Gilda’s Club Receives $100k Grant to Build New Teen Center

The First Center of its Kind in our Community to Provide Comprehensive Cancer Support to Teens

Each year at Gilda’s Club Westchester, we provide our support to over 3,000 individuals with cancer and their family members. Over the last few years, we've been deepening the support that we offer to meet the needs of teens who are impacted by cancer. Gilda’s Club is thrilled to announce that we recently received a $100,000 grant from Impact100, which will be used to create a new Teen Cancer Center — a much-needed resource in our community.

"Life as a teenager is challenging. When there is a cancer diagnosis in the family, it can be overwhelming, which can leave teens feeling isolated and alone," explains Dr. Melissa Lang, CEO of Gilda’s Club Westchester. “Our teen counseling and support groups help reduce stress and anxiety, and improve communication and coping skills while giving teens an opportunity to meet other teens who are experiencing cancer in their families. We needed an age-appropriate, welcoming and private space for teens where they can explore and express their feelings about cancer and grief. We are so excited to build our new Teen Center which will create a destination for teens in our community.”

Building on the success of our newly expanded teen programming, Gilda’s Club will transform existing unused outdoor deck space at our White Plains clubhouse into a 1,300 square foot Teen Cancer Center. Currently, teens and tweens are mixed with younger children ages 5-12. This current space combines all children, limiting what teens and tweens feel comfortable discussing. The new Center will include a computer lab and library, a comfortable place for teen and family counseling sessions. The Center will be large enough to hold teen workshops and coping skills training, as well as provide a place where teens feel comfortable to socialize with other teens.
I met Ken Goldberg last week for the first time. As I approached him in the lobby of Gilda’s Club Westchester, he greeted me with a warm, open smile and outstretched hand. Somehow, this meeting felt different than the many, many times I have met would-be members for the first time. There was an ease in Ken’s manner — a sense of belonging or familiarity that I don’t usually feel when I greet new individuals who come to Gilda’s Club to find support. As I reflect on this now, I imagine it is somewhat like a homecoming or returning for a high school reunion. Feelings arise, there is familiarity in the surroundings, and memories return, but there is also an acknowledgment that this chapter is in the past.

Ken is a former member of Gilda’s Club Westchester. He and his wife Nicole had been married for 37 years, lived in White Plains, worked together in the food business and created a culinary education company. Ken described how they worked at home, had one dog but no kids. “It worked well.” Nicole was “an exceptional entertainer, chef, and eBay shopper extraordinaire.” Nicole was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of breast cancer in the summer of 2012 and died in October of the same year. During that time, Ken describes that he “did it” — he was Nicole’s sole caregiver throughout her brief illness.

Ken had known about Gilda’s Club for years and decided to join one month after Nicole’s death. At that time, Gilda’s Club Westchester offered one bereavement support group that met every other week. Ken was advised that a new group would be starting shortly, and he would be able to join, giving him the unique opportunity of beginning with a network of friends that grew. It was a combination of social and group, but it was the common experience that was important.” Ken and his fellow group members met socially on a regular basis, celebrated events together and dined together. “They can’t know (about grief) if they haven’t experienced it,” he explained. This shared experience helps grieving individuals manage their emotions, as well as the practical day to day challenges of living life while grieving.

Throughout our conversation, Ken spoke comfortably and personally about navigating his life after Nicole. He has had two relationships in the past several years, but feels he is still “navigating how to talk about Nicole while on a date.” Ken describes, “I don’t want the person to feel that I cannot let go…. I am still coming to grips with how much to share.” It is common for those bereaved to search for the perfect balance of sharing while not overwhelming, being hopeful for the future, but honoring their memories. This is part of the process of grief — moving between restoration and loss.

On reflection, Ken has found meaning in his experience and a way to keep Nicole’s memory alive. “I think I’m a better partner now. You can never do too much.” He describes that her lasting gift to him was the gift of entertaining. Ken described Nicole’s beautiful collection of china and how he treasures it and thinks of her when he uses it — his tangible evidence that a part of Nicole will always be with him.

New and Noteworthy

Gilda’s Club Westchester, in partnership with the Bedford Playhouse, is pleased to announce a new Living with Cancer Support Group. The group provides an opportunity to share experiences with others and engage in discussions on cancer-related issues, explore emotional and social concerns and share wisdom and practical advice.

Debbie Vincent, LMSW and Clinical Support Manager, facilitates the Bedford Playhouse support group. “It’s significant that Gilda’s Club Westchester is able to offer a support group at the Bedford Playhouse so that people living with cancer in Northern Westchester can join with others who are on the same journey in a location close to their home. We are thrilled to be able to offer this group at such a beautiful location.”

The group meets twice per month, on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday from 10 am to 11:30 am. in the beautiful NYC&G Tasting Room at The Bedford Playhouse, 633 Old Post Road in Bedford, NY. Please call 914-644-8844 x133, or email dvincent@gildasclubwestchester.org for more information or to register. The support group is offered free of charge to anyone living with cancer.
Valued Volunteers: Shout out to Arnie & June

Gilda’s Club Westchester is fortunate to have a group of dedicated volunteers who help with many tasks around the clubhouse.

When someone walks through the Red Doors, they are warmly greeted by one of our reception volunteers.

Meet Gilda’s Club Westchester volunteer, Arnie — a retired marketing and advertising executive with a focus in the health, beauty and toy industry. Arnie is married to his “dream girl” June, and they have two adult children — one living in Brooklyn and the other in Salt Lake City. Arnie and June initially lived and worked in New York City, then in Berkeley and Los Angeles. In 1988, they happily moved back home to Westchester County, spending their leisure time in the city, taking advantage of its enormous breadth of culture. Arnie’s passions include family, friends, film-going, cultural pursuits, running, and volunteer work.

Arnie was introduced to Gilda’s Club Westchester about 5 years ago by June who is a longtime reception volunteer. He was retired, with a couple of days devoted to hospice work and elementary school tutoring, but felt that even more of his time could be spent doing “good work” and, most particularly, using his skills to the benefit of people facing serious health challenges. From what Arnie knew of Gilda’s Club Westchester through his wife and getting to know its staff, Gilda’s really fit the bill. Arnie feels that the work of Gilda’s Club represents a community dedicated to pursuing wellness for its members. It has been five years of working in an environment that fosters understanding, helpfulness and hopefulness. Arnie sees it every day. He is hopeful that he plays a small part in supporting our member’s well-being. Arnie states, “It is my privilege to be a volunteer at Gilda’s Club Westchester. Lucky me.” Lucky us! Thank you, Arnie and June, for being such wonderful, dedicated volunteers.

Calling All Campers! Gilda’s Club Westchester is pleased to announce the 2nd annual summer day camp, “I am a Superhero,” for kids affected by cancer.

Laura Moore, EdD, CHES, CCLS, Gilda’s Club Children, Teens and Families Director describes “We are so excited about offering a kids’ summer camp here at Gilda’s. The structure allows for more continuity — we can work on a theme one day and then pick it up the next day. This offers an accelerated opportunity to bond with the kids and for the kids to bond with each other.”

Campers in our previous 2018 session really enjoyed being active and were engaged in all of the different programs that were offered each day. “The kids were pleasantly surprised at what they liked — cooking, for example. I don’t assume what activity is going to be popular. We tried to offer a variety of activities which afforded different outlets for expression.” Laura offered.

This year’s camp theme, “I am a Superhero,” was suggested by a former camp participant, Danny. Laura describes, “This is a great theme for our campers. It’s a natural fit for these kids, as they are superheroes every day and are also surrounded by superheroes — their families, doctors, nurses, etc. Plus, they all like playing superheroes!”

Camp activities will include making a superhero costume, writing their own superhero story, and cooking superfoods for super heroes. Laura even hinted that the popular scavenger hunt and snack opener might return!

Camp will be held at the clubhouse August 12-August 15, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. Please contact Gilda’s Club to register - 914-644-8844 x104 or lmoore@gildasclubwestchester.org.

Space is limited. Camp, like all Gilda’s Club Westchester programs, is offered free of charge.

NEWS & UPDATES
Bereavement Event
Professionals and Community Members Gather to Learn About Grief While Parenting

On Monday, April 22, Gilda’s Club Westchester, in conjunction with the Bereavement Center of Westchester, was honored to host Donald Rosenstein, MD, and Justin Yopp, PhD, for two special educational events — a daytime workshop for professionals and an evening event for members of the community.

Over 40 mental health professionals attended the daytime workshop at Gilda’s Club Westchester. The authors outlined their work that initially began with widowed fathers. They recognized the unique needs of grieving fathers who had young children in the home, so consequently a support group was created just for them that addressed not only the loss of their partner, but also the challenge of being thrust into the role of sole parent. Donald and Justin have expanded their work to include both men and women who have lost a co-parent.

“At a time when they are making sense of their own loss, widowed parents must figure out how to support their grieving child, manage a household on their own, and essentially be both parents at once,” Donald said. “It’s not hard to imagine how this can feel overwhelming. What is harder to understand is why there are so few programs designed to support these parents.”

The entire family system is profoundly disrupted after the death of a parent, and traditional bereavement programs tend to focus more on individual grief and perhaps less on the parenting role after the death of a co-parent.

Donald explains, “The fathers felt that, by and large, they were doing a good job parenting alone but that it came at a cost, and they reported high rates of depressive symptoms.”

Donald and Justin envisioned bringing the widowed fathers together for six sessions to “teach” them about the process of grief, but quickly realized that the men needed a forum where they could share worries and fears for themselves and their children. The support group met regularly for nearly four years. During this time, Donald and Justin learned about the men’s unique journeys, challenges and successes. With the agreement and participation of the men, they co-authored “The Group: Seven Widowed Fathers Reimagine Life.”

During the educational workshop, the authors reflected on the well-referenced Kubler-Ross 5 stages of grief model. Alternately, they described “the Dual Process Model” where the bereaved move between loss and restoration. This model seems to more accurately reflect grief as a dynamic process that requires a balance between feeling the pain of the loss and the necessity to continue to live life.

“The Dual Process Model is such a practical and elegant framework for understanding grief and is something that we often cite in group meetings to help parents make sense of what can be a disorienting time in their lives,” Justin noted. “We’ve seen countless times how this model resonates with our group members.”

“One of the most helpful aspects of the Dual Process Model is that it gives the grieving person permission to revisit their loss after they think they should be “past that phase by now.” At the same time, the Dual Process Model acknowledges the healthy necessity of carrying on with life,” explained Donald.

Donald and Justin engaged in a lively and interactive discussion with the professionals and encouraged them to consider establishing a similar supportive program in their own communities in order to meet this under-served population. Donald observed, “There is simply no reason why support groups shouldn’t be available to widowed parents from all over the country, including here in the Westchester area. That’s why we are so grateful to Gilda’s Club for hosting today’s event and bringing together bereavement and mental health professionals who may be interested in launching a local group.”

Participant Gillian Rittmaster, Gilda’s Club Westchester Group Facilitator, commented, “Suffering is not just feelings of grief, but in many cases trauma as well — what they went through caring for someone with cancer. What I learned is that losing a spouse is not just about the traumas in the past, but the future as well. This is a “crisis of imagination,” as they cannot imagine what life will be like without their spouses. This is where the work of restoration orientation comes in.”

In the second session, over 25 members of the community joined to learn about grief, loss and sole parenting. Many attendees brought their children who were welcomed to “Noogieland” — Gilda’s Club Westchester’s area for children — for pizza and social activities, led by Laura Moore, EdD, CHES, CCLS, Director of Gilda’s Club’s Children, Teens and Families program.

Donald and Justin provided a safe and welcoming environment for the adult participants to share their feelings and experiences of losing a co-parent. They also provided some context to their grief and educated and encouraged participants to ask questions and share. Participants relayed their common experiences and provided support and validation to one another.

“It was so meaningful to have the chance to meet with the widowed parents who attended our event,” Donald noted. “We were blown away by their willingness to share their experiences, eagerness to learn ways to best support their children, and ability to be emotionally present with us and each other. Frankly, it felt somewhat like the first night of a support group. We are continually impressed with the healing potential of this kind of shared experience and are grateful to the participants for sharing so bravely.”

Donald Rosenstein, MD and Justin Yopp, PhD, are co-authors of the book “The Group: How Seven Widowed Fathers Reimagined Life” and founders of the “Widowed Parent Project” www.widowedparent.org, which provides support, education, resources and research for parents who have lost a co-parent. Dr. Rosenstein and Dr. Yopp both maintain a clinical practice at the Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All proceeds from their book are donated back to the Widowed Parent Project.