



The CFGC COMPASS GUIDE



FALL 2019

Stories from Our Community MARÍA'S & JOHN'S JOURNEY

María's family moved to Bridgeport from Puerto Rico when the youngest, John, was 5. John had started showing symptoms of special needs when he was 3 and, María recalls, ***"school services were hard to secure there."*** As it turned out, it would continue to be tough in Connecticut for years to come. María's primary language is Spanish, and, she says, ***"I didn't understand the law and it was hard to find people who would take the time to explain it."***

The language barrier made it hard for John to benefit from the educational and behavioral healthcare programs he did have, and María's own frustration built up to where it took a toll on her own mental health. Finally, she says, it hit a ***"crisis point."*** It was then, when John was about 10 years old, that the family was connected to our Care Coordination program.

"Care Coordination taught me to see my child in terms of his strengths and what he offered."

"I learned to see my child in a different light," she says. ***"Care Coordination taught me to see my child in terms of his strengths and what he offered."***

With the help of her Care Coordinator who spoke Spanish, María learned new tools to work with John's behavioral issues. ***"One of the first things I learned was that when John interrupted it became immediately a trigger,"*** she says. ***"And that led to altercations."*** By modeling a new way of responding, their Care Coordinator encouraged María to practice, right in the office. ***"I was able to use verbal cues along with body language and he responded well."*** she says. María also learned that she could say, ***"At this point I don't have the answer. Let's take some time and calm down and then let's talk about the situation that's more solution focused."*** This approach has been life altering for María. ***"To this day it hasn't failed me. Since I learned that tool and I taught my son the same tool, we take space and do the same thing."***

"It's become an essential skillset for him to be his own advocate and can be more effective in communicating his needs at the school meetings," she adds. María also remembers when she was once handed a large book about special education rights and



María, (left) with Director of Care Coordination and Interim Unit Director, Virginia López.

regulations in one of those meetings. She said to herself, ***"If I really want people to respect my rights then I have to read this whole thing... as I read, I became more aware of things."*** Since then, she has served on groups and committees to support others and most recently, has added her voice for special education policy development at the state-wide level.

Today, John is 16, has completed a 3 month computer program, holds down a part time job, and is invested in a vocational training program. María talks with pride about a leadership program for high school students with disabilities at UCONN that he recently participated in. ***"He was one of two students accepted from his high school,"*** she says, beaming with pride.

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PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Turning Point Adolescent Substance Abuse Program

Last year our Adolescent Substance Abuse program launched a new initiative within its spectrum of services which include individual and family therapy. SMART is a national program providing youth a chance to meet as a group and practice making healthy choices about their activities. Youth are encouraged to plan "pro-social" activities like community service or field trips to places that enrich their lives such as cultural and sporting events. This group of teens also voted to set their sights on something long lasting: a Recreation Room right here at the center. **By working together to budget, plan space, present to senior leadership, and order equipment, the youth have created a fun - substance free - place to gather.** As they graduate from the program, they can be proud to know that their work will be helping future teens in recovery. Thanks to a grant from the Connecticut Recovery Oriented Support System for Youth the SMART Recreation Room was made possible.



The New SMART Recreation Room – Equipment & Furniture in progress this summer.



Champions for Children at The Shorehaven Golf Club

The revival of our Champions for Children gala on May 30th raised over \$83,000 and gave our community a chance to come together and show support for the children and families we serve.

Honoring longtime Board Member Ann Owens, family and friends spoke of her dedication to the Center & Greater Bridgeport. **Special Guest Honoree Speaker Attorney General William Tong** honored Ms. Owens in his words of support for The Child & Family Guidance Center. And legendary sports champion **Bobby Valentine** was our dynamic Master of Ceremonies. Perhaps most inspiring of all were the words of former **Nurturing Families Network Client, Michelle Suárez**, who has gone on to have a successful career, and be the proud mother of two successful college students.



CEO Michael Patota with Connecticut's Attorney General William Tong



Mrs. Ann Owens, (2nd from left), celebrating with family



CEO Michael Patota, Chair of the Board of Directors Dana Scinto, & MC Bobby Valentine toast our Champions for Children



Staff members Ahisha & Keisha with Board Chair, Dana Scinto



Stories from Our Community

Vinny's Journey

Detective Vincent Lariccia of the Bridgeport Police Department was giving a staff training on safety and security this summer when he realized that we were the organization that helped him when he was a boy. Today, with a successful career and as a Doctoral Candidate in Public Administration, he's grateful for the work CFGC continues to accomplish. *"Maybe you'll therapeutically help the next Vinny,"* he remarked as he began his training.

Vinny and his mother Peg generously and humbly opened up about their journey following the training. *"You were part of our family for six years,"* Peg shared. Struggling with ADHD in grade school, Vinny had trouble completing his work and following rules. Often getting into trouble, he remembers coping by not being honest with his parents about unfinished assignments and failed

tests. He saw one of our therapists weekly, and, he said, *"I remember I felt like I could open up and be completely honest."*

Detective Vincent Lariccia uses his experience in his work today, saying, *"It allows me to relate to kids."* Sadly, part of his job sometimes means he has to arrest juveniles. In those cases, he says, *"I tell them, 'It's not over. You are good person who made a poor choice. How do you move on from here?'"*

After high school, Vinny joined the Marines before graduating second in his class at the Police Academy. Eventually, he completed with the highest honors a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice and a Masters in Public Administration all while working and raising a family. Looking back on the therapeutic care he received with us, Detective Lariccia told us, *"It set me up for huge success in the future."*



A young Vinny, with a bright future ahead of him



Detective Lariccia, with his mother Peg Lariccia visiting our Bridgeport location recently



Dan's Journey

In 2017 Dan Tenney helped with a Continuous Improvement project as part of our Strategic Planning process, before joining the Board of Directors in 2018. A doctoral candidate and professor at the University of Bridgeport, Dan brings a wealth of management experience from the corporate world and CFGC is part of his thesis project, 'Creating a Strategic Development Model for Small to Midsize Nonprofits.'

Dan says, *"I deeply believe in the mission. ... as I get to know more about the organization and people in it, I'm just so impressed by the work that they do. It's selfless work. If there's anything I can do with my area of expertise for this organization it's just the right thing to do."*

Virginia's Journey

Virginia López started her CFGC career with Care Coordination in 2004 and since then, she says, *"I've grown with the agency."* Moving up through supervisory roles to program director, and now serving as Interim Unit Director of Family Services she has continued her journey here in large part because, *"I love everything about Care Coordination. To me it's very common sense. We utilize what we call the Wrap Around process that builds on a set of values that I believe in - family centered, strength based, the community approach, collaboration."*

But it's also been the encouragement from her mentors who provided Virginia with a professional place to grow. *"With coaching from my supervisor I went back and got my MSW,"* she recalls. Before choosing social work, Virginia had originally planned to major in education and that continues to be the basis of her leadership style as a director. *"I really enjoy coaching and teaching... I believe a good leader never stops learning."*





Stratford Academy Raises Funds on Fun Day

We were thrilled and honored by a gift from **Stratford Academy** this summer!

Participating in their "Fun Friday" on June 7th, students raised \$338 for The Child & Family Guidance Center. It's a gift to know that the youngest members in our communities support the work we do. They are part of the *'better tomorrow'* we are creating together. We're thankful!



Ways to Give:

There are many ways to deepen your connection to our mission and be a part of our community's journey. Here are just a few:



- 1 Join our Mission Sustainer Club by signing up to give recurring monthly donations
- 2 Include CFGC in your estate plans
- 3 Join one or more of our fundraising initiatives throughout the year as a volunteer or matching challenge sponsor

Contact our development office at (203)394-6529 ext 3069 to learn more. Or to give today, simply log on to www.cfguidance.org/support

The Ackerman Institute for the Family Strengthening Relationships, Strengthening Communities



*A Socially Just Approach to
Working with Families*

November 1, 2019



Strengthening Relationships, Strengthening Families

Are you a mental health professional or know of one?
We're excited to be hosting the Ackerman Institute for The Family for an all day workshop on November 1.

To learn more, go to www.cfguidance.org & click on the "Strengthen" Box. Or, call, (203) 394-6529 ext 3069



We're keeping it green for a better tomorrow!
Through September, \$1 of every community bag sold at Big Y (355 Hawley Lane) in Stratford and Stop & Shop (4531 Main Street) in Bridgeport will be donated to CFGC! Now that Connecticut is leading the way with re-usable bags, this is a great a way to support the environment, children, and families.



World Mental Health Day

Sign up today and start raising awareness for **World Mental Health Day, October 10th**. This will be the

2nd year that CFGC takes part in World

Federation for Mental Health's effort to raise awareness about mental health, while at the same time raise critical funds for our programs.

Anyone can register now as a Mental Health Awareness Advocate, or support someone who has already signed up. To learn more, go to www.cfguidance.org and click on the "Mental Health Awareness" box.

WORLD
MENTAL
HEALTH
DAY

