

Insights

THE INSIDE STORY

It Takes a Community

CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE IN A COMMUNITY REQUIRES INNOVATIVE THINKING, COLLABORATION AND ACTION. PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT'S ABOUT STARTING SMALL.

That's what West Bergen's Community Education and Outreach program did. Begun in earnest during the Covid 19 crisis in 2020, the program started as a way to reach out to community members struggling with loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression and grief. Emotions such as this had been percolating below the surface for many people prior to Covid, but often unspoken, endured and hidden out of shame. The pandemic changed all that, becoming the great equalizer for behavioral health. Everyone was struggling, and openly sharing their need for help coping with isolation, fear and a myriad of other emotions. Partnering with local churches, libraries and hospitals, West Bergen began offering free Zoom programs on stress and anxiety that focused on self-care coping tools. But equally valuable was the chance for participants to connect with each other and share their challenges in a safe environment.

The programs quickly became a lifeline for many while offering West Bergen an opportunity to provide much needed education about mental wellness issues. In this way, the outreach further supported West Bergen's quest to both lower mental health stigma by providing a community forum to increase awareness of the many ways people struggle with mental health challenges, and also

share information to help participants build resilience and develop positive mental health practices.

Today, the Community Education and Outreach program has expanded significantly, with agency team members (including frequent speaker CEO Michael Tozzoli) providing support and education on a weekly basis to numerous community partners and organizations throughout

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Bergen County and beyond. The topics have expanded as well, with talks on LGBTQ+ issues, financial anxiety, parenting topics, aging anxieties and more. Often, the topics are customized to the specific needs of the requesting organization, with plenty of time for open discussion. There is no "one size fits all".

West Bergen's mission is and always has been to provide hope and healing to our communities, and this program is yet another example of our commitment to that mission. Your support of unfunded programs such as this is critical and necessary and allows us to continue to provide these much needed services.

MENTAL HEALTH MOMENT

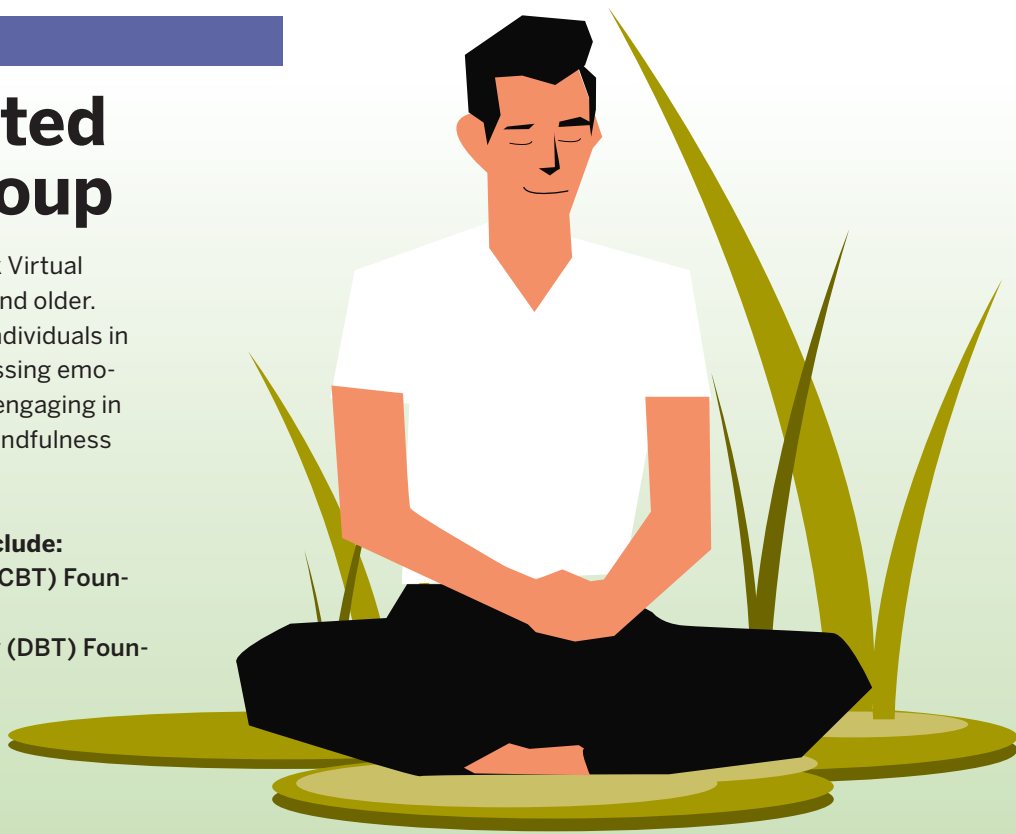
New Integrated Wellness Group

West Bergen is launching a 6-week Virtual Skills Based Program for ages 18 and older. The program's goal is to support individuals in strengthening coping skills, processing emotions, connecting with others and engaging in creative practices that promote mindfulness and personal growth.

Introduction to Interventions Include:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Foundations
- Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) Foundations
- Emotional Processing
- Creative Self Expression
- Community Connection

The program will meet virtually, two days a week for approximately 2 hour sessions. Interested people should contact West Bergen's Access Department at 201-688-7098.



Message from our CEO

I am so heartened by the support we received this past Holiday season! Thanks to so many of you who generously gave "The Gift of Mental Health", West Bergen was able to meet its year end fundraising goal of \$150,000! These donations are such a critical component for the continuation and expansion of our mission, and directly support our goal of providing quality, affordable and accessible mental health services to our communities.

Your support matters. Now more than ever. Because of you, many forgotten and overlooked chronically mentally ill adults have found a home and treatment support through our group homes and Adult Day Treatment program.

Because of you, children and teens struggling with social

anxiety, ADHD, Level 1 Autism disorders and more are finding hope and healing through our Social Discovery programs at our Center for Children & Youth in Ramsey.

Because of you, income limitations and being underinsured are not a barrier for families and adults who desperately need mental health services, as your tax deductible gifts help to underwrite our sliding scale fee structure.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. We simply could not do what we do without you. Our dedicated team, such incredibly passionate professionals, do this work because they care. Because they want to help those who struggle to live their best life. So your support, showing us that you care, means more than you know.

We all deserve dignity. We all deserve respect. We all deserve to be treated with compassion. And we all deserve

We are excited to announce that West Bergen has been selected as a nonprofit partner in the Stop & Shop Community Bag Program.

Get your bag at the Ridgewood location during the month of April and make a difference!

The Power of Engagement

Hope and healing often begin with engagement. When we listen to the stories of others and perhaps share struggles of our own, compassion and empathy are natural byproducts.

And so it's been with West Bergen's Community Outreach and Education program. Through our live (and free) wellness programs, monthly articles in Ridgewood Living, social media stories and face to face engagement with community partners, we've built a foundation of advocacy that includes volunteers and supporters, all of whom help us tell our story. We couldn't do the work we do without them.

Join them. Join us. Together we are bringing about change.



VOLUNTEER CORNER

Let's talk about the impact of Community outreach on our volunteer program. Did you know West Bergen is actively involved in several organizations? Being members of several chambers of commerce, the Ridgewood rotary club and the College club of Ridgewood has helped our volunteer program grow immensely. Being members of these organizations gives us the opportunity to connect with individuals who want to make a difference in their community. Volunteering offers a unique opportunity for individuals to gain an inside glance at our daily operations. It provides a firsthand experience of the tasks and challenges that staff members face, allowing volunteers to understand and appreciate the intricate workings of the agency. By participating in daily activities and witnessing how situations are handled, they gain a comprehensive understanding of the organization's role in the community.

In our adult day treatment program, volunteers play a critical role in uplifting our clients. They provide support and companionship, helping clients feel valued and recognized as important members of the community. This interaction fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth among members, which is essential for their personal growth and development.

Volunteers also play a critical role in West Bergen events. Volunteers are often present to greet guests, tell them about West Bergen and to ensure that each guest feels welcomed and comfortable.

By volunteering, individuals become part of a larger community dedicated to supporting our mission. Their involvement not only benefits the organization but also strengthens community ties.

We are so grateful to our volunteer team, but we are always looking for new members. To learn more about our volunteer program, please contact Chrissie at cljoi@westbergen.org.

SAVE THE DATE

TUESDAY May 13, 2025



The Ridgewood AM Rotary Celebrates Mental Health Month

Join the Ridgewood AM Rotary and West Bergen Mental Healthcare for a fun and festive wine tasting event featuring fine wines from Uncorked Wine & Spirits and food from local Ridgewood restaurants. The event will be held at West Bergen's newly renovated Center for Children & Youth in Ramsey, and the Rotary is generously donating all proceeds to West Bergen Mental Healthcare!

Ticket information will be available soon!

West Bergen's free "Warmline" provides support to anyone in the community who is experiencing stress and anxiety.. **Available Monday through Friday from 9am – 5pm**, calls will be received by a West Bergen Access Clinician and a trained **West Bergen licensed therapist will return your call within 30 minutes. 201-688-7098**