

Health and Mental Health Committee Report January 13, 2022

Presentations included two organizations seeking support for outpatient drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services in Sunset Park. During our 2021 board meetings, we have heard of the increase in numbers of people in our area that show signs of alcohol and prescription drugs and opioid abuse, many of them homeless. There is no denial of the need to get these people treatment and to avoid the number of overdoses in our area.

Monika Siergiej, who is a Registered Nurse, employed at NYU Langone, Brooklyn, presented on her agency, Under Angel's Wings, who proposes to open an outpatient drug and alcohol recovery center at 4802 5th Avenue, 4th floor. Ms. Siergiej is seeking OASAS accreditation and community acknowledgement and feedback from CB7, and to increase access to rehabilitation services using holistic and multi-faceted approaches (group, individual counseling, and medication management), and referrals to services that they do not provide. At this point they are seeking the right location for their services.

Her presentation included information on the facility, types of outpatient services to be provided, benefits to the community, and why she seeks to provide the services in Sunset Park. She also spoke of her experience over her many years as an emergency room nurse in Sunset Park.

Discussion:

Members of the board and the public questioned Ms. Siergiej about the history of her organization, what certifications she had, any other community affiliations, how many people she sought to serve, where her referrals were coming from, who the professionals are who will be staffing the agency, how long the treatment will last, and will seniors be served?

Ms. Siergiej responded that the agency was incorporated in May 2021, they have no other affiliations, and no accreditations yet. At this point, they are seeking support for their state accreditation from OASAS. She hopes to serve 40 clients per day. She will have a board-certified physician, a nurse and substance abuse trained counselors. Treatment will involve individual, group and family counseling in various modalities, as well as medication management, if needed. The population will be adults, anyone over the age of 18, and any family members in crisis or seeking help.

Several board and community members expressed concern over the proposed location site for the agency, (potential loitering at the site by clients, the impact to the businesses and families in the area, and the potential increase in crime). Other concerns included the agency being converted into a center where drug use will be allowed, and Sunset Park becoming saturated with such programs. Also, that the location is not ADA accessible, as it does not have elevator service.

Ms. Siergiej acknowledged the concerns raised by the community and stated that there will not be any conversion to on site drug use. Clients may take their first dose of medication on site under the supervision of the physician, but they will be given a prescription to fill if they wish to continue with the medication. She reiterated that she does not want to disrespect the community in any way and seeks for her services to improve the quality of life by providing help to people

seeking to get services in the area, as opposed to traveling outside for them. She is aware of another agency in the area that provides inpatient services to the same population. She thanked everyone for their input and stated that she is open to seeking another location that is ADA accessible within the district.

The second presenters are Connie Petony-Brown, Program Director of Genesis Detox of Brooklyn, formerly, Resource Beacon of Hope, located at 449 39th Street, are seeking a letter of support for their NYS OASAS application to provide outpatient services at their current location where they have been providing inpatient drug and alcohol detox services for the past 5 years. She is joined by her colleagues, Sam Benitez, CEO/Managing Partner and Edwin Benitez, who is also a partner of the organization. They have a wealth of information on their mission and treatment models on their website.

Discussion:

Members of the board and the public had the following questions and concerns for the presenters. Is the building ADA accessible, do they have any involvement with the schools in the area, who are the people they serve and where do they come from, when do they plan to open the outpatient unit, how will they help to keep Sunset Park proper safe, clean and welcoming, who else occupies the building, do they give methadone, what is their staffing, are they looking to expand to other locations in the neighborhood or the borough, do they hire from the community, how do they follow up after discharge, will they be adding additional floors to the facility, are we allowed to see the facility, and how do they address the homeless population they serve?

Ms. Petony-Brown gave a detailed and comprehensive history of her background, as did Edwin and Sam Benitez. Ms. Brown is a BFA with Advanced CASAC-G (specialty in gambling), and a credentialed prevention specialist. She has opened a 100-bed residential facility, overseen 6 outpatient centers before coming to Genesis. Ms. Brown began her career in Sunset Park and returned to open Genesis.

Mr. Edwin Benitez and his brother Sam have been Sunset Park residents since 1975. Their parents are property and business owners in Sunset Park. Edwin was a member of the NYPD for more than 30 years, 25 of those were in the narcotics division, and saw the scourge of narcotics in the community firsthand. Sam owns a construction business in Sunset Park for 32 years. The family has not had any complaints of the site and works together with the 72nd Pct.

Ms. Brown reported that Genesis currently operates under the New York Office of Addiction support and Services (OASAS). They also are accredited by the Joint Commission (formerly known as JACHO). They currently have 35 outpatient beds in the facility that operate 24 hours per day. The staff consists of the Medical Director, 2 Nurse Practitioners (one specializing in psychiatry), 5 RNs, 1 LPN, certified Social Workers, and 6 CASACS. In all they employ 50 people. Others include administrative, clerical support and maintenance staff. No other agency occupies space in the building, and they do not plan any expansion on that site or to other locations.

They have served 5107 patients since opening in 2017 (2411 from Kings County and 528 from within walking distance). All patients are picked up by their driver personnel, and when they leave, they are provided transportation to home or the next residential rehab facility. While waiting for transportation, an aide monitors them to assure they do not wander from the building. Over the years, they have been asked by their patients why they do not have outpatient services so that they do not have to be referred out. Under state law, they are allowed to treat a family member experiencing problems with coping.

They have collaborated with professionals at NYU Langone Brooklyn treating people in the emergency room who are referring people for detox. They also have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sunset Terrace Family Health Center for the past 5 years. They have been involved with Lutheran Medical Center's resident program who received training from their staff to understand addiction.

The outpatient program will be located on the 4th floor of their current building. The planned hours of operation will be Monday through Friday from 9-5 pm, with some evening hours and Saturdays from 10- 3 pm, to accommodate working people for group therapy and peer recovery services. The Medical Director will oversee the medication management and maintenance. Prescriptions to patients will be limited to a 7-day supply to avoid subversion.

Ms. Brown stated that 97% of their website ratings show patients as having been treated with positive regard and respect.

Ms. Brown and Mr. Benitez reported that the building is ADA accessible (two elevators, one used to transport patients). The organization has provided prevention trainings at the local school to students. They hope to open the outpatient program this summer if they successfully complete the OASAS process. They will not be giving methadone on an outpatient basis. Ms. Brown states that they do employ community people and are seeking additional staff for the outpatient program. Homeless people are discharged to residential treatment centers such as Samaritan Village and Phoenix House if they choose to go. Their homeless population is small. High risk homeless people are flagged and reported to their case managers and the ACT Team. Most are released to their home and every effort is made to involve the family during their treatment. All are monitored upon leaving and loitering in the area or in the park is discouraged. Ms. Brown stated that where they are aware of a domestic violence case is inpatient, they make sure that the perpetrator is not onsite. She also stated that because of Covid-19, no one is allowed into the building. Also, they do not want to compromise patient confidentiality.

Motion: Provide a letter of support to Genesis Detox of Brooklyn for their NYS OASAS application for an outpatient drug and alcohol program to be located at 449 39 Street, Brooklyn, NY 11220. The motion was made by Cynthia Gonzalez and seconded by Joan Botti. Members voted 5 in favor, 0 opposed and 0 abstentions. The motion carried.