

News from the Village



Thankfully, I found programs and people at CV who are helping me. My mentor has been an amazing role model.

Navigating the Foster Care System: Mentors Make the Difference

When he was 16 years old, Lonell came to live at The Children's Village in residential foster care. With the guidance of his program mentor Robin, Lonell left CV and successfully transitioned to an apartment in Brooklyn.

“I was able to obtain my high school diploma the same month that I aged out of foster care.”

Unfortunately, not all teens get the support that Lonell did. Statistics show that up to half of teens who age out of foster care without continued support do not finish high school, are chronically unemployed, and/or have no stable place to live.

Aftercare mentors at CV help young people like Lonell enter the workforce, save money, and transition back to the community.

Lonell recently wrote about the role his mentor played in his life:

“With the support of Children's Village, I was able to obtain my high school diploma the same month that I aged out of foster care. But when I went out on my own, I still had a lot of difficulty. Now I am 23, and I continue to struggle with housing and depend on my mentor to this day. Through CV I have the services and the people I need. My mentor Robin has been an amazing role model – but not everyone has the support I do.”

Thanks to young people like Lonell, who were willing to share this lived experience, and the tireless work of the Fair Futures Coalition -- a group of child welfare agencies, non-profits, foundations, and advocates -- NYC has added \$10 million to this year's budget to expand mentoring and support services for youth in foster care.

Today, Lonell is interning at Children's Village, and was selected to participate in the New School's Summer Youth Initiative. He is using both to hone his professional skills to achieve his goal: giving back by working as a mentor to kids in the foster care system.

Effecting Change: Dr. Kohomban Recognized for His Impact On the Foster Care System

Dr. Jeremy Kohomban was recently ranked number 3 on the “2019 Nonprofit Power 100 List: The Top Figures Making a Difference for the Most Vulnerable New Yorkers” by *City & State* magazine.

“Foster care is undergoing radical changes nationwide, and Jeremy Kohomban has played a key role in these efforts as an early backer of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act that will transform the foster care system to facilitate family unification. His advocacy on behalf of the law was informed by his experience as head of The Children's Village.”



Siblings Joyfully Reunited

This past month was a very special one for the Ferguson family. They officially adopted two children, David and Jeremiah. This wasn't your typical adoption – in fact it was a beautiful moment of family reunification.

Almost five years ago, the Fergusons adopted David and Jeremiah's three older sisters. The Fergusons continued to visit with David and Jeremiah, and did their best to keep the siblings close and in regular contact. Still, each time they had to separate, the look on their faces would crush the Fergusons' hearts. They always wanted to be able to adopt the entire family, and finally it happened.

Two days before Thanksgiving last year, a social worker called and asked if the Fergusons could adopt David and Jeremiah. Mrs. Ferguson practically jumped through the phone to say yes. David and Jeremiah were just as excited. When they came to the Fergusons' home they jumped up on Mrs. Ferguson and screamed "mommy!", and then immediately ran over to hug their older

siblings. Last month the adoption became official, and a beautiful family of seven was created!

"I wanted to at least let them have each other. If we can keep these siblings together that's what we need to do. I don't know why they were separated or why we can adopt them now, but I just tell them that they are in their forever home now and we love them. They are amazing children: resilient, bright, friendly, beautiful inside and out."

The next step for Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson is moving to a bigger house with a yard. After that, they hope to open their home as a short-term placement for foster youth. They are well aware of the high number of youth awaiting adoption, and want to make whatever difference they can.

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Credible Messengers: Learning Best from Each Other

When Brenneis Nesbitt heard the judge's sentence that he would be incarcerated for up to 17 years, he couldn't imagine that one day he would be applying to law school and sharing his life story as a mentor to youth who needed guidance to avoid the criminal justice system.

At age 30, Brenneis entered federal prison with no role model and no idea how to turn his life around. He felt his public defender wasn't representing him properly, and suddenly had a thought, "I can do this better than him!" His hard work paid off when Brenneis was finally released on probation at age 42 with a Paralegal Diploma and an Associate's Degree. With the help of prisoner reentry groups, he is now a John Jay graduate and applying to law schools.



Brenneis is one of CV's Credible Messengers: people who have been in foster care, overcome substance abuse, have been incarcerated, or who are members of the same community as the young people we serve today. These Credible Messengers are effective mentors as they have struggled with some of the same situations our youth are currently facing, and are able to provide stability and offer guidance. Without seeming judgmental, they can guide youth to make better decisions and explore constructive outlets that may not have been discovered previously. Credible Messengers are a key component of CV's strategy to keep teens and young adults off the streets, compliant with probation, and out of the criminal justice system. Why does it work so well?

"I'm relatable. I let these kids know how I was on the streets in high school, how I spent a huge chunk of my life in prison. That I'm a felon who got out of prison less than 3 years ago and now I'm about to start law school. They become fixated on what I have to say."

For Brenneis, it's now all about sharing his experience to give kids the type of help he wishes he had growing up. He talks enthusiastically about the young people he works with, and how every single one of them has potential. He sometimes has to get creative about how to motivate youth who are going through difficult moments, but that's the part he enjoys most.

"It's no 9 to 5 here. I have people calling me at all hours of the night checking in or asking for advice. But that's how I want it. It's rewarding and it's something I'll definitely continue while I pursue my law degree."

Thanks to credible messengers like Brenneis, transformative mentoring programs at CV are proud to report that in the past year 92% of youth were compliant with probation, and 96% avoided re-arrest.

The Holidays Are a Special Time at The Children's Village

The holiday season can be a difficult time for all of us, but even more so for the youth in our care. While many return to family, others remain on our campus, and it can be hard not to feel lonely. But thanks to the amazing generosity – and creativity – of our donors and volunteers, the children have wonderful gifts to open, parties to attend, and events and trips to look forward to. Some of our larger events from previous years are highlighted below, but there are so many more ways to support our young people and families! It truly takes a village to make the holiday season at CV special and unique.



Residential Campus Holiday Party

Originally started by CV volunteer Jessica Ianelli, the Dobbs Ferry campus holiday party, sponsored by Prestige Consumer Healthcare, is a favorite for our youth – especially the youngsters. This event is always so engaging and fun, including activities like holiday movie watching, bingo, dancing, and of course the famous gingerbread contest!

Sponsoring A Cottage for the Season

Pure Insurance sponsors a cottage every year, fulfilling the children's gift wish lists and throwing a holiday party that reminds us what the season is all about. Cottages at CV house between 10-15 children, and thanks to Pure Insurance, last year the boys in Johnson cottage received ALL of their wish list items. The company went above and beyond though, and provided the cottage with a brand new television and a ping pong table. When groups like Pure show such kindness and generosity, it completely transforms the holiday season.



Adoption, Foster, and Birth Families Celebrate Together

When CV's Adoption and Foster Care Division was looking to throw a holiday party last year, they needed a space large enough to accommodate all the children and families who would be celebrating together. The Chairwoman of Temple Emanu-El's Tikkun Olam Committee simply said: "Have it here, as our guests." Everyone had such a good time at the party last year that it will be held at the Temple again this year, and amazingly, the Temple has generously offered to act as host and sponsor!

Thanks to all of our generous donors and volunteers, there are plenty of smiles to go around this holiday season!

There are so many ways to make a difference for our youth and families during the holidays, and throughout the year. You can **organize a gift drive** with friends and family – where you can use our Amazon wish lists to keep everything simple and organized. You can **adopt a cottage or program**, donating gifts or throwing a party or dinner for a larger group. You can send actual items to our **"Gifts for Giving" drive**, so that our youth have something to bring home and give to their families. And you can **donate gift cards** for the movies, restaurants, and teen clothing stores.

To learn more about our volunteer and giving opportunities for the holidays and throughout the year, contact our Director of Volunteer Services, Amy DelliPaoli, at adellipaoli@childrensvillage.org.

If you would like to add CV to your giving tradition, fill out and return the form below with the enclosed envelope.



I want to give
holiday cheer
to children and
families in need!

Make your donation go twice as far. Please check to see if your company offers a matching gift program.

Donate securely online at: childrensvillage.org/donate

Enclosed is my gift of: \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

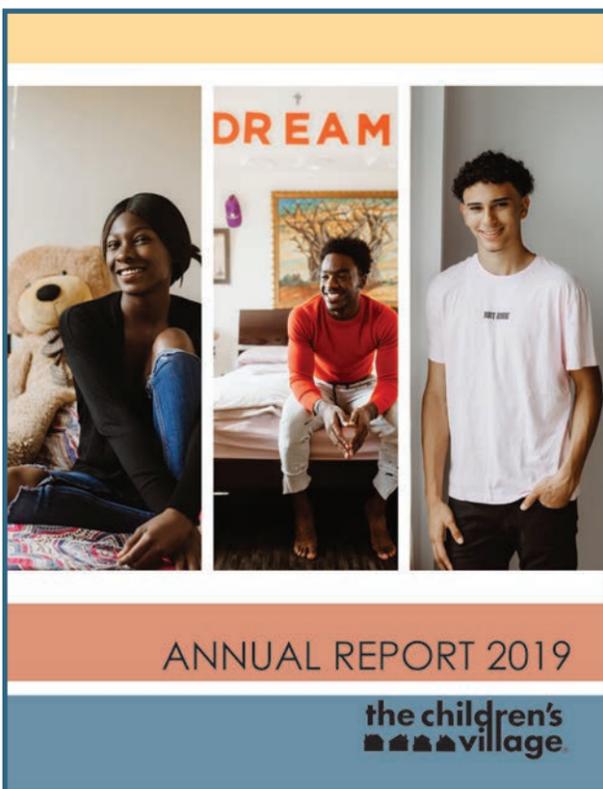
Please make checks payable to: The Children's Village
Credit card: AmEx Visa MasterCard Discover

number _____

exp. date _____

CVV _____

To volunteer, donate, or get involved, visit our website at www.childrensvillage.org, or follow us on social media @ChildrensVllg.

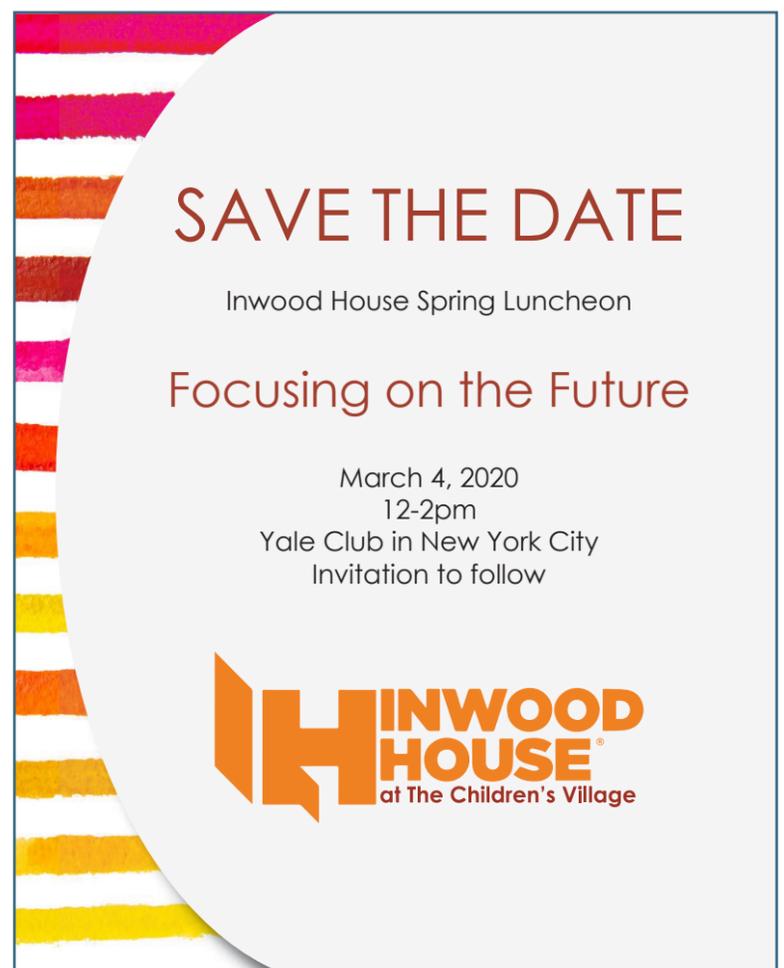


You made a difference!

Your support is critical to our work. While most of our funding comes from the government, you make additional support services and innovation possible.

You can read the annual report online at

childrensvillage.org/annualreport



The Best Costume Party in Westchester!

Our volunteer-run Masquerade Gala is always a boisterous good time, a celebration of costumes and creativity that keeps party goers coming back year after year. But it has an important purpose: helping homeless teens in Westchester County. This year the event raised approximately \$80,000 (with only \$4,000 in expenses)!

Our generous and energetic event committee pours their heart and soul into the event. They understand that the money they raise is helping get kids off the streets, so they make sure just about everything is donated,

and goes directly to help teens or support programs. We're so grateful to sponsors Mt. Carmel Pharmacy and Armand and Janice Paganelli, to Silvio's Italian Restaurant for donating all of the delicious food, to Roger and Joanne Paganelli for providing spirits, to Timko and Moses for their donation of beer and wine, and to TNT Dynamite and DJ Curtis Winchester for providing the music that kept us dancing 'til midnight.

A huge thank you to everyone who made this party a success!