

## Santa Claus Brings Gifts to Children at the 36th Annual Christmas Celebration

For 36 years, Santa Claus has made an appearance at the Annual Children's Christmas Party. The afternoon of December 20, 2015 was no exception.

As parents, volunteers and some community members, including Hempstead Deputy Mayor Luis Figueroa, gathered around, Santa and Mrs. Claus handed out gifts to every child who attended Hispanic Counseling Center's special celebration at the Hempstead Methodist Church.

It appears that all 150 children had been on Santa's "nice" list, because the gifts—gender and age appropriate—made everyone squeal with delight. The children are all familiar faces in HCC's programs, as many attend after school and Respite programs.

Two groups of children performed beautiful Christmas dances that had been rehearsed in anticipation of Santa's visit. They wore lovely costumes that parents and volunteers had made for the occasion. In the audience were family, friends, HCC Board members, clients and donors.

Music and entertainment were in abundance. DJ Lil'Jay generously donated his D.J. skills. "Tamborcito" a clown-magician, who performs in Spanish, delighted adults and children alike with his entertainment—also graciously donated for the afternoon.

The celebration—with cake, delicious cookies donated by generous HCC staff and Board members, and toys galore—

### Message from Gladys

Dear All,

*As we close a busy, productive year, I would like to extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to all who have worked so hard to help the individuals and families in our community.*

*HCC is strong and relevant because of the people who come through our doors every day. I am proud of every staff member at HCC, as well as our many individual volunteers. Without you and your efforts, we would not be able to provide the extraordinary services that make a difference in the lives of so many.*

*I thank our Board of Directors who guides our mission and whose support is invaluable to me personally and to the organization as a whole.*

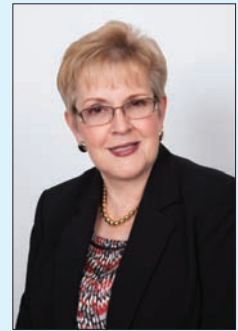
*Without the generosity of donors, businesses, and governmental entities that support HCC, we would not be able to serve our clients as we do. Thank you, one and all.*

*As we embark on 2016, join me in renewed strength and hope as we continue to enrich, improve and nurture the underserved populations who seek our services.*

*Happy Holidays!*

Sincerely,

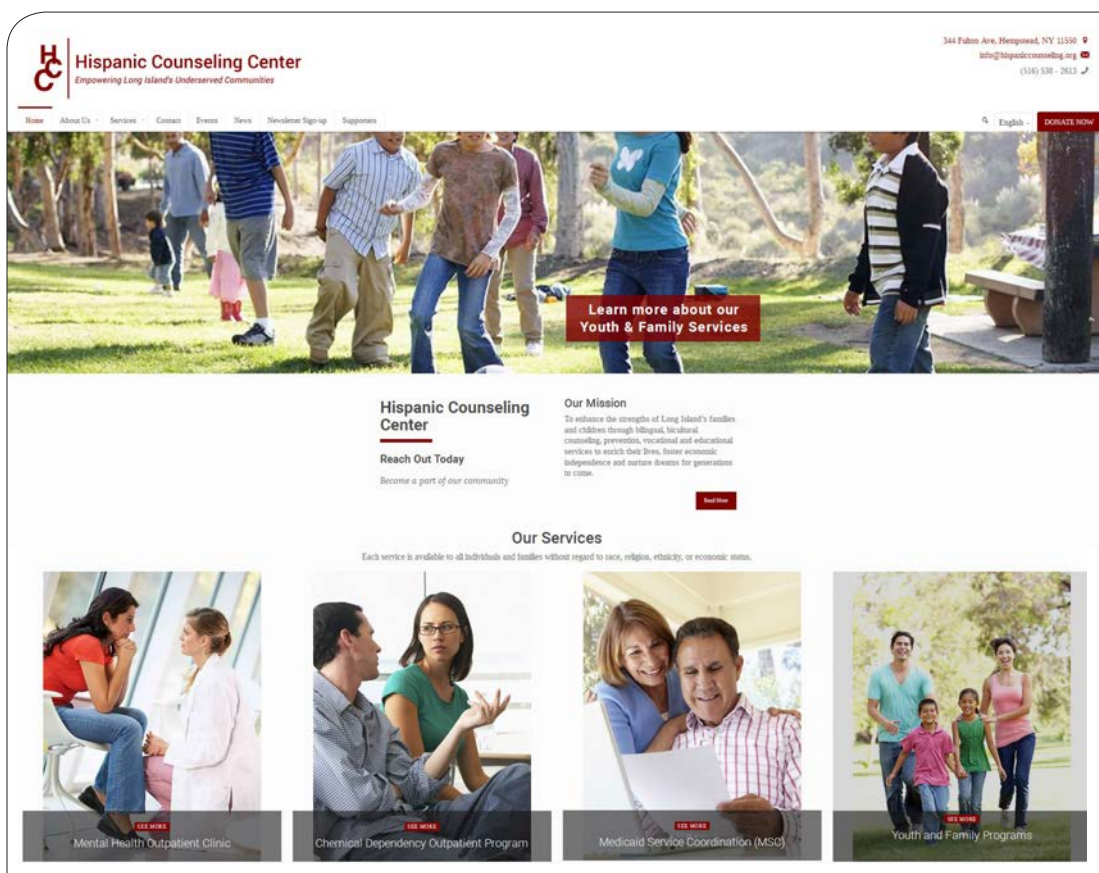
Gladys Serrano  
CEO, Hispanic Counseling Center



was made possible thanks to local businesses, churches, private donations and a host of volunteers. In fact, there were so many toys that 25 raffle tickets were sold for \$2 each—which meant that the children went home with even more than expected.

"We want to extend our thanks and gratitude to all who made the Annual Children's Christmas Party so successful," said Gladys Serrano, CEO, HCC. "It was a heartwarming afternoon as we spread holiday cheer to dozens of children who would otherwise not enjoy the season without such generosity."





## New and Improved Website Makes a December Debut

Faster. More colorful. Easier to navigate. Welcome to the newly designed HCC website!

In December 2015, the revamped HCC website made its debut. The aesthetic is clean and clear, with beautiful photos to enhance the content. The mission, services, news and events are easy to navigate. The "Donate Now" button is appropriately dynamic.

The design was created by Fat Guy Media, a Long Island-based web design and marketing agency.

Perhaps the best advice is to take a look yourself. Browse the website and discover easier functionality, enjoy its interactivity, stay informed with timely content.

## Domestic Violence Awareness Is Practiced Every Day of the Year at HCC

Domestic violence: It's real. It's often hidden. And awareness may be the first step in stopping it in its tracks.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, but the reality of domestic violence is something that HCC addresses throughout the year.

"We educate clients about domestic violence and run groups for perpetrators all year long," said America Ducena, LMSW, Chemical Dependency/Domestic Violence Coordinator. "We can't really prevent domestic violence, but we work to create awareness within the community on where to get help, and at HCC we hold programs for perpetrators."

Thanks to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which initiated the nationwide "awareness month" in 1981, the topic gets considerable national and local media attention. The message is reinforced by several entities, including Child Protective Services, court probation officers and agencies throughout Nassau County, that work together to promote awareness of the many resources available to help individuals and families.

For perpetrators who are referred to HCC by the court, HCC engages them in a 26-step program: "The Duluth Model." One such program is for those who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time the violence was committed; another program is for those who acted while sober.

Ms. Ducena confided that some populations and cultures may be at greater risk for domestic violence. Further, some families with a history of abuse have become accustomed to the notion that beating a wife or kids is okay.

"It is a challenge to change the belief that violence at home is okay," Ms. Ducena said. "It's an issue that is often hidden. It is serious and sooner or later it will come out."

HCC provides information about domestic violence at religious institutions, in libraries, at court houses and at health fairs. The literature about prevention and help is handed out to both men and women.

"They thank me," said Ms. Ducena, describing the responses she gets when telling individuals that there is help and hope for those who struggle with such issues.

## Respite Programs Are Good for Children and Parents Alike

*Respite = temporary rest time.*

For three hours once a week, children ages six to 18 can participate in a hands-on program that aims to help them improve their social skills, make friends and participate more fully in life. The Respite Program, which is free of charge, meets after school to give guidance to children with emotional or behavioral issues.

It also gives their parents a short break. While some parents use the time for food shopping, others take a breather from the pressures of dealing with a child's disability or behavioral situation. Many of the children who attend HCC's Respite Program suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or oppositional or defiant behavior.

"Respite helps out the whole family," Maria Evelyn Rodriguez, Respite Coordinator at

HCC, explained. "The three hours a week make a difference. We help. There's a stigma with mental health in general, and often people don't understand what to do to help their children."

Forty-five children attend HCC's Respite Program sessions that run throughout each week. Before a child joins a group, an HCC staff member spends an hour in the child's home as preparation for the activities. Recent group activities included window shopping at a local mall, going to Jones Beach to see a Christmas light display and giving a performance at HCC's Annual Children's Christmas Party.

HCC also has workshops for parents throughout the year.

Recently, for example, the 15th Annual Respite Training on November 14th drew

52 parents. HCC provided babysitting services, as well as lunch for the parents and children. HCC Therapist Maria Cardon gave a presentation on "The Three C's of Discipline: Constant, Constructive, Continual."

While the evaluations following the training indicated that it was "very worthwhile," perhaps the best evaluation came from an in-person visit from a former student.

Ms. Rodriguez described the visit from a man who is now in the U.S. Navy, who came to HCC's Respite Program at age 11, when his parents were going through a divorce.

"The program helped him navigate big changes in his life," Ms. Rodriguez said, adding that he stayed with the program until he was 18. "He came by to thank us."