



The CFGC COMPASS GUIDE



FALL 2020

Stories from Our Community

Gina's Journey & Our Newest Trauma Focused Model

After completing her clinical internship at CFGC in 2019 and graduating with her Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Gina LeVon-Simpson immediately came onboard with us as a Clinical Mental Health Counselor and to be part of our brand new Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) program. A proud grandmother, and well known for her artistry as a storyteller and drummer, Gina brings almost 25 years as a Leadership Outreach Worker in the Bridgeport schools.

The Center was one of a handful of agencies awarded funding from The Child Health and Development Institute to be part of a learning collaborative and implement the

internationally disseminated CPP model, an intervention for children aged 0-5 and their caregivers who have experienced at least one traumatic event. With CPP, the Center's spectrum of clinical expertise in trauma focused therapy expands to include the very youngest clients.

"The beauty of this is we engage parents and children and those children are infant to five years old," Gina says. *"Typically, most therapy is usually five and up."*

"The initial three or four day training was an eye opener for me because the process is different. It is trauma focused." Gina explains how gathering the family history



Gina LeVon-Simpson, Clinical Mental Health Counselor

from the parent or caregiver is foundational to successful treatment. *"The very first thing we do, before we start with any core process is to...delve into the [parents' or caregivers'] history, and to find out who they are. This gives a lot of "ah-ha" moments. It opens the lenses of the caregivers."*

(Gina's Journey Continues on page 4)

Gisselle's Journey: A Reunion

The Board of Directors welcomed Gisselle Acevedo in April. Gisselle brings to the Board her deep connection with The Child & Family Guidance Center, her passion for social justice, and her life experiences and expertise that span North and Central America. It is a reunion in large part, since Gisselle's years as a clinical intern and

therapist with us from 2015-2018.

Recalling her clients at The Child & Family Guidance Center, Gisselle says, *"I still think about the children and families."* She reflects about how the issues these children have, *"makes you or breaks you as a therapist. No one can ever be the same."* Revering the resilience of children and adolescents

traumatized by intergenerational abuse, often living in poverty, and often challenged by cultural barriers like language, she says, *"in many ways, they were my teachers."*

She also credits the team - including several clinicians who are Gina LeVon-Simpson, Clinical Mental Health Counselor still at the Center today - for the kind of supportive

(Gisselle's Journey continues on page 2)



"The Center is a big and important place in Bridgeport - and the world...The children take with them what they've learned out into the community."

Gisselle's Journey...Continued

and scrupulous training they took the time to provide her.

Born in Costa Rica, Gisselle moved to California as a child with her mother and sister. As a Latina and daughter of a single mother, she experienced first-hand the linguistic and cultural challenges and traumas that families experience when immigrating to a new country. It was these early years that informed her life's work. *"It really mattered to me to be able to serve this community,"* she says.

Gisselle's mother worked hard as a key punch operator to raise both girls, and Gisselle credits her mother for the value she placed on education, making sure that the daughters completed high school, and post-secondary education too. Her mother graduated high school at 82.

Going on to earn three graduate degrees in Special Education, Law, and Marriage and Family Therapy, Gisselle has devoted her life to

the mental health and education of children, whether in direct one-to-one care roles, or at advocacy, executive leadership, public affairs, and corporate philanthropic levels.

Gisselle began her career as a teacher and when she saw how the system was failing to meet her students' needs, she returned to school for a Law Degree and advocate for children with differing abilities. From that point, she entered leadership in the larger system: paving the way in Los Angeles for new schools, early childhood education centers, mental health and social services for thousands of children. She then continued to raise awareness and philanthropic efforts in corporate leadership roles at The Los Angeles Times, AT&T Broadband and the Los Angeles MTA. When Gisselle and her wife moved to Connecticut in the early 2000s, it was a chance for Gisselle to look at the next chapter in her career.

"I really wanted to work individually with families," she says. After matriculating into the Master of Marriage and Family Therapy program at Fairfield University Gisselle began her journey with The Child & Family Guidance Center. She is now in private practice as a therapist, and thrilled to be circling back in her journey to The Child & Family Guidance Center as a member of the Board of Directors. Her interests and goals while on the Board include governance, development, diversity and equity. *"The Center is a big and important place in Bridgeport - and the world,"* Gisselle says. *"The children take with them what they've learned out into the community."*



Board Member Gisselle Acevedo: Therapist, Lawyer and Educator

Stories from Our Community

Journey into Philanthropy: Jeff

During this pandemic, we've been so grateful for the thousands of masks donated by Jeff Weber who recently shared his journey into local and global philanthropy; and his crusade to ensure children, families and essential workers have the masks they need to fight off transmission of COVID-19. It's a journey he's been sharing with his sons, Jeffrey and Jack - a family purpose that has been educational for them.

Before the pandemic, Jeff had been working in financial markets as a trader on his own, largely focused on issues that emanate in China. *"The day everything hit the papers I started trying to understand this in terms of the financial impact,"* he recalls. *"It was not entirely transparent about how it was going to affect the rest of the world but its impact on China alone was enough to impact supply chains."*

I was very closely following the reaction of the Chinese government...Very early on the Chinese, who have a surplus of masks and all the machinery, mandated that everyone wear these masks." Jeffrey describes the harsh penalties he was seeing China impose on those not wearing masks. As distressing to see that as it was, he says, *"It really ingrained in me - they really think there's something here. I then did some research into 1918 [the flu pandemic] and they were all wearing masks too!"*

Knowing it was a matter of time before COVID-19 hit the US, Jeff switched his business focus and had a philanthropic awakening of sorts. *"I was like, 'So how do I get these masks?' The kids and I the year before imported paper straws from China as part of a business test...just as an experiment."* Fortuitously,



"So I found The Child & Family Guidance Center because I was really concerned about the impacts within families and particularly with families that were already in stress..."

he received an email from the distributor saying they had shifted their production to masks. *"I started placing orders before the lock down started here."* When they arrived, he distributed them to local cities and towns, fire and police departments, and then expanded to organizations that provide essential services.

"So I found The Child & Family Guidance Center because I was really concerned about the impacts within families and particularly with families that were already in stress," he says. *"Because I knew the layoffs were coming. I knew the data from China had showed huge increases in domestic violence that has now been manifested here...and so I knew that if you took these situations that The Child & Family Guidance Center is dealing with and then you added a once a century stressor... I can't imagine*

(Jeff's Journey continues on page 4)

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at The Child & Family Guidance Center

A Q & A with Michael Patota, CEO/President



CG: In July, you and our Board of Directors formally resolved to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion at The Child & Family Guidance Center. What led you all to take this action?

MP: It's been a historic time of reckoning for our country with the Black Lives Matter demonstrations locally and across our nation that were ignited by recent and senseless killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Aubrey. Individuals and organizations in every sector have been called to take a close look at how we can do better to dismantle centuries of systemic racism. We needed to ask ourselves: 'How does our leadership reflect who we are and our mission?'

CG: What came out of those questions?

MP: Well, several actions. We take pride in our history of cultural and linguistically competent clinicians and diverse staff who care for our families. We help families overcome barriers to mental healthcare because of this. But we have to ask, how can we

do this better? One answer is in making sure we have consistent diversity across our Board. We know that to achieve the highest levels of care, we need to include the voices of the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Color] community at our highest levels of leadership. It's ultimately about the children and families we serve. It's about their future, their safety, their promise, their intrinsic value.

CG: What's the first step?

MP: Well, we have room for up to 30 directors on our Board and we now have 13 members. Our resolution on July 15 is to increase and diversify this year. Every Board Member is actively searching for new candidates who will reflect the racial and ethnic diversity in Greater Bridgeport and Fairfield County.



Jeff's Journey...Continued

what it's like...so when I got that second call from you I was like, "Take whatever you can."

Jeff hopes that others can do their part too.

"If there's ever a time to be charitable, it's right now. Now

you have a situation where every single day for so many people, it's like 'Oh my God, how am I going to eat? How am I going to live?' During normal times this exists, but now there's so much less hope for them, there's so much less opportunity.

A dollar now, a mask now, anything right now will mean so much more than it would have meant before the pandemic. And that was really what inspired me. This is what I was waiting for! People actually need help...right now."

Gina's Journey...Continued

Gina goes on to explain how this really helps to engage with parents and caregivers and best talk about their child's development. Her work so far has been primarily with children who are survivors of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Their caregivers may be foster parents; or the single parent who was victimized and needs healing

from trauma too.

Because children are still nonverbal or newly verbal, CPP takes time, up to about a year. Gina says, *"It's about engagement and observation... and to be able to embrace the caregiver and let them know what we see, and help with the process of healing. Ah, they realize. This child is crying and they cry every time I drop the keys*

because the keys fell before the house fire - and that's the last thing they remember."

Since CFGC migrated to telehealth and video conferencing in March, Gina has had to be especially creative, pulling out her creative talents in storytelling such with puppets and music. *"It's a learning process for everyone and we're all in this together."*

Rock Garden

This summer our Mobile Crisis Intervention Team brightened up the front of our main building by adding beautifully painted rocks with inspirational messages to share. What activities have you been doing to care for yourself and others during the pandemic?



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Stay Tuned for more updates at:
<http://cfguidance.com/contact-2/>
Give Today for a Better Tomorrow:
<http://cfguidance.com/support/>

Mark Your Calendars:

Our 3rd Annual World Mental Health Day campaign is just around the corner on **October 10th**. Go to <https://cfgc.salsalabs.org/mentalhealthday2020> to be a peer to peer mental health advocate, or to simply support and celebrate our advocates.



Thanks to our Supporters!

Generous individuals and organizations like The Fairfield County's Community Foundation and Near & Far Aid made it possible for us to continue our services through telehealth and videoconferencing technology. As we plan a safe re-opening at our central offices and in-person sessions, your help is greatly appreciated.

