

NCHC @ Smilow Life Center

2 years of care in South Norwalk

It's been almost two years since Norwalk Community Health Center (NCHC) opened a new health center at Open Doors' Smilow Life Center, and in that time they have been focused on meeting the needs of the community with on-site and telehealth care.

The health and wellness services they offer at the Smilow Life Center include Pediatrics, Adult Medicine, Women's Health, Behavioral Health, and Chronic Care Management for ongoing needs like asthma and heart health.

Michele Conderino, Executive Director of Open Doors, has seen the incredible impact that this partnership has made. "Since opening their doors, NCHC has served thousands of Norwalk residents and has been a valuable partner to us and those we serve."

NCHC partners with Open Doors and other community-based organizations to break down barriers to health and wellness care and to lead the community and all who live and work here to achieving its best health. Their services are available to anyone who needs them, regardless of status or ability to pay.

Joseph E. Mann, Chairman, Norwalk Community Health Center, Inc, said that "Norwalk Community Health Center is certainly grateful for the partnership that we have with Open Doors and the Smilow Life Center. The opportunity to have our medical services and behavioral care available at that site is beneficial to residents of Norwalk that reside in the area, and it is a particularly important resource for people who have had to deal with homelessness and poverty, and who may have mobility and transportation issues, to be able to obtain medical care in a setting close to where they live. Our beginnings were not far from where the Smilow Life Center is located, and we well know some of the challenges experienced by residents of the area in obtaining



accessible health services. We are grateful for the foresight on the part of Open Doors to have made the Smilow Life Center a priority and their vision of bringing comprehensive services to the neighborhood. We are proud to have been able to make the Smilow Life Center our first satellite facility and will continue to work toward expanding our own services to meet the needs of residents throughout the Greater Norwalk area."

NCHC is accepting new patients and can be reached at 203-851-1004 or www.norwalkchc.org

Program Spotlight: The Community Closet at Open Doors



For many years, Open Doors has provided clothing to the community and to shelter guests. Sometimes clothing racks were set up in a temporary or borrowed space. When there was no dedicated space available, staff and volunteers would hold seasonal pop-up events to get clothing out to people who needed it.

That all changed in 2018 when one of our incredible board members, Melora Johnson, helped transform a space on the ground floor of Open Doors' Smilow Life Center into a community closet.

Open Doors' Community Closet is a 'free store' where people in need can shop for seasonal clothing, shoes, and household necessities like linens and kitchen items. Everything in the community closet is donated by our neighbors in order to provide quality wardrobes and goods for low-income households.

Its purpose is to provide clients with a dignified shopping experience by offering clean, seasonal, current and stylish items and by treating everyone with respect and kindness.

Volunteers and donors make the community closet a welcoming place for shoppers. We are grateful to have a team of volunteers who work hard to keep the place not only running, but keep it inviting and organized and functional. Special thanks to Chip, Maria, Shelly, Natalia, Cindy and others who have consistently shown up week after week, month after month and exhibited a level of commitment that is exemplary.

We're always looking for people to join the incredible community closet team! Volunteers assist shoppers as they're selecting items or sort donations from the community and restock the clothing racks. There is a particular need for volunteers who speak Spanish or Haitian Creole, from basic skills to fluent speakers.

Regular community closet donation hours are the last

Tuesday of every month from 1pm to 3pm. We also work with groups to coordinate donation drives for most-needed items, and we love to make connections with retailers who may have items to donate!



Volunteer with Open Doors! See new ways to serve and sign up at opendoorsct.galaxydigital.com or contact us for more information.

Gala & Auction 2022 - Thank You!

On April 28, Open Doors celebrated our first in-person Gala since 2019. It was wonderful to see new friends and longtime supporters gather to help ensure that everyone in our community has a safe and stable place to call home.



This year's Village Luminary Award recipient, Harsha Bethi, has used his resources as the owner of Norwalk's Beverage King to hold donation drives and spread awareness of the support that Open Doors provides. When he saw how people were struggling through the pandemic, he knew he wanted to make a difference.

"Growing up, we didn't have much," Harsha said in his remarks. "However, with hard work and the support of our community, my parents purchased their very first business back in 2010. We stand on the shoulders of the folks that lent us a hand all those years back. As such, as an adult it is one of my life's priorities to do what I can and to lend a hand to those in need."



A Message from our Executive Director: Partnerships at Open Doors

Dear community, what a year it has been!

Although COVID variants and rising inflation have darkened the first half of the year, Open Doors is looking with continuing hope on the future of our organization and the community we serve. In the last year, we have expanded our services in order to provide lasting impact to this community, and we are working to continue to enrich our initiatives to ensure the success of the greater Norwalk area.

We are tackling complicated, systemic issues to help create long-term systemic change. Thankfully we do not have to do this work alone. Here at Open Doors, we are committed to maximizing our impact by creating strategic partnerships with other community organizations, area experts, and local community members.

Through this strategy we have brought healthcare, tax preparation, employment services, English as a Second Language, and financial literacy to our community members.

As we continue to move forward as an organization, we will continue to build relationships, offer space, and connect those we serve to a variety of opportunities that will help stabilize their housing, grow their financial wealth, and see an end of homeless for the greater Norwalk area.

Thank you for all of your partnership over the last several years. We would not be the organization we are or have the impacts we do without all of you.

If you have an area of expertise that might be a good match for Open Doors, please reach out to see how we might be able to work together!

Wishing you a wonderful summer,

Michele Conderino
Executive Director

Extraordinary Year for Feeding 500 Students

As another school year ends, we wanted to celebrate the incredible volunteer work that local students have done to help Open Doors make an impact in our community!

New Canaan High School student Oliver Tuff launched the student-led charitable group in 2021 to work towards ending homelessness and poverty in Fairfield County through fundraising and community service while encouraging leadership and generosity in high schoolers.

Oliver and his team are ending the school year strong and making plans for the summer months. "Feeding 500 New Canaan has been busy the last few weeks with their annual appeal and reaching out to the community for support. We were recently featured on News 12 and we look to continue spreading the word about our program in New Canaan. This summer, we're looking to continue expanding into new towns and ensuring the continued success of the program as a whole."



Members of Feeding 500 hold a donation drive

Just a year and a half after Feeding 500 began, more than 80 high school students have joined to create chapters in three towns. Together, their combined food drives, fundraisers, and volunteer hours have been able to provide more than 19,000 meals for our neighbors who come to Open Doors' grocery pantry and kitchen.

Lucy Brennan, the president of the Darien chapter of Feeding 500, is proud of the work that her team has done.



Lucy Brennan receiving her Outstanding Emerging Volunteer award from the Community Fund of Darien.

"The chapter of Feeding 500 Darien has made great progress after their first year. Working to fundraise and hold food drives has fostered a sense of team work in our Feeding 500 community and has allowed us to grow leadership, collaborative, and interpersonal skills. Feeding 500 Darien is finishing their first year strong by working together to throw local fundraisers at town wide events, food drives at the grocery store and their high school, and educate Darien about Feeding 500's mission. We are excited for the year to come and look forward to your support."

Wilton also launched a Feeding 500 team during this school year under the leadership of WHS student Tanner Schmauch. "Feeding 500 Wilton has just finished a bake sale at Orem's Diner and the community was so supportive! Currently, we are working on setting up a food drive at our local grocery store Village Market sometime in early June and are beginning the planning process of a 5k Turkey Trot in November. Our group of 8 members (and counting!) is super excited for the future of Feeding 500 and the future of Open Doors."