Larchmont-Mamaroneck Community Counseling Center Helps Combat Growing Mental Health Crisis

By KENDALL PSAILA

Most students at Mamaroneck High School have interacted with counselors from the Larchmont-Mamaroneck Community Counseling Center (LMCCC), but few realize it. From Life Skills classes in 6th and 7th grade, to Advocacy Groups in 8th grade, or parenting groups, the LMCCC has touched a large number of students and families in the Larchmont-Mamaroneck community. All of the programs mentioned above, and many more, are developed and led by the relatively small staff at the LMCCC, which is located in Mamaroneck, not far from the business district on Mamaroneck Avenue. It is an easy, unintimidating and approachable resource for anyone seeking help, regardless of their financial resources.

The LMCCC has been a true community organization from its inception almost 50 years ago. A drug overdose in the community in 1970 prompted a coalition of concerned citizens, from the school district to local politicians, to establish a counseling center for Larchmont-Mamaroneck. It is funded by New York State, the Town of Mamaroneck and the Villages of Larchmont and Mamaroneck, as well as by the MHS School District. In addition, there is a letter writing fund-raising campaign every year. From its creation to present-day, the Center has revolved around the local community and relies on it for its support. Executive Director Mark Levy and a staff of seventeen run a variety of programs, all intended to maintain and improve the mental health of Larchmont and Mamaroneck residents.

Staff Psychotherapist Jennifer Prussin emphasizes that the Center has an incredibly "open, accepting, and supportive environment," and a close-knit staff where everyone helps one other. It is "more than just a job," for the staff, and they want people to feel as comfortable around each of them as possible, so they can grow as people.

Mental health is one of the most important issues facing us all today; according to The American Journal of Managed Care, mental health problems have significantly increased for youth today. Clinical Director Alan Dienstag explains that the Center sees "kids who are dealing with anxiety, depression, the pressures of being a student," and more, which is exacerbated in this "community where kids are under an immense amount of pressure." Prussin notes that "anxiety and depression doesn't discriminate," and mental health problems such as these must be "normalized" in the community.

To combat this growing crisis, the Center provides affordable and confidential counseling services, as well as crisis intervention. It does not turn anyone away for financial reasons, and students can go to the Center without parental consent. In addition to individual counseling, it also provides an array of other education and prevention services for both parents, young adults and children. Importantly, the Center has a Spanish speaking counselor and a program called "La Casa" that is dedicated to the specific needs of the Spanish speaking community in the area.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LMCCC

The LMCCC team, pictured above.

For most students, their first exposure to counselors at the center is in middle school, during the Life Skills classes that run for 6th and 7th graders. In 8thgrade, 120 students participate in advocacy groups. Additionally, the LMCCC organizes summer programs, such as helping students prepare for college, which they did just this year. For parents, their first exposure to the LMCCC is often an educational "lunch" or workshop. To help parents with various issues, such as social media and anxiety, counselors hold educational workshops at our local elementary schools, as well as form "parent groups," where parents of similarly aged children can talk about the issues that they are facing.

Dienstag and Clinical Supervisor Christine Hidalgo Danberg discuss how the demand for the Center's services has increased over time, partly due to the fact that it is easier to find out about and contact the Center online. Also, the "stigma," as Danberg puts it, around mental health issues, has decreased as knowledge about the prevalence of mental health issues, especially in adolescence, has increased. People are now more open to receiving help and admitting that they have a problem. Additionally, Danberg and Dienstag note that the economic means of people who seek help at the Center has changed as well. Even those who have the financial means to get private therapists or psychologists still come to the LMCCC.

At its heart, the Center is focused on counseling those in need, and wants the community to know that it is here to help and that its work can truly change people's lives. As Danberg says, "Don't hesitate to come and talk to someone, as everybody deserves to be supported."

For more information, please visit the website at www.communitycounselingcenter.org, or follow them on Instagram @community-counselingcenter.