



COUNSELING NEWS

WINTER 2019

“FIGHT THE TEMPTATION” CAMPAIGN

YMCA COUNSELING SERVICE COLLABORATES WITH TOTTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO RAISE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS



Research shows that 9 out of 10 adults who struggle with substance misuse started using as a teen. In an effort to prevent teens from going down the path of addiction, evidence-based drug prevention programs have been established in almost every public school on Staten Island. In June 2018, the Staten Island YMCA Counseling Service was given the opportunity to partner with students from Tottenville High School to start “Fight the Temptation,” which raises awareness about substance misuse and recovery options.

Students from Tottenville’s Advertising and Design Academy worked with the Y Counseling Service to create a graphic inspired by Y programs, staff, and clients. The graphic was used to create a “Fight the Temptation” stairwell in the school that emphasizes how 70% of teens only start abusing drugs because of peer pressure. Decals were also created and placed in the school’s restrooms that emphasize how 90% of individuals who need drug counseling don’t receive it. In addition, Tottenville High School’s Senior Day included an addiction awareness presentation, which current and past clients of the Y Counseling Service were a major part of. The Advertising and Design Academy also created the hashtag “#YRECOVER,” which was printed on t-shirts given to 200 students on Senior Day.

“This was a heartening, informative and inspiring collaboration that culminated in wonderful results – awareness building around recovery, services available and the Y as a resource! The work was noticed by the District Attorney’s Office and there is a desire to replicate it in other schools on the Island,” said Jacqueline Filis, Executive Director of the Staten Island YMCA Counseling Service.

The Y Counseling Service strives to create a safe environment that empowers young individuals to achieve a positive, productive, and drug-free lifestyle through our Adolescent Services program and our community outreach programs.

YMCA COUNSELING SERVICE

South Shore Center, 3911 Richmond Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10312 (718) 948-3232

North Shore Center, 285 Vanderbilt Avenue
Staten Island, New York 10304 (718) 981-4382

OPEN INTAKE HOURS
NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

South Shore Center (3911 Richmond Avenue)

Monday 1:30PM – 3:30PM
Wednesday 4:00PM – 6:00PM
Friday 3:30PM – 5:30PM
Saturday 10:30PM – 12:30PM

North Shore Center (285 Vanderbilt Avenue)

Tuesday 1:30PM – 3:30PM
Thursday 4:00PM – 6:00PM

WHO WE ARE

The YMCA Counseling Service is a comprehensive outpatient chemical dependency program providing prevention, treatment and recovery services to children, adolescents, adults and their families. It also serves as an immigrant resource center, providing vital services such as ESOL and Citizenship Preparation classes through its New Americans Welcome Center.

OUR SERVICES

- ◆ Assessment Services
- ◆ Individual Counseling
- ◆ Group Counseling
- ◆ Family Therapy
- ◆ Psychiatric Services
- ◆ Addiction Medicine Management

ENJOY THIS ISSUE?

Feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who you think may find it useful.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR IDEAS?

Contact Anna Bagliore, the editor, at abagliore@ymcanyc.org.



MEET OUR STAFF

Meet the YMCA Counseling Service
Culture Committee

Culture is a key factor in what makes any organization a positive place to work. In an effort to improve the culture of its staff, the Staten Island YMCA Counseling Service has recently restarted its Branch Culture Committee.

Angela Russo, Senior Program Director of Youth & Family Services, restarted the Culture Committee to provide her fellow staff members with the best work environment possible.

The members of the Culture Committee are:

- **Elisa Abreu**, Prevention Counselor
- **Marie Howard**, Executive Administrative Assistant
- **Michele Lincoln**, Counselor
- **Lisa Matelle**, Counselor
- **Nicole Pipitone**, Counselor
- **Joanne Springstead**, New Americans Initiative Director
- **Angela Russo**, Senior Program Director of Youth & Family Services
- **Christie Yates**, Hospitality Agent

All members of the Culture Committee will work together to identify issues impacting branch culture and devise strategies to improve these issues.

The Culture Committee has already taken its first initiative by installing "Suggestion Boxes" in the front offices of each branch. This will provide employees with an anonymous way to offer their suggestions/ideas on improving branch culture. The committee will also be providing staff with a "Calendar of Events" in which employees can list any important events that they'd like the rest of the branch to be aware of (EX: Staff Birthdays).

This first initiative made by the Culture Committee is a stepping stone toward creating lasting positive change within the YMCA community.

ROB'S STORY

YMCA PARTICIPANT FINDS HAPPINESS AFTER TREATMENT

"I grew up in a normal Irish-Catholic household - where everyone loved to drink. My older brother had a drug problem, so I never wanted to go near drugs and end up like him. But in high school I started drinking. As time went on I continued to drink. After high school I got a great job and was making good money, but it was stressful, so after every shift I would go home and start drinking. I was still young, so I was able to wake up for work and bounce back from the hangovers after drinking all night. My girlfriend at the time used drugs sometimes, but I still never used them. We moved to Long Island together in a beautiful house, but I didn't know there was a bar in our neighborhood when we moved there. I would be in that bar every afternoon after I got off of work. While my career was excelling and I was making more money, I was drinking more and more every day. One night, someone gave me a painkiller and it made me feel great, so I started dabbling in those. I didn't feel the need to drink anymore when I started those. I thought it was a miracle drug. Within 6 months I tried stopping the painkillers, but I started experiencing withdrawals, and I realized I was stuck with these drugs. I was in numerous car accidents because I started drinking again while taking the pain killers. My friends warned me that if I didn't stop drinking and using drugs I would lose everything, but I didn't believe them. Sure enough, within 3 months I lost everything - my house, my boat, my jet skis, my motorcycle. I was living with some friends until I finally decided to move back to Staten Island and live with my parents while I tried to get clean on my own. Eventually I went back to work and wasn't abusing drugs or alcohol at all. One night, I used a little cocaine while I was out at the bar and I spiraled back into my old lifestyle. I didn't have any money because whatever money I had was going to drugs and alcohol. My doctor wouldn't see me anymore because my drug use was too excessive. My parents eventually kicked me out of the house, so I started staying with whatever friends would let me sleep on their couch that night. At the time, I was working on this big project in Manhattan. My boss and I had a great relationship, and not once did I ever think about stealing from him. Although I never robbed him of any money, I did rob him of his time. I stopped showing up for work or would leave work after a couple of hours and tell him that I had been there the whole time. I didn't know it at the time, but eventually he started tracking my whereabouts through my phone. After tracking me for 6 months, he confronted me about it. So I quit. Whatever little money I had saved was gone within two weeks. When I couldn't afford pills anymore, I went straight to heroin. That's when I became a person I didn't really know. I was robbing people and doing whatever I could to get drugs. I remember thinking 'this is exactly what my brother went through.' One day, I ran into an old friend - she was actually one of my old neighbors - who had also used drugs for a long time. She told me about how she'd started rehab and how it completely changed her life. I had never known much about rehab, AA, or how to get clean - I always thought I could just do it on my own. She suggested I give it a try. My union rep sent me away to the Clearbrook Manor Rehab Facility in Pennsylvania for a month. People that I'd spoken to about going to rehab suggested I go there high on my first day. Going to rehab was a very intense experience, but I didn't want to leave once I started. I would be in meetings all day talking about my addiction. When I got back to Staten Island, I immediately started going to 3-4 meetings a day. I was clean for 11 months before I relapsed. This time I tried to just stick to one drug instead of going back to pills. Within 3 days I was going back to pills, and within 2 months I was back in a detox program. I finally tried an outpatient program when someone in detox suggested it to me, and that was the missing link. I started outpatient at the YMCA and I've been here for over 16 months - although I have now completed the program, I remain engaged in the alumni program. If it weren't for my counselor, Lisa, Floyd, Nicole - everyone at the Y - I wouldn't have the life I have today. I don't take back that last relapse because I really needed to see that I had an issue. If I can give any advice to people going through a similar situation, it's that recovery is definitely possible if you put both feet into any program. Life without a substance is scary, but having a network of people you can turn to makes it easier. It just takes a little bit of action."



Mary, Ivy, Kya, & Fynn's Story

FAMILY FINDS RELIEF THROUGH YMCA LITTLE STEPSSM PROGRAM

The YMCA has been tending to the needs of children affected by a family member's addiction for 30 years through the Little StepsSM program, serving more than 60 children and their families every year. Little StepsSM utilizes expressive art and play therapy, role playing and other therapeutic techniques to address the special needs of kids ages 5-17 whose lives have been turned upside-down by addiction. The goal of the program is to teach children that they are not the cause of their family member's substance misuse, and that while they cannot control or cure it, we will help them learn to cope with it.

"It all started when my daughter, Jennifer, and her three children, Ivy, Kya, and Fynn, were taken from their home in Pennsylvania. Jennifer was sick and passed out in the bathroom. She called a friend for help, but that person didn't want anything to do with the situation, so they called my parents. My mother took Jennifer to the hospital and my father took the kids to Jennifer's house. Social Services was called because the condition of the house was unlivable - Jennifer was a hoarder. She was given a few months to make the house livable for the children, but when Social Services conducted a random drug test, she tested positive for cocaine. We didn't know where she was going to live or what was going to happen to the kids, so we decided they would all come live with me in Staten Island and they'd start working with Seamen's Society. Jennifer was not allowed to be alone with the kids, but I was a little lax with that because I worked at the time and couldn't always be home. One day while I was at work, I thought she was still home with the kids - but she was actually on her way to see her doctor in PA to get drugs. In 2013, three days before Christmas, I was making dinner while Jennifer was upstairs with the kids. My son went upstairs and came back down angry because the kids were all crying. When I asked what happened, the kids said that Jennifer had threatened to leave and hurt herself. She denied saying that, and claimed she had only said that she wouldn't be able to stay at my house anymore, but I didn't believe her. She started making a scene, so I called 911 and she was taken to the hospital. It was around 12:30AM on Christmas morning, and the cops showed up at my house claiming that they received reports of a violent altercation. After questioning myself, my son, and my oldest daughter, Jennifer came running down the street screaming 'I called them' and that I was keeping her kids from her. I explained the situation to the cops, but they told me, my son, and my oldest daughter that we could face jail time if we didn't let Jennifer in because she had squatter's rights. After days of fighting with Jennifer afterwards, I called Seamen's Society, and they suggested I call ACS. I called and they opened up a case on Jennifer - but they also opened one on me because they claimed I couldn't control her. My case was immediately opened and closed. Jennifer was given the ultimatum to either go to rehab or have all her parental rights terminated. She chose rehab. After everything was worked out, Seamen's Society suggested we all come for counseling at the Y. We had our intake session with Angela and started with group counseling first. Ivy and Kya eventually started individual sessions. Now Ivy and I attend group counseling, Kya continues her individual counseling, and Fynn chooses not to go for any type of counseling anymore. It's been a lifesaver. It's helped me because I didn't understand why my daughter couldn't just stop using, and here I learned why. I think because I've been here so long, I can help the new people who come here because of my experience and what I've learned from my counselor.

- Mary

"When I come for group, we start with a highlight and a lowlight of the week. Then we'll play a game or make a craft that focuses on our feelings, how we can improve on something, or help us when we're stressed out. I've learned that it's not our fault that our mom used drugs, and even though she might blame us at times, it's not true."

- Ivy, 13

"In my sessions, we do a highlight and lowlight too, and then we'll play a game while we continue our discussion. I also have a journal that I can write things down in throughout the week that I want to talk about during my session. The most important thing my counselor taught me was the 7 C's - 'I didn't cause it, I can't cure it, I can't control it. I can help take care of myself by communicating my feelings, making healthy choices, and celebrating me.' If I could speak to other kids going through the same thing as me, I would tell them that they didn't cause it, but if they do feel like they caused it they can go to Y and the people there can help them feel better."

- Kya, 11

"I learned that you can get better by learning what addiction is. I used to read a book about what addiction can do to your family and it talked about how drinking and driving can cause accidents, or how addiction can make you sleep more while you're at home, making it hard for you to spend time with anyone. I would tell other kids going through the same thing that it's not their fault, it's that person's fault because they chose to do it and they need to fix the problem themselves."

-Fynn, 8

