

news

SUMMER 2015



Equinox Integrated Clinic

Offering Primary and Behavioral Care in One Location

Renee is a hard worker who juggles three part-time custodial jobs. At 43, she has been a client at the Equinox Mental Health Clinic for the past 10 years. She also has diabetes and suffers from severe arthritis and a degenerative disk disease in her spine.

Yet for years, Renee has lacked a primary health care provider. And if she sought care, it was usually

new Integrated Primary and Behavioral Health Care Clinic located at Equinox's 500 Central Avenue facility. Primary care is provided by Whitney Young Health, a partner in the Clinic, and is available to Equinox clients receiving mental health and/or chemical dependency care.

Funded by a grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Integrated Clinic is helping patients coordinate physical health care with mental health treatment. Case managers at Equinox are able to share patient information with Whitney Young Health Physician Assistants (PA) to ensure that the most effective care is provided.

"Patients are able to see the PA for sick visits, for physicals, to get prescriptions, and for referrals to specialists, all with a goal of helping them establish a relationship with a primary health care provider, and preventing unnecessary visits to an emergency room," said Health Coordinator Allyson Tallman, RN. "Using the ER for these kinds of services can be difficult and lengthy for the patients, and very costly to the health care system."

through the emergency room.

"Patients with mental illness and substance addiction face greater health risks due to chronic diseases that are not well managed," said Equinox CEO Dorothy Cucinelli.

"According to a report by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, people with severe mental illness die 25 years earlier than the general population."

Improving the overall health of Equinox clients was the major impetus for the agency's

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Message from the CEO	2
Equinox Battling Opiate Overdoses Through Training	2
DV Shelter Commemorates 25 Years of Service	3
Thank You to Our Friends and Supporters	4
Equinox Celebrates Community	5
ThanksGathering	6

Continued on page 2



CEO's Message

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news

Among the many things that distinguish Equinox is the agency's success in building meaningful partnerships in the community to help us accomplish goals on behalf of those we serve. This year has brought that message home to us in several ways. First, in January, working in partnership with Whitney Young Health, we were able to launch the Integrated Primary and Behavioral Health Care Clinic (see story on page 1). There is an abundance of evidence that individuals with mental illness and/or a chemical addiction are much more likely to suffer from chronic illness, and to have a shorter life span. With the new Integrated Clinic, we are able to greatly improve our clients' access to primary health care as well as to coordinate that care with their behavioral health care. This is a significant step in improving our clients' well-being.

Secondly, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter. Since 1989, the Shelter has been Albany County's sole provider of emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children. We hosted a wonderful luncheon commemorating this milestone (see page 3). At the event, we honored the Junior League of Albany and the Legal Project, two of our community partners who have been essential to our ability to serve victims of domestic abuse.

We are also grateful for all of our partners who donate food and supplies for the Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner – including Price Chopper for the essential ingredient: 900 turkeys! It is with great delight that we honor Price Chopper/Market32 at our exciting new ThanksGathering Event on November 5 (See back page).

And, of course, it is our partners, like you, whose generous support of Equinox makes all of our work possible.

With warm regards,

Dorothy S. Cucinelli, PhD

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Equinox Integrated Clinic *continued from page 1*

Two days a week, a phlebotomist from St. Peter's Laboratory is onsite at the Integrated Clinic to draw blood and obtain urine specimens for routine testing. "Of course, patients can get this done wherever they'd like, but almost all choose to come here because of the convenience and comfort level," added Ms. Tallman.

The U.S. Department of Health and Services has invested more than \$25 million in a Primary and Behavioral Health Care Integration Grant program, noting that integrated care helps "prevent and reduce chronic disease and promote wellness by treating behavioral health needs on equal footing with other health conditions."

Whitney Young Health CEO David Shippee said that: "Embedding primary care in a behavioral health setting with which patients are familiar will hopefully lead to a great level of trust of care providers and continual service."

That is exactly what happened when Renee began seeing certified Physician Assistant Richard Haldeman.

"I like Richard very much. There aren't too many men I'd feel comfortable with as a primary. It's nice to have a doctor who believes you when you're in pain." Mr. Haldeman has referred Renee to a pain specialist, a podiatrist, and a nutritionist – all of whom she has seen.

"He wants me to see the nutritionist because he wants me to lose weight," said Renee. "I can't afford a co-payment, but he sent me to the nutritionist at Shoprite. She's been very helpful and it's free. I've lost six pounds already."

Renee is quick to offer help and advocacy, including letting fellow Equinox clients know about the Integrated Clinic and opportunities for civil service jobs for individuals with physical or mental disabilities.

Being able to access primary care at Equinox has made it much easier, and more likely, that Renee, and many others, will get the care they need. "Before the Primary Clinic opened I would go to the ER," she said. "Having one primary makes me feel a lot more comfortable." ●

Equinox Battling Opiate Overdose Through Training

Since 2008, drug overdoses have caused more deaths than motor vehicle accidents among people 25 to 64 years old, and the number has been increasing ever since. In 2014 there were more than 118,000 admissions into New York State-certified treatment programs for heroin and prescription opioid abuse. The largest increase in opioid admissions during that time were for clients ages 18 to 34.

Last year, the state launched the Combat Heroin and Prescription Drug Abuse Awareness Campaign to inform and educate New Yorkers about the risks of heroin and prescription opioid use, the warning signs of addiction, and the resources available to help. In response, Equinox offered an Opioid Overdose Prevention training through Project Safe Point for Counseling Center staff and other interested staff. Staff learned the signs and symptoms of heroin and opioid overdose, and how to use Naloxone (Narcan) to respond to an overdose. Each staff person who completed the training received an Overdose Prevention Resource Kit which included Intranasal Naloxone. Naloxone is widely used to reverse the life-threatening effects of opiate overdose. ●

Domestic Violence Shelter Commemorates 25 Years of Service



Congressman Paul Tonko, Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, and Equinox CEO Dorothy Cucinelli at the DV Luncheon.

More than 200 people attended a luncheon marking the 25th anniversary of the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter on May 6th at Wolfert's Roost Country Club. Since 1989, the Equinox DV Shelter has been the sole provider of emergency shelter for victims and their children in Albany County. The Junior League of Albany (JLA) and the Legal Project were honored for their extraordinary commitment to the Shelter and those it serves. The event was attended by Equinox friends and supporters and several special guests, including New York State's Lt. Governor Kathleen Hochul whose remarks reflected the powerful legacy of her mother's work with domestic violence victims. Mary Powell, one of the JLA members responsible for establishing the Shelter 25 years ago, came in from Ohio to attend the event.

As part of the JLA's current focus on hunger, the organization presented Equinox with a check for \$10,000 to help with the renovation of the Shelter's kitchen, which serves 90 meals a day.



Equinox Board Chair Steve Baboulis, Legal Project Executive Director and Honoree Lisa Frisch, Equinox CEO Dorothy Cucinelli, and Mistress of Ceremonies WNYT-NewsChannel13 Co-anchor Benita Zahn.



Junior League of Albany Past President Caitlin Cooper (holding birdhouse) and JLA President Maggie Dunham (front row, far right) were joined at the luncheon by current and sustaining JLA members as they proudly display their partnership award—an inscribed white and purple birdhouse representing the Equinox DV Shelter.

Thank You to Our Friends and Supporters

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who donated to Equinox in 2014. Nearly 2,500 individuals, families, and businesses made gifts to support our programs and services – and to support and strengthen our neighbors in need. Because of our generous donors, like you, Equinox is able to help more than 5,000 people every year move forward on their paths to recovery, healing, and independence.

For example, last year, with your help • 1,730 victims of domestic violence received counseling, advocacy, and support. Almost 250 victims found safety at the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter, and our 24/7 hotline responded to more than 2,000 calls. • Nearly 600 adults who struggle with mental illness received ongoing services and treatment from our Mental Health Clinic. • The Transitional Living Program (TLP) provided supervised housing and services to 46 homeless young people (aged 16-21) and their 7 dependent children to help enable them to live independently. • In its first full year, our Health Home Care Management program helped coordinate and manage the care of 650 adults with one or more chronic conditions, such as mental illness, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and obesity. • With the help of 3,500 volunteers, 10,000 Thanksgiving meals were prepared and provided to those throughout the Capital Region who were lonely, homebound, homeless, or in other difficult circumstances.

Again, thank you for your meaningful support of Equinox. Every gift truly makes a difference! For a complete list of our 2014 donors, please visit www.equinoxinc.org



Fuccillo Has "Huge" Impact

During October, National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Billy Fuccillo donated \$100 for every car sold at his dealerships in New York to organizations providing domestic violence services. Equinox received \$87,100! Mr. Fuccillo also used his frequent commercials to raise public awareness about domestic violence and where those in need could get help.

KeyBank Makes a Difference at Equinox

A team of KeyBank employees volunteered their time at the Equinox garden on May 13 as part of KeyBank's Neighbors Make the Difference Day. They planted flowers and prepared beds for planting vegetables by our youth at the Equinox House for Youth emergency shelter. KeyBank is also a generous corporate supporter of Equinox. Thank you!

It's a Wrap!

United Way employees generously volunteered their time to wrap hundreds of gifts donated from area businesses and groups during the holidays for teens at Equinox House for Youth and the Youth Outreach Center, and for individuals and families served by our domestic violence programs. Thank you to Crisafulli Brothers, Blue Shield of Northeastern New York, NYS DOT, PwC, SEI Design Group, White-man Osterman & Hanna, LLP, McGeary's, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Congregation Beth Emeth, and the many others that donated gifts.



Thank you PEF!

PEF (Public Employees Federation) sponsored a golf tournament last fall at Normanside Country Club to benefit Equinox's Domestic Violence Shelter. Nikki Brate, PEF Region 8 Coordinator (on left), presents a check for \$1,000 to Equinox CEO Dorothy Cucinelli. In addition to the tournament proceeds, PEF donated an additional \$500 to our DV services.



Equinox Celebrates Community



Homemade Care

Farnsworth Middle School students sewed “care bags” in their Family and Consumer Sciences Class and filled the bags with hygiene items for homeless and runaway youth sheltered at the Equinox House for Youth.



Albany All Stars Rocked the Equinox

On March 21, the eve of the vernal equinox, the Albany All Stars Roller Derby rocked Port City Roller Derby at the Washington Avenue Armory in Albany. Proceeds from a raffle at the match-up benefitted Equinox. Photo by Albany All Stars Official Photographer, Sean Childs.

Cooking For a Cause

Albany Medical College students teamed up with Equinox teens for AMC’s Cooks For A Cause (C4C) program. The medical students taught the teens about nutrition and cooking skills by preparing healthy meals together. The program concluded with a special dinner prepared by the AMC students and teens, which they enjoyed with special guests. Pictured below (l-r) Jose Ramirez, Capital Region Field Manager of Outreach and Community Relations for MVP, medical students Elvin Mendez, Kristen Island, and Andrew Wall, and Theresa M. Weinman, Administrative Coordinator, Department of Family & Community Medicine at AMC. MVP is the corporate sponsor of C4C and an Equinox supporter.



Spring Into Health

Equinox’s first annual Spring Into Health Fair offered clients free health screenings, information, demonstrations, and useful give-aways. Sherry Gold and Bernie demonstrated the benefits of spending time with a certified therapy dog. Sherry, an Equinox Board member, and Bernie are regular visitors to the Youth Outreach Center and to the PROS program (Personalized Recovery Oriented Services).



Focus on Homeless Youth

Equinox partnered with WMHT, HATAS, Pride Center, The College of Saint Rose, The Madison Theater and Central Avenue BID to present two free screenings of the documentary *Homestretch*, a powerful look at homeless youth in Chicago. After the screenings, which were open to the public, Amanda Saltzman-Middleton, manager of the Equinox House for Youth, participated in a panel discussion about homeless youth in the Capital Region.



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SAVE THE DATE!

equinox THANKS GATHERING

A Celebration to Kick Off the Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner

An Evening of Feasting & Merriment at the New York State Museum

To benefit the programs and services of Equinox

November 5, 2015 • 5:30-8:30 PM

Honoring



With Special Recognition of the

Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner Committee

The ThanksGathering celebration is Equinox's exciting new fundraising event to kick-off the Annual Thanksgiving Community Dinner. Mark your calendar and plan to join hundreds of Equinox friends and supporters for an evening of pure enjoyment, featuring live music, bountiful hors d'oeuvres by Mazzone Hospitality, and beverage stations by your favorite local breweries and vineyards.



T-DAY VOLUNTEER JEFFERSON AWARD FINALIST

For 30 years, Tom Tibbitts has been the volunteer Head Chef of the Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Community Dinner, putting in 12-hour days as he all but moves into the commercial kitchens in the New York State Plaza the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Because of his extraordinary commitment and service, Equinox nominated Tom for a prestigious Jefferson Award for Public Service. Tom was named a 2015 finalist and received special recognition at a ceremony in April at the Century House. Tom will be working his magic again this year, in preparation for Thanksgiving on November 26. Pictured above is (l-r) James Reed, CEO, St. Peter's Health Care Partners, NewsChannel13 Co-Anchor Benita Zahn, Tom Tibbitts, WNYT-TV/WNYA-TV VP/General Manager and Equinox Board Chair Steve Baboulis.