were clearly in pain or crying.

We had this one individual who had entered our crisis stabilization program, and she was explaining to staff and going through a very, very hard time, and she was crying, and then all of a sudden, she encountered Arnie, and her whole demeanor changed. And Arnie ran over to her wagging his tail and smiling, and she reached out, and she started to pet Arnie, and Arnie started to lick her, and you can tell like it was a time where, you know. She was able to just let out a big gasp and just let go of things. And it really did change the course of our interaction with her, and the course of her really entering into recovery.

Is Arnie trained in anything

specifically, or is he just a happy dog spreading cheer?

Arnie is very trained. There are dozens and dozens of commands you can give Arnie, and Arnie will act on those commands from anywhere.

If you hold out your fist, Arnie can give you a fist bump. He hits his nose to your fist, if you wanted to take a selfie with Arnie, Arnie could take a selfie. If you wanted to shake hands with Arnie, Arnie could shake hands. And then Arnie knows just a whole variety of other commands. He can put his head down on your lap, and you can rub his head, and he can just stay there. He's pretty just amazing in terms of his comfort level, but very docile, very loving, and very easy to work with.

What has the response been to Arnie's services?

People just love Arnie. The staff

YOU & YOUR PET

love Arnie. The people we serve love to see Arnie there. We have over 400 people who work here, and so we get requests into our office here every day in terms of people booking Arnie to come out to their program and meet with different people that we serve, or different staff.

It's a nice thing. It changes the dynamic in terms of people feel very at ease around Arnie, so be it staff or the people we serve. And so he's been accepted with open arms. We, we have our traditional staff day once a year, we go and do team building experiences with our staff.

And so at that event, we had like close to 300 people there, and that's where we introduced Arnie. So no one knew Arnie was coming. They never met Arnie before. They didn't hear about Arnie. And we introduced Arnie. He ran up the aisle, and people are clapping. He's running to everybody, kissing everybody and just being very, very happy. And so since that day in November, he has been very popular here.

Tell us about Arnie's history. Where did he come from to

get the job with CN?

He came from an organization called America's VetDogs which was established in 2003. We're partnering with them, and they provide Arnie to our facility here as a wellness facility dog. And so, you know, we had staff that were trained. Arnie has a dog trainer that spent some time with our staff here, teaching us how to work with Arnie most effectively.

And so the American VetDogs have been just wonderful partners to work with, and have been terrific. And in the short time, Arnie, who's been here, he's really helped a lot of people, including the veteran population that we serve.

You opened a 24 hour crisis center in Hicksville. Is Arnie a resident there?

He's not a resident there. He goes along to all of our programs. He's there once or twice a week to visit there, and then he visits other programs that we have throughout the agency. We have 60 plus programs here in the agency, many of which are out in the community. And Arnie is a presence at all of our services and facilities here.

And so Arnie comes to work with me every day, and then when I get to work, I have a schedule, and Arnie has a schedule. And then at the end of the night, Arnie comes home with me.

Looking forward, what, what are some of the things you hope to do with Arnie?

We have children and adolescents who are suffering, you know, somebody who comes into us in a crisis, in the midst of a crisis, particularly a child, I think Arnie would be really helpful to them in terms of making them feel comfortable and not afraid, and make the experience not a traumatic one.

And so, I think that for us to get Arnie out in front of as many people who are suffering as pos-

sible will have a big impact on our community. We encounter over 20,000 people a year, and so Arnie will see a fraction of those folks. But that's why it's important for us to have Arnie out there and to be interacting with people who are really experiencing probably one of the most difficult things you can or challenging things in one's life: trying to recover from a mental health or substance use disorder. And if you can just help out somebody to make it a little easier for them, I think that's our hope for Arnie in 2026.

CN Guidance and Counseling is located at 950 S Oyster Bay Road, Hicksville, and can be reached at 516-822-6111 or cnguidance.org.



PHOTO BY CN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

ARNIE IS BELOVED BY STAFF AND CLIENTS ALIKE.



PHOTO BY CN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

ARNIE AS A PUPPY.CN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING