

The Bridge Opens West Hartford's New Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic for Children

Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF) has licensed The Bridge as West Hartford's second state-sanctioned OPCC, or Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic for Children.

The Bridge undertook DCF's rigorous year-and-a-half approval process to meet a dramatic increase in cases. "We've seen a 58 percent increase in referrals from last year alone," says Pat Doherty, Director of Youth and Family Services at The Bridge. The Bridge is hiring additional licensed therapists to meet the need.

Jill Hanson, the Clinical Director of Youth and Family Services, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and an Approved Supervisor through the Connecticut Association of Marriage and Family Therapists. "We have a multi-disciplinary team of social workers, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, and a child and adolescent psychiatrist. We have three bilingual Spanish therapists on staff as well," said Hanson.

Most Bridge referrals come through the West Hartford schools. Acting out at school, falling grades, or undue absences are sometimes early warning signs of underlying concerns. As a licensed OPCC, The Bridge can now offer in-depth evaluations and therapies for problems such as depression, anxiety, grief and loss, conflicted relationships, challenging family problems, and self-destructive behaviors. "Our therapy services emphasize building on strengths and finding practical solutions with children and adolescents as well as parents and families as a whole," said Doherty. "We balance competence and care."

The psychiatrist on staff is Dr. Alan Schmerler. His services are offered for children and adolescents—not adults—and only when the child or adolescent is otherwise engaged in therapy with a Bridge therapist. Dr. Schmerler was listed as a Top Doc in the April 2008 issue of *Connecticut Magazine*.

Not all problems people bring are severe. Many parents who come to The Bridge for counseling seek professional guidance on how to deal with common behavioral challenges such as discipline or coping with divorce.

As a designated OPCC, The Bridge can now accept health insurance payments for therapy and psychiatry services. Though the number of insurance plans currently accepted is limited, The Bridge will be accepting more in the next couple of months. As a nonprofit, The Bridge in turn will use the revenue from these insurance payments to help offset the cost of providing services to the uninsured. The Bridge Family Center believes in service to "*Every Family. Every Child. Every Time.*" No West Hartford resident will be turned away based on his or her ability to pay.

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