

Proposal: Community Centers offering free and accessible health and wellness services

In the last few years New Yorkers have faced many severe issues including the COVID Pandemic, systemic racism, climate change, and political division. Many face a lack of affordable housing, crime, and food insecurity. Recently the threat of world war and the recent subway shooting have added to feelings of living in a dangerous world.

Background: As a psychologist at H+H for the past 22 years, I have seen my patients face huge struggles all of which increase stress and stress related chronic medical and psychiatric illness. While I can't address all of these issues head on, I have tried to consider ways to increase our resilience and coping and to reduce the impact of stress on our health. I run the Gouverneur Healthy Lifestyle Program. We offer classes including yoga, Qi Gong, Healthy Cooking, meditation and arts and creativity for adults, children, and families. In response to COVID we moved from in-person to classes on ZOOM. As expected, we have found that members benefit from the content of the classes. However, we found that they also benefited from the structure, having something to look forward to each week, and the community, seeing the same people and feeling a sense of caring for each other and being in it together. I have received many moving letters telling me what a difference these classes have made in their lives. We offer the classes to anyone, free of charge. Staff, patients, or community members, even if they do not attend Gouverneur.

The difference between the classes in the Healthy Lifestyle Program and say a senior center or community center, is that our classes are healing based. Most of the classes are run by psychology externs and teachers of healing arts. In many cases having these classes can work preventively, or to reverse chronic illness. At the same time, we can also assess when someone needs higher care and connect them. One problem I have seen working in H+H is that we are always playing catch-up, and never have a chance to work preventatively. If we provide early intervention and prevention we can improve lives and also save millions of dollars in health care costs down the road.

Proposal: I would like to expand the Healthy Lifestyle Program as we slowly return to in-person format. My ideal is to have mind-body treatment centers throughout the city where we offer classes as well as social services and links to medical and mental health care. We would create free and accessible health and wellness services that meet the needs of underserved and at-risk populations. I envision multigenerational members where teens, children, adults, and seniors can find their own interests and also interact in classes. Each location should have participation of local residents to decide the types of classes they would like. Hopefully youth and adults can be trained to teach classes as well, providing meaningful jobs. Examples of classes include, yoga, Qi-Gong, Arts and Crafts, Music, Meditation, Horticulture, Pottery, Dance, Acupuncture, Massage, and a teaching kitchen with cooking classes and nutritional information. Classes can be offered in several languages to meet the needs of the members.

Finally, on a personal note, I have been living with ulcerative colitis for many years. I have found that diet and practices such as yoga and Qi Gong as well as engaging in arts and community, have helped me in managing my symptoms and I want to pass this on to others.