

Astor Services opens youth center

By Patrick Rocchio

Saturday, November 6, 2010 10:17 PM EDT

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BRONX *Times*
REPORTER INC.

Bronx Times-Reporter

Parents of children in Highbridge will now have increased options when it comes to finding mental health counseling that focuses on their child's strengths.

Astor Services for Children & Families recently celebrated the opening of the new children's mental health center, "Astor at Highbridge", at 1419 Shakespeare Avenue with a ribbon cutting. The center now offers an outpatient clinic for children and adolescents ages 2 to 21. The range of services offered includes counseling, case management, and psychiatric services.

Attending the ribbon cutting ceremony were leaders of Catholic Charities for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, Deputy Borough President Aurelia Greene,

Assemblywoman Vanessa Gibson, Democratic nominee for the 33rd senate district Gustavo Rivera, and Bronx Chamber of Commerce CEO and president Lenny Caro, as well as many other community leaders. Greene presented a proclamation from Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. celebrating the occasion. A representative from Councilwoman Helen Diane Foster's office was also in attendance. Also making remarks were board member Monsignor Kevin Sullivan and board chair Lawrence Weisberg.

"Astor is pleased to be able to join with other organizations in the Highbridge community to provide quality mental health services to children and their families," said Joan DiBlasi, assistant executive director for Bronx community-based programs for Astor.

DiBlasi said that the facility should be especially adept at performing "strength based assessments" with children 12 and under. She said that strength based assessments differ from other kinds of counseling because the focus is first and foremost on what is working well in a child's life and family, as well as dealing with areas of need.

Zory Wentt, program director, said that the limited resources of the Highbridge community often complicates matters when addressing mental health concerns with the children and their families.

She said that a lot of the children being referred to the clinic suffer from not having enough to do outside of school. She said that by partnering with schools and other organizations, this problem can oftentimes be solved.

One of the challenges that many parents in the Highbridge community face are living in shelters with their children, with at least 7 shelters open in the area, said Astor CEO and executive director James McGuirk. This can sometimes lead to disruptions or complications in the child receiving needed treatments.

As part of therapy sessions, parents will interact with their children while being videotaped in some instances. This is to help the therapists, parents, and children participating learn more about interacting successfully with one another, said McGuirk.

The clinic, which is located near P.S. 199 at Shakespeare Avenue and West 172nd Street, is a designated Child and Family plus provider.

This means that it provides mental health screenings for children at no cost to families. For additional information about Astor Services for Children & Families, visit them at astorservices.org or calling (718) 231-3400.

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