

## Hope For Youth Launches First-of-Its-Kind Program for At-Risk Youth Who Have Not Responded Well to Traditional Treatment

April 23, 2023 – Hope For Youth (HFY), a provider of integrated, complex care for children, youth, and families on Long Island, has announced the inception of its Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team for youth in Suffolk County. HFY is the first organization in the nation to establish an ACT team specifically for young people. Suffolk Youth ACT addresses the mental health needs of children in the county who are at risk of entering, or who are returning home from, high-intensity facilities such as hospitals and residential treatment centers.

New York is the first state to enact youth ACT teams. On March 29, Governor Kathy Hochul announced that the state would award a total of \$21 million to 15 agencies that deliver services to individuals with severe mental health difficulties. HFY is the first of the approved organizations to implement a plan.

“When at-risk young people are suffering from hardships, it is imperative that families stay together,” said Governor Hochul. “In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York is leading the way in developing new and innovative ways to provide behavioral healthcare to vulnerable individuals. With the help of this new program, children across the state will have the opportunity to remain with their families and receive the services they need.”

In contrast to case-management programs that connect people to agencies or services, ACT helps individuals where they live. Researchers at Mendota State Hospital in Madison, WI, launched the model in the 1970s. Since then, it has been successfully used for adults with serious mental illness. According to a 2016 study, ACT reduced self-reported psychiatric symptoms, hospital stays, and emergency department visits among people with mental illness and substance abuse issues. The US Department of Veterans Affairs has implemented it across the nation.

Suffolk Youth ACT offers in-home, integrated care to children who are 10 to 21 years old and their families. It serves children who have demonstrated serious emotional disturbance and whose needs are not being met in more traditional settings. It aims to keep children out of restrictive, high-end facilities such as hospitals and in the comfortable environment of family. For children who have been in institutionalized settings, it facilitates their successful transitions back to the community.

Interdisciplinary teams provide psychiatric treatment, therapy, peer services, skills building, and vocational and educational

support. Each child receives an individualized treatment plan based on his or her strengths, needs, and desires. Children are able to attend school, and the program empowers families to ask the right questions and advocate for their kids. Professionals hold daily meetings on each child's progress and visit each family as needed. Help is available around the clock, with the teams able to triage emergencies via phone.

Suffolk Youth ACT can treat a maximum of 36 children at a given time. Referrals come through Children's Single Point of Access (CSPOA), a program of the New York State Department of Mental Health. Once a child is admitted, the team conducts a comprehensive assessment to identify the needs of the child and family.

“Suffolk County is pleased to be able to host the first Youth-Assertive Community Treatment Team in the State of New York,” remarked Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone. “As we strive to provide and improve access to behavioral health services for our residents, we embrace new opportunities and seek to lead by example. The unique structure of the ACT Team will provide a multidisciplinary team approach bringing mental health services to the youth and their families through a community/home-based model.”

Founded in 1969, HFY is dedicated to facilitating positive change in the lives of children, adolescents, and families. The organization provides residential care, foster care, preventive, and out-patient programs that educate, motivate, and empower individuals to become self-sufficient and achieve their full potential. With six residential facilities, 35 foster homes, and 165 staff members, HFY affects the lives of over 14,000 people annually.

“We are very grateful to New York State for funding our ACT team,” commented Dr. David Hegarty, HFY's Executive Director. “This groundbreaking program closes the gaps in existing mental health care for youth in Suffolk County. Transitioning from a residential treatment facility or hospital is often difficult. By involving the family in a holistic approach, Suffolk Youth ACT gives its recipients a greater chance at recovery and independent living than traditional modes of care. We are honored to be the first in the nation to create an ACT team. We hope that it will serve as a model for other organizations and other states as they develop their own teams.”

## CCE-Suffolk Marks Pride Month with a Unique Event at Its Farm Facility

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June 9, 2022 – In celebration of Pride Month in June, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County (CCE-Suffolk) will host Pride at the Farm on Friday, June 10, 2022, at the Suffolk County Farm and Education Center at 350 Yaphank Avenue. This free, family-oriented event will run from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm.

“One of our most important goals is to create an inclusive environment for our staff and community,” said Vanessa Pino Lockel, executive director of CCE-Suffolk. “Pride at the Farm is a creative, engaging way to meet that goal and to let our LGBTQ+ staff and community members know that we value their contributions to the organization and to the county. Our farm, a safe and welcoming space, is an ideal spot for our celebration of the freedom of love.”

The 220-acre working farm offers hands-on education about Long Island’s agricultural heritage while showcasing modern practices. Guests at the event will have the chance to visit with animals including llamas, horses, goats, pigs, and chickens. They will be able to tour the facility on the back of an open-air tractor wagon. Crafts, music, dancing, and rainbow-themed treats will round out the festivities.

The centerpiece of the day will be Drag Queen Story Hour, in which drag queens will read tales to kids. “Especially on eastern Long Island, there needs to be more events like this,” remarked Bella Noche, a drag queen who presented Story Hour last year. “We have a strong community and a strong group of allies, but we need greater representation, because the more events we have like this, the more we get to know each other, as Long Islanders.”

Representatives of Stony Brook Medicine will be on hand to provide educational resources to youth and adults.

Last year, Pride at the Farm drew approximately 350 people of all ages. Individuals, couples, and families enjoyed Story Hour and the hay ride, created jewelry and hair art with faux flowers and pipe cleaners, and painted a mural to memorialize the festival.

“I recently came out to my family at the beginning of the year,” noted Nikki Klang, who attended with members of her family, including her toddler nephew, in 2021. “I thought we could come by with my nephew and celebrate acceptance and equality all together—and make sure the younger generation knows it’s OK to be who you are.”

Affiliated with Cornell University, CCE-Suffolk is a non-profit community-education agency that serves Suffolk County with agriculture, marine, community-education, and 4-H Youth Development programs. The educators, researchers, specialists, and support personnel who constitute the organization are dedicated to making Suffolk County a desirable place to live and work. The organization’s DEIB (Diversity, Equality, Inclusivity, and Belonging) committee organized the event.

Pride at the Farm will be open to all. Visit <http://ccesuffolk.org/events/2022/06/10/pride-at-the-farm> for more information and to register. You may also contact Vicki Fleming, 4-H Youth Development Director / Farm Administrator, at [vjf4@cornell.edu](mailto:vjf4@cornell.edu) or 631-852-4602.