



HELPING HANDS: CN Guidance Senior Director of External Affairs Mary Silberstein, of Northport, and Community Crisis Center Assistant Director Sara Berman, in one of the children's rooms at the facility, which offers around the clock help for people in mental health and substance use crisis.

Crisis Center to the rescue

Around the clock support at new state-funded facility

By David Ambro

CN Guidance and Counseling Services Inc. in Hicksville is making a push to make Long Islanders aware of its new Community Crisis Center that provides immediate care for people suffering from mental health or substance use crises.

CN Guidance Senior Director of External Affairs Mary Silberstein, of Northport, a member of the Town of Huntington Opioid and Addiction Task Force, and CN Guidance Communication Director Andy Weissberg, led **The Observer** on a tour of the Community Crisis Center in Hicksville last week. After the tour, CN Guidance Chief Executive Director Jeffrey Friedman, who has led the organization since 2013, shared the vision that resulted in state approval of the Community Crisis Center.

CN Guidance and Counseling Services has provided mental health and substance abuse programs on Long Island

since 1972. It is located at 950 South Ouster Bay Road, Hicksville, where it has been operating one of the nation's 67 federally certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics. CN Guidance relocated its administrative offices to Laser Court in Hauppauge to free up space in the Hicksville building for the Community Crisis Center, which opened in December.

Mr. Friedman said experts agree that the mental health and substance abuse system has long been broken. He said services are hard to navigate and it is hard to gain access to care, and when people do seek services, either their insurance company doesn't cover the place they need to go to or the deductible or co-pays are unaffordable.

"What would happen and what we see is that people go into crisis and once they're in crisis there was no place to turn, and they end up in the emergency room," Mr. Friedman said. "In some cases, they would

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CN Guidance offers help for those in crisis

Facility developed based on site visits to similar centers around the country

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sit in the emergency room for ten hours."

He said it has long been the vision of CN Guidance and Counseling that access to care is the key to fixing the mental health and drug abuse systems. "When somebody is in crisis, and they need care, they should be able to get it immediately."

Four years ago, Mr. Friedman said CN Guidance opened a dialogue for government funding for a program to provide immediate services to people in crisis. "We put our visions out, and we had discussions with New York State in terms of how they can put funding behind an idea like this and ensure that people who are in trouble or suffering can get help immediately," he said.

The state responded by putting out a request for proposals to build crisis centers all around New York State. After a lengthy application process, which included articulating its vision and program plan, the CN Guidance Community Crisis Center in Hicksville was approved for state funding. He said the state funding wasn't enough to properly launch the program, so CN Guidance worked with Nassau County to obtain opioid settlement funds generated by large pharmaceutical companies responsible for the opioid epidemic.

"Four years later we were finally able to build out our dream about how to really have an impact on the community," Mr. Friedman said.

As they cobbled together the funding for the Community

Crisis Center, Ms. Silberstein said that Mr. Friedman sent staff members to crisis centers around the country to see what works best. Ms. Silberstein said they took into account everything from design features to paint colors, to scents, and artwork on the walls.

"We want to learn from others who are doing this already, hear about what worked, what didn't work, what their mistakes were," Mr. Friedman said. "By traveling across the country and seeing other programs, and talking with other people, we learned a lot. We didn't even realize, for instance, that there is architecture that is influenced by trauma. So we were able to talk to other providers and learn that there is a science behind the colors to paint the walls, having natural colors throughout the building, having plants and what that does for people."

"We want it to be a healing environment through the psychiatrists and social workers, and the peers that we have employed there, but we wanted the physical environment to also heal," Mr. Friedman said. "By doing road trips across the country and finding out what best practices were on how to build one of these facilities, was really insightful for us."

The facility is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. People in crisis can walk in off the street. Every shift is staffed with peers (people with lived experiences who are credentialed), clinical social workers, licensed mental health counselors, certified alcohol and substance



OPEN DOOR POLICY: The reception desk (above) of the CN Guidance Community Crisis Center in Hicksville is always open.

-David Ambro photos

use counselors, nurses, psychiatrists, and behavioral health technicians.

The stay at the facility is limited to 23 hours and 59 minutes or less, during which time the client will be evaluated and transferred to the appropriate program to meet their individual needs. There are rooms for children five years and older and their families, and there are rooms for adults. In each wing of rooms, there is freedom to move about, with lounge facilities to make the client feel at home.

Since the December opening, the Community Crisis Center has seen more than 500 clients. Mr. Friedman said it is a start but that it is important to spread the word that the facility is available and that people in crisis should utilize the center.

"If they are in need, be it on a Sunday night at 10 o'clock or any other time, they can come in and get help. The days of waiting for an appointment and scheduling something four to six weeks out when you need help now, we have a solution for that," Mr. Friedman said.

CN Guidance takes its outreach to schools, community groups, libraries, or other events. "We give them our materials and tell them there is a resource for your loved ones, for you, for your friends, for your neighbors, in terms of getting help immediately," Mr. Friedman said. "We did not expect to see so many people in the community accessing it so quickly. We thought it would take a long time for the word to get out, but the word of mouth in our community has spread."

Despite the success, Mr. Friedman said it is important to continue putting a spotlight on the Community Crisis Center to get the word out and help even more people in crisis. Currently, Mr. Friedman said 35% to 40% of the people accessing the facility are children, which he described as a "big deal" to the agency when it opened the crisis center.

For more information about CN Guidance, go to cnguidance.org or call 516-822-6111.

Although in existence since 1972, CN Guidance has grown over the past 13 years of Mr. Friedman's stewardship from 150 staff serving 3,000 people to more than 400 staff serving more than 25,000 people in more than 60 programs, including

a mobile outreach component that goes anywhere on Long Island, including to the East End of Long Island for both mental health and substance use patients.

Mr. Weissberg said it has been the philosophy of Mr. Friedman since he arrived at CN Guidance to grow the program to meet the growing needs of the community. "And there has been a growing need," he said. "We have responded to that with mobile services, with servicing mental health and substance use, with providing on-demand services."

He said the behavioral clinic has offered walk-in services for years, and CNG has had mobile services for years; they rent or lease over 300 housing units across Long Island for people in treatment to live, and the Community Crisis Center now offers 24/7 walk-in services for people in crisis, another growing need. In addition, CN Guidance offers vocational training and case management services.

"If you have a significant mental health or substance use issue, it impacts your whole life, and you may not have a job. We are trying to right the circle," Mr. Weissberg said.

Based on what they learned around the country, Ms. Silberstein said the CN Guidance Community Crisis Center has an adult side and an adolescent and children side for 5-18 year olds. The rooms allow family members to stay with their child, and they can bring another child with them. The rooms are family-friendly, with a television, a play table, a restroom, and a chair that reclines into a bed.



A family lounge at the CH Guidance Community Crisis Center.