

# news

WINTER/SPRING 2018

## Role Model, Artist, Life Skills Counselor Outreach Center Experience Inspires Youth to Join Staff



Pictured Left to Right: YOC youth Naikieya & Chilo with Life Skills Counselors Anthony & Belkis

As a young child, Anthony Jackson spent a lot of time going between Albany and the Bronx. He and his mother and older sister eventually settled permanently in Albany. When he was 13, his aunt suggested he check out the Equinox Youth Outreach Center (YOC). It was a good suggestion. The YOC was not only a place that Anthony felt at home, it was a place where he could bloom. "The staff was very kind, and I grew strong bonds with many of them," he said, adding with a wide grin: "They loved my personality."

"I was very interested in art and in the YOC music studio," he noted. Besides offering the supplies and an art room to create art, YOC staff arranged for Anthony and other youth artists to show their work in several community art exhibits.

The YOC offered a safe space to hang out with kids from his neighborhood, and staff gave Anthony help in

preparing for his Regents exams, assistance filling out his first job application (which he landed, as a Planned Parenthood Peer Educator), and also the encouragement and guidance to develop his artistic skills and vision.

The YOC, located in one of Albany's high-needs neighborhoods, serves about 40 youth (ages 13-24) each day—700 annually—and is open 3 pm to 8 pm, Monday-Friday. The YOC meets basic needs with nutritious snacks and daily meal, laundry and shower facilities, clothing, hygiene supplies, school supplies, and connections to emergency shelter. Youth also take advantage of homework help, computers, the art room, life skills workshops, basketball court and fitness activities, video games, and opportunities to make positive connections with peers and caring adults. Strong relationships with community partners such as

Planned Parenthood and Whitney Young Health Center are fundamental to the program. The YOC is also a conduit to Equinox youth mentoring programs.

Today, seven years since Anthony first came to the YOC, his art work—bold, vividly colored paintings and sculptures—can be found all around the Center. And so can Anthony. He "returned"—though he'd say he never left—as a staff member. He is a popular Life Skills Counselor and role model who is adept at making youth feel valued. Whether baking with them, setting up an obstacle course in the gym, or teaching them drawing techniques, which he describes as a "great stress reliever for kids," the youth feel comfortable reaching out to him.

"We have similar backgrounds, many of them feel like an underdog. I know life's not easy, and there's rebellion. But you learn how to draw them out. They are loving kids. You give them respect, they give you respect." Anthony, who is very close with his mother and grateful to have his father in his life, noted that there are kids from "all different groups here—lots of kids who identify as LGBT, and they are very accepting of one another."

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## CEO's Message

Equinox is the lead agency of a behavioral health collaborative that has been awarded a \$2.3 million grant to participate in the transformation of New York State's Medicaid system. The grants were given

to help mental health and substance abuse providers adopt a business model of Value-Based Payment, which rewards quality of care and better health outcomes, rather than the volume of services they provide.

The State awarded a total of \$60 million to 19 behavioral health collaboratives across the state. Equinox is a part of the Capital Region Collaborative (CRC), a group of mental health and substance abuse providers that have been working together for a number of years to share best practices and improve services. CRC is excited to be a part of this ambitious initiative to improve behavioral and physical health care, enhance quality, and lower health care costs.

The funds, which will be given over three years, will be used in areas such as: identifying gaps in the continuum of care; ensuring ongoing monitoring of care planning, to avoid unnecessary costs and avoidable complications; identifying opportunities for performance improvement and cost reduction; and improving IT capabilities to more efficiently share data with other providers and partners.

While we are planning for the future, I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize someone who is synonymous with Equinox's history. After 29 years as the Director of Domestic Violence Services, Kathy Magee retired on March 2, leaving a legacy of tireless dedication to breaking the cycle of abuse and helping survivors create a positive path toward independence. Under her leadership, Equinox DV Services grew to benefit more than 2,000 individuals every year, including more than 200 adults and children who find safety at the Equinox DV Shelter.

When the first Shelter opened in 1989 with Kathy at the helm, there was nothing else like it in Albany County. A hallmark of Kathy's leadership has been her commitment to reaching underserved populations; particular focus has been given to immigrants and refugees, LGBT survivors, those with disabilities and elderly individuals (see "There is No Age Limit to Abuse" on page 5). Kathy's much-deserved retirement includes a cross-country trip in her camper—accompanied by her dog and cat—to visit family. We extend our deep gratitude and wish her the very best on this and all her journeys ahead.

In gratitude,

Dorothy S. Cucinelli, PhD

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## Foundations Invest in Equinox

July 2017-March 2018

Equinox is grateful to these generous foundations for investing in our mission and supporting our efforts to improve the lives of those we serve.

### Frederick McDonald Trust • \$10,000

For agency general operating. Equinox is grateful to be among the organizations supported by the Frederick McDonald Trust, which focuses its efforts on the city and people of Albany.

### John D. Picotte Family Foundation/ Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region • \$7,500

For the Transitional Living Program (TLP) for homeless and runaway youth ages 16-24, including those who have aged out of foster care. Equinox is grateful to the Picotte Family Foundation for its years of support of our youth programs. This gift to TLP helps us provide supervised housing, support services, and guidance as youth pursue their education, employment, and permanent housing goals on a path toward self-sufficiency.

### Barry Alan Gold Memorial Fund/ Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region • \$5,000

For Family Resources Intern. Thank you to the Barry Alan Gold Memorial Fund for its commitment to supporting the health and well-being of Capital Region residents. The Equinox Family Resources program provides support groups and counseling to family members of individuals with serious mental illness.

### The Wright Family Foundation • \$5,000

For the Domestic Violence Shelter. Thank you to the Wright Family Foundation for this meaningful gift, which was used to purchase furniture and baby equipment to replace well-used items at the Shelter.

### The Sidney and Beatrice Albert Foundation • \$5,000

For renovations at the Cohoes Residence. Equinox is most appreciative to The Sidney and Beatrice Albert Foundation for its financial support over the years of our Mental Health Residential Program.

### Role Model (Continued From Page 1)

Looking to the future, Anthony, now 20, is saving his money, and thinking about moving to Seattle with a friend who he met at Equinox many years ago. He likes working with youth and is thinking about getting a degree in social work. He would also like to one day be designing and selling his own line of upbeat, graphic t-shirts and hats. This high energy and talented young man makes it all sound very possible. ●

# Equinox Community Snapshots



## A Loving and Meaningful Tribute

The Butler Family traveled to Equinox to dedicate a plaque in memory of Christina Butler—their beloved sister and aunt—an attorney and tireless and compassionate defender of those affected by domestic violence. Her brother Mike Butler and sister Pamela Kelley shared the story of Christina’s life and her passion to help others. The family presented Equinox with a \$10,000 contribution for the Domestic Violence Services programs—a beautiful tribute to Christina and her legacy. Pictured: Butler Family with CEO Dorothy Cucinelli (far left) and Steve Baboulis, Past Board Chair (far right).



## Generous Donors Support Holiday Gift Drive

Santa Claus had help from both Crisafulli Bros. and Clancy Real Estate in providing holiday gifts to families and youth in our Domestic Violence Shelter and Youth Outreach Center. We are so grateful to all of the individuals, families, organizations and businesses whose compassion and generosity helped make the holidays a little brighter for those in difficult circumstances, including: Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha PSI Fraternity \* Capital Luxury Cars \* CDM Smith \* Church of the Immaculate Conception (Glenville) \* McGear’s Irish Pub \* NYS DOT Office of Right of Way \* SEFCU \* SEI Design Group \* The Affinity Group \* The D’Angelo Team at Keller Williams \* The Yoga Loft \* Trinity United Methodist Church (Albany) \* UHY, LLP/UHY Advisors \* Verizon Albany FSC \* Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker LLP.



## Team Equinox Climbs and Walks for Suicide Prevention

Congratulations to the Equinox Climb Team who helped raise awareness for suicide prevention. Led by Equinox Medical Director Rob Hertz (pictured center), his wife Karen Smith, RN (left), and Senior Clinician Claudia Warren (right), the team reached the summit of Giant Mountain (over 4,500 ft) in the Adirondacks on September 9th in honor of World Suicide Prevention Day. On September 24th, Team Equinox joined hundreds of other teams, survivors and family members for the Walk for R.I.T.A. (Remembrance + Intervention + Together we can raise Awareness) held at the Saratoga Spa State Park. Sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the walk provided an opportunity for healing and to raise awareness and funds—bringing hope to those affected by suicide.



## SEFCU Partners with Area Colleges to Benefit Local Charities

Many thanks to SEFCU for making Equinox a beneficiary of its 2018 Community Support Program. SEFCU teamed up with UAlbany basketball to give one lucky fan a chance to grab some cash from the SEFCU Money Machine, while awarding Equinox with a matching gift of \$1,000.



## UAlbany Students Come Together for Children at Domestic Violence Shelter

Thank you to the UAlbany Advocacy Center and the Sexual Violence Prevention Ambassadors for collecting and assembling Goodnight Bags for children staying at the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter. Students Jessica Cuoccio (pictured center) and Ashley Stock (left) spearheaded the collection of nearly 40 Goodnight Bags filled with blankets, notebooks and markers—gratefully accepted by Development Director Christina Rajotte (right). These thoughtful items help comfort children during a stressful time.

# ThanksGathering Celebration: An Evening Filled With Gratitude

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
2018 ThanksGathering  
October 25th

The Albany Capital Center, with its floor-to-ceiling city views, was the exciting new venue for the third annual ThanksGathering Celebration on October 12, 2017. Nearly 250 Equinox friends and supporters enjoyed delicious seasonal food and beverage tastings, live music, and a raffle and gift card pull. Equinox extends many thanks to our generous event sponsors who helped make our celebration special, and, most importantly, help us continue to provide essential services and positive opportunities to more than 5,200 individuals every year. A special acknowledgement to our returning Presenting Sponsor: Equinox Development Companies (which shares our great name). Thank you to our media sponsor, Albany Broadcasting; to our new sponsors UHY Advisors, NYSCOPBA, and NBT Bank; and to those who have been with us for years, including major sponsors Hannay Reels, Tri City Rentals, KeyBank and Schuyler Companies. This Celebration marked the unofficial countdown to Equinox's 48th Annual Thanksgiving Community Dinner.



Albany County Executive Daniel McCoy, Equinox CEO Dorothy Cucinelli, NYS Assemblymember Patricia Fahy, Equinox Past Board Chair Steve Baboulis, and NYS Assemblymember John McDonald III.



Equinox Past Board Chair Steve Baboulis with Jane Golub. The Golubs and Price Chopper/Market 32 have been longtime supporters, and a lead community partner for the Thanksgiving Dinner.



The Turkey Feather Pull, featuring gift cards from restaurants and retailers from throughout the area, was a big hit!

## Equinox Annual Thanksgiving Community Dinner Serves 10,000!

By 7:30 am Thanksgiving morning, nearly 1,000 volunteer drivers were happily, and patiently, lined up in the Empire State Plaza concourse. There was a festive atmosphere as families, groups of friends, couples and singles chatted with each other as they waited for the cafeteria doors to open at 8:30 am when they would pick up the Thanksgiving dinners—also prepared and packaged up by volunteers—to be delivered to Capital Region neighbors in need.

On their way to the well-orchestrated food pick-up lines, drivers were given address cards instructing them where to bring the meals. Many volunteer drivers have made Equinox part of their annual Thanksgiving tradition for years, even decades. Some deliver dozens of meals and bring wagons, laundry baskets or boxes to the concourse to carry the meals to their car. By 11:00 am, all the drivers had their assignments, and nearly 9,500 Thanksgiving dinners were on their way to homes throughout the Capital Region. Additionally, as it happens every year, 500 meals were served at the First Presbyterian Church in Albany, where people enjoyed a lovely sit-down meal and companionship.

The church was the site of the first Equinox Thanksgiving Dinner in 1969.

Today, 48 years later, the whole operation involves a total of 3,500 volunteers, a handful of which start working in late August to update databases, set-up and train hotline volunteers, and put into motion the countless moving parts it takes to pull "T-Day" together. From the Sunday before Thanksgiving until Thanksgiving

morning, a rotation of more than 2,000 volunteers peel, chop, cook and assemble the meals in the commercial kitchens of the Empire State Plaza.

Equinox is enormously grateful to all the volunteers, and the generous individuals, companies, organizations, congregations and schools that donate money, food and supplies, and to all the children who create colorful Thanksgiving cards that accompany each meal. Many thanks to our lead community partners: Price Chopper/Market 32 for donating turkeys; Hannaford Supermarkets for donating 1,200 pies and 10,000 meal containers; the NYS Office of General Services, which donates the kitchens and other spaces in the Empire State Plaza to prepare the meals; NYSCOPBA for donating extra space at our 102 Hackett Blvd. location to collect, store, and inventory tons of donated food and supplies; H.L. Gage for donating the use of a cargo truck to pick up donated food from throughout the region and, of course, the First Presbyterian Church, which has been a gracious and welcoming host for almost 50 years.



T-Day Head Chefs Tom Tibbitts (middle right) and Paul Strasser (middle left) take a moment to thank Mazzone's Prime Restaurant Executive Chef Matt Joyce and Sous Chef Michaela Schermerhorn for creating and donating "Show Birds" for the sit-down dinner at the First Presbyterian Church and the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter dinner table on Thanksgiving Day.

# There is No Age Limit to Abuse

## Equinox offers Elder Abuse Services

Elder abuse has stayed hidden in the shadows for far too long. Victims often have a greater reliance on their abusers for basic needs and daily living activities, as they may have limited mobility, have a disability or other restricting circumstance. In addition, elders may have few community connections or lack access to financial and other resources, that leaves them dependent on perhaps the only individual accessible—their abuser. Many elderly victims live not only in fear, but if the abuser is a family member, which is most often the case, their fear may be compounded by shame and misplaced guilt. This complex and intense emotional mix often creates reluctance on the victim's part to reach out for help and to get the abuser—perhaps a child or grandchild—"in trouble."

Elder abuse takes many horrendous forms: physical abuse, including neglecting a person's physical needs, tying them to their bed, or under- or over-medicating them; emotional abuse, such as berating, intimidating, threatening, or subjecting a person to other controlling behavior; and financial theft or exploitation.

Equinox established its Elder Abuse Services Project in 2010 to:

- Provide safe shelter, and compassionate and respectful services that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of victims age 60 and older;
- Reach out to the elderly directly at senior services programs and in senior housing facilities to let them know where to find help; and
- Raise awareness and educate the community about recognizing the many forms of elder abuse and where to seek help.

Because of our outreach efforts and partnerships, elderly victims are frequently referred to us by Senior Services of Albany, Albany Adult Protective Services or other law enforcement, as well as health care providers and senior-serving agencies.

Equinox provides older victims with emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, case management, a specialized support group, advocacy, referrals for low-cost or no-cost legal representation, and affordable housing.



When victims are connected with the Equinox Elder Abuse Case Manager Richard Storms—a licensed social worker with a specialty in geriatrics—he listens to their fears and concerns and works to address them. If the abuser is a family member who lives in the home, does the individual feel comfortable reaching out to law enforcement, or going to family court to get an order of protection? Mr. Storms works to allay victims' anxiety by accompanying them throughout these processes. This sometimes literal hand-holding may be critical to a successful outcome with older victims who can find it overwhelming to navigate the legal, law enforcement and social service systems.

### Incidents of Elder Abuse Likely to Increase

- According to the U.S. Census, individuals age 65 and older are the fastest growing segment of the population.
- In 2017, the Equinox Elder Abuse Services Project assisted 139 individuals 60 and older, including 59 who were helped to obtain an order of protection.
- In just the second half of 2017, we also helped 102 individuals ages 50-59, many of whom were struggling with an abusive or exploitative adult child.

If an order of protection is obtained, Mr. Storms will follow up to make sure the abuser is out of the home and to determine what services the victim needs to remain safely at home. Do they need a home health aide, transportation to the grocery

store, or to be accompanied to a medical appointment?

Equinox's Domestic Violence Shelter is outfitted to accommodate the needs of older victims. The three-story building has an elevator, but there is also a first-floor bedroom located near the staff office. This offers both more privacy as well as more immediate access to staff support. The Shelter is equipped with wheelchairs and walkers, and bathrooms have grab bars, shower benches, and removable shower heads.

If a victim is not yet ready to have their abuser removed or to seek emergency shelter, individualized safety planning will be provided, and discreet phone contact will continue. After working closely with a man who was being controlled by his wife and stepson who had wiped out his bank account, Equinox was able to arrange to have the gentleman's dialysis treatments moved to the nearby VA hospital. That was the key that made it possible for him to leave his abusers and enter the Equinox DV Shelter—which he did after the police escorted him to his home to collect his belongings. Following a two-week stay at the Shelter, he made arrangements to move in with an out-of-state cousin and start a new life. The reluctance to have a relative arrested—no matter how abusive—can be very powerful. Experience has shown that it often takes time, multiple phone calls and sadly, many incidents, before victims are ready to pursue an action such as an order of protection. But Equinox is there to assist them whenever they are ready.

**If you or someone you know may be affected by abuse, call our 24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotline: (518) 432-7865**



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### Domestic Violence Services Director Retires

A retirement luncheon was held on March 2nd for Kathy Magee, Director of Domestic Violence Services (pictured right), celebrating her impressive 29-year career at Equinox (see page 2, CEO'S Message for more highlights).

Christine Rodriguez (left) has been appointed as the new Director. Christine has worked with Kathy for the past 19 years, most recently as DV Outreach Director. She had a great mentor and brings experience and passion to the position.

**Congratulations and best wishes to both  
Kathy and Christine!**