

# N. Shore center tends to mental health

BY GABRIELLE DEONATH

In 1953, noticing a lack of programs geared toward helping their families, a small group of parents of children suffering from mental health issues on the North Shore created a service to fill that gap.

Over the next 60 years, the service, now known as the North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center, grew steadily, turning it into one of the leading mental health agencies on Long Island, according to Andrew Malekoff, the executive director of the center.

The North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center is an outpatient mental health agency working with children with various issues from birth to age 24, as well as their families. The center is also an outpatient chemical dependency agency licensed by New York state.

In addition to the headquarters located in Roslyn Heights, there are two other facilities, in Manhasset and Westbury.

The center also operates out of an elementary school, middle school and high school, all of which are part of Nassau BOCES. The center also has a presence in Nassau County Family Court, which was created to provide “a safe and enriching environment for children whose parents have legal matters to address at family court,” Malekoff said.

Children who seek help from the center suffer from a range of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, attention deficit and learning disabilities, according to Malekoff. Patients are sometimes children who live in a household where domestic violence takes place, who are victims of child abuse and neglect, or who may be suicidal or exhibiting self-harming behaviors, such as cutting.

Aside from its mental health and chemical dependency programs, there are a num-



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Andrew Malekoff

ber of specialty areas to which the Guidance Center caters.

The center’s maternal depression services help mothers suffering from mood and anxiety disorders who struggle to establish a connection with their babies to gain stability and feel less isolated, while providing them with tools to develop a healthy attachment to their child.

Another program is geared toward helping pregnant teenagers navigate pregnancy and parenting.

“Our Good Beginning for Babies program helps pregnant and parenting teens to receive prenatal education and care they need to ensure the babies are born after a full term pregnancy, while giving the babies early exposure to sensory experiences, such as reading,” Malekoff said.

There is also an emergency program for children referred to the center who are in

a situation where they cannot wait to receive help. These urgent situations include children living in a home where domestic violence is present, women suffering from maternal depression, and individuals who are suicidal. Professionals conduct a comprehensive assessment within 24 to 48 hours, based on the level of urgency, and immediately work with the patients or facilitate connections to places where they can receive higher-level care.

Malekoff said the guidance center is a strong advocate for making sure the insurance industry provides timely access to families who need mental health treatment and for issues geared toward eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health.

“If a child has a physical problem like a broken bone, families will seek help right away, but if their child has a mental health issue, families will wait days, weeks, months and sometimes years to seek help due to stigma,” he said.

The center will be hosting its largest fundraising event, called Dancing with Our Stars.

“The event comprises cocktails, a seated dinner, a silent auction, a live auction, raffle prizes, a program with remarks around the agency’s mission and current projects, and the main event — a performance by our ‘Dancing Stars,’” said Diana Martin, the center’s event coordinator. “These are members of our community who are willing to commit their time and resources to performing at our event. They train for many weeks with Ballroom Palace Dance Studio in preparation for their performance, and we are so grateful for their dedication and the entertainment they provide for us on this evening.”

Dancing with Our Stars will take place on Friday, Nov. 11, at 7 p.m. at the Garden City Hotel.