

# Let’s Talk About It, New Canaan: Part Two

## Mental Health, Stigma and the Courage to Seek Help

**Publisher’s Note**

John Kriz has given New Canaan a work of consequence: a sober, generous and necessary examination of mental health, addiction, stigma and care in this town.

We thank John for the seriousness he brought to the topic. We also thank those who spoke with him and, by doing so, served the community: Dr. Bryan Luizzi, superintendent of New Canaan Public Schools; Andrew Gerber, M.D., Ph.D., president and medical director of Silver Hill Hospital; Marcella Rand, LCSW, New Canaan’s director of human services and adult and senior services coordinator; Susan Bliss, Ph.D., LCSW, student support coordinator with New Canaan Public Schools; Alex Sullivan of New Canaan Unplugged; Jacqueline D’Loughy, LCSW, youth and family services coordinator with the town’s Department of Human Services; Colleen Prostor, executive director of New Canaan CARES; Maureen Asiel, education and program manager with New Canaan CARES; the Rev. Peter Walsh, rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church; the Rev. Scott Herr, senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church of New Canaan; Lauren Patterson, president of the New Canaan Community Foundation; Russ Barksdale, Ph.D., president of Waveny LifeCare Network; Laura Futterman, N.D., a naturopathic physician in Stamford; and Paul Reinhardt, founder of the New Canaan Parent Support Group.

They spoke from different stations: the schoolhouse, the hospital, the town office, the pulpit, the nonprofit, the home. Together, they helped name what too often goes unnamed.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. A community worthy of its blessings says this plainly: Not only is there no shame in tending to one’s physical and mental health; there is beauty in it. There is wisdom in it. There is strength in it.

By JOHN KRIZ

**The First Step Is Naming the Need**

Part 1 of this two-part series reviewed key behavioral health issues New Canaan residents are facing and the factors driving them.

The reporting showed that behavioral health challenges are widespread in the community and that vulnerability to these challenges is common. They are not going away.

Behavioral health is complex, changing and often exacerbated by co-occurring addictions. Treatment can be arduous, expensive, shifting and sometimes lifelong. Untreated behavioral health difficulties can end in tragedy. Self-treating with substances can lead to a downward spiral.

Where should a resident or family begin?

**Stigma and Early Detection**

“The low hanging fruit would be, Number One, there is still a negative image from someone having any type of mental health issue,” said Dr. Russ Barksdale, president of Waveny LifeCare. Another is early detection.

“There are families in our community who have kids with what I would call severe mental illness,” said Dr. Andrew Gerber MD, medical director of Silver Hill Hospital, “who still are afraid to tell anybody that that’s what their family members are suffering from. And not just the individual kid, but the whole family is suffering because they feel guilty, they feel scared, they feel embarrassed.”

He continued, “If I could get mental health to being something – a regular conversation that everybody shared what was going on with them or their family members. No judgment. We can make a ton of progress.”

Behavioral health issues do not improve because they are ignored.

Dr. Gerber said, “It’s always true that the earlier you treat, the easier it is to treat. It’s never a situation that we say, ‘Oh it’s got to get worse before we’ll do anything.’ It doesn’t work like that in mental health. It’s always ‘Let’s prevent it from getting worse.’ And the treatments are milder, and the treatments are easier,” the sooner treatment begins.

As noted in Part 1, the first principle is to talk about behavioral health and purge the stigma. The second is to act when help is needed.

**Community Connection as Prevention**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION AS PREVENTION

How New Canaan residents can find support, companionship, and community



One factor consistently cited as important to behavioral health is community involvement, and the emotional and social support that can come with it. New Canaan offers many places for residents seeking connection: houses of worship, civic groups, charitable organizations and sports groups. Few charitable, civic or faith groups in town are likely to turn away a sincere desire to participate.



### Where residents can connect



**1 New Canaan Human Services**  
Provides information on behavioral health resources, support groups, volunteer opportunities, food and housing resources, and financial assistance.



**2 New Canaan Behavioral Health Alliance**  
Provides contacts and information for residents seeking help, from crisis support to assistance finding therapists.



**3 New Canaan Parent Support Group**  
Supports parents and caregivers walking alongside loved ones facing substance use and mental health challenges. Through weekly meetings, educational events, and community outreach, we offer connection, compassion, and a safe place to share the journey.”



**4 New Canaan Library**  
Hosts a steady stream of events where residents can learn and socialize.



**5 Lapham Community Center**  
Offers adult programs, including Medicare counseling, health screenings, legal advice, social games, cooking classes, educational talks and bingo. Many are targeted to seniors.



**6 New Canaan Health Department**  
Offers free “Question, Persuade, Refer” suicide-prevention training at least monthly for residents, community groups, students and nonprofits.



**7 New Canaan YMCA**  
Offers activities to promote well-being, including fitness classes, social and hobby clubs, and the Bennett Center for Behavioral Health, a partnership with Jewish Family Services of Greenwich.



**8 Bennett Center for Behavioral Health**  
“Offers therapy in a private, welcoming space in the Y’s facility for individuals, couples, and families ages 6 through older adulthood.”



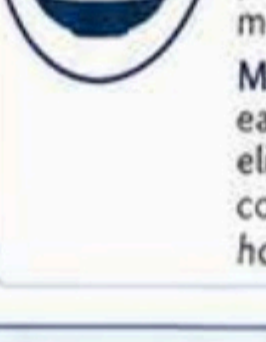
**9 New Canaan CARES**  
Focuses on the health and well-being of youth and families through programs for elementary through high school students and parent education. It also works to bridge the generational gap between seniors and youth through programs such as Elder Buddies.



**10 GetAbout**  
Provides free rides in New Canaan and surrounding towns for medical appointments. For older residents, isolation and health concerns are serious issues, and GetAbout helps address them.



**11 Staying Put**  
Helps seniors live in their homes and stay engaged in the community as they age by providing supportive services and social connections. Events include luncheons, discussion groups and trips to local attractions.



**12 Waveny LifeCare & Meals on Wheels**  
Waveny LifeCare provides healthcare and living services, including independent living, dementia care, physical therapy and home care. Its dementia day programs can also help caregivers manage the stress of caring for a loved one. Meals on Wheels provides low-cost meals each weekday throughout the year to eligible New Canaan residents so they may continue to live independently in their homes. There is no age restriction.



Community involvement can strengthen behavioral health by reducing isolation, increasing support, and creating more opportunities for residents to be seen, known, and helped.

One factor consistently cited as important to behavioral health is community involvement, and the emotional and social support that can come with it.

New Canaan offers many places for residents seeking connection: houses of worship, civic groups, charitable organizations and sports groups.

Few charitable, civic or faith groups in town are likely to turn away a sincere desire to participate.

**The following are places residents can find support, information or companionship:**

**New Canaan’s Human Services Department** provides information on behavioral health resources, support groups, volunteer opportunities, food and housing resources, and financial assistance.

**The New Canaan Behavioral Health Alliance** provides contacts and information for residents seeking help, from crisis support to assistance finding therapists.

**The New Canaan Parent Support Group** supports “parents and caregivers walking alongside loved ones facing substance use and mental health challenges. Through weekly meetings, educational events, and community outreach, we offer connection, compassion, and a safe place to share the journey.”

**New Canaan Library** hosts a steady stream of events where residents can learn and socialize.

**Lapham Community Center** in Waveny Park offers adult programs, including Medicare counseling, health screenings, legal advice, social games, cooking classes, educational talks and bingo. Many are targeted to seniors.

**The New Canaan Health Department** offers free “Question, Persuade, Refer” suicide-prevention training at least monthly for residents, community groups, students and nonprofits.

**The New Canaan YMCA** offers activities to promote well-being, including fitness classes,

social and hobby clubs, and the Bennett Center for Behavioral Health, a partnership with Jewish Family Services of Greenwich. The Bennett Center “offers therapy in a private, welcoming space in the Y’s facility for individuals, couples, and families ages 6 through older adulthood.”

**New Canaan CARES** focuses on the health and well-being of youth and families through programs for elementary through high school students and parent education. It also works to bridge the generational gap between seniors and youth through programs such as Elder Buddies.

**GetAbout** provides free rides in New Canaan and surrounding towns for medical appointments. For older residents, isolation and health concerns are serious issues, and GetAbout helps address them.

**Staying Put** helps seniors live in their homes and stay engaged in the community as they age by providing supportive services and social connections. Events include luncheons, discussion groups and trips to local attractions.

**Waveny LifeCare** provides healthcare and living services, including independent living, dementia care, physical therapy and home care. Its dementia day programs can also help caregivers manage the stress of caring for a loved one.

**Meals on Wheels** provides low-cost meals each weekday throughout the year to eligible New Canaan residents so they may continue to live independently in their homes. There is no age restriction.

**The Groups Coordinating the Response**

Many groups in New Canaan are active in behavioral health matters and related issues such as substance abuse, misuse and addiction. Coordination matters.

One leading coordination group is the New Canaan Coalition.

According to Colleen Prostor, executive director, “New Canaan CARES is the state-sponsored Local Prevention Council (LPC) leader for the Town of New Canaan. As the LPC, New Canaan CARES helps to organize and facilitate the New Canaan Coalition — a group of affected families, community organizations, concerned citizens, faith organizations, first responders, government, the recovery community, schools, youth organizations, and treatment centers committed to enhancing the lives of New Canaan youth and families through education, prevention and positive programs.

“The specific goals of LPCs are to increase public awareness of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention and stimulate the development and implementation of local prevention activities primarily focused on youth.”

While education and prevention of substance use and misuse by New Canaan youth remain the Coalition’s primary focus, that focus has expanded.

“Look where we are today,” Ms. Prostor said. “We’re talking about behavioral health, substance abuse, mental health, technology, gaming, gambling, suicide prevention and awareness. I mean, it’s become so multifaceted... so many co-occurring challenges for children, for parents, for communities, for states, for our country.”

Coalition members include New Canaan Public Schools, the New Canaan Chamber of Commerce, New Canaan Library, Silver Hill Hospital, New Canaan’s Health and Human Services departments, RAM Council, the Police Department and the New Canaan Parent Support Group, among others.

Another coordinating group is the New Canaan Behavioral Health Alliance, a coalition of more than 30 local organizations working to make it easier for residents to access behavioral health information and resources.

The New Canaan Coalition focuses on town-specific groups, while the Behavioral Health Alliance includes groups with a wider geographic scope. The two groups work to keep each other informed.

**The Assessment Program’s Role**

In mid-2022, the Town of New Canaan launched a behavioral health initiative in partnership with Silver Hill Hospital, then called the Urgent Assessment Program. The word “urgent” has since been dropped to reinforce the message that residents need not wait until a behavioral health issue becomes urgent, and that early intervention and treatment are best. The towns of Weston and Westport have since joined the program.

The Assessment Program provides “New Canaan residents in urgent need of mental health treatment with a timely psychiatric assessment and tailored referral for ongoing care.” There is no cost for residents. About 7.5 people have made appointments each month. More than half have been under 19, and two-thirds have been under 30. Residents of all ages may apply.

The goal is to have a face-to-face meeting with the client within 48 hours of initial contact. That meeting is an evaluation involving the client, a staff psychiatrist and a social worker with Silver Hill. The psychiatrist and social worker — and, in some cases, other professionals — then discuss the matter and meet promptly with the client again to share their evaluation and recommend treatment.

Those recommendations may include a psychologist, social worker or psychiatrist. Often, several specialists’ names are provided so the client has choices. Silver Hill considers insurance and cost matters as best it can when making recommendations.

This is not a “Here’s a phone number. Good luck.” approach. The goal is a ‘warm hand-off,’ with Silver Hill working with the client to ensure the client is contacting therapists and receiving needed care.

Silver Hill also follows up with clients. If the therapist a client chose is not working out, Silver Hill works with the client to find a better placement.

Help can begin with a phone call. And the client retains full control.

**Three Families, Three Paths to Care**

*Editor’s Note: The New Canaan Sentinel interviewed several people who used the Assessment Program, either for themselves or for a family member. The interviews are intended to help readers understand how behavioral health challenges affect residents, how the Assessment Program works, and how access to critical behavioral health services in New Canaan might be improved.*

*Those interviewed requested anonymity, and the Sentinel agreed. Pseudonyms are used, and some identifying details have been withheld or generalized. The stories are real.*

*The Sentinel is grateful to these interviewees for their honesty in sharing difficult behavioral health experiences. Their stories may encourage residents who are struggling, but have not yet sought help, to do so.*

**Ingrid: Finding the Right Therapist**

Ingrid is a stay-at-home mother in her 40s, married, with several children ranging from grammar school to high school.

She saw that one of her children, who was at Saxe, was struggling with what turned out to be obsessive-compulsive disorder, expressed as difficulty eating food.

Ingrid reached out to the child’s pediatrician, who told her about the Assessment Program and suggested some therapists. Ingrid decided to try the therapist route directly. This was after COVID struck, when “therapists were very hard to find. I couldn’t actually get into any of the therapists.” In addition, “I couldn’t find anyone that took insurance, and a lot of the therapists are charging \$300 a session, which if you need to go once a week gets very expensive.”

She then discussed her child’s challenges with guidance counselors at Saxe, who also suggested the Assessment Program.

She reached out to Silver Hill and was seen within 48 hours.

Ingrid said of the initial meeting, “I thought it was great. Just coming in here, the people we met with, you feel like someone’s actually really there to help you.”

A virtual therapist who accepted insurance was recommended.

“So we went straight to that, and met with this therapist weekly for nine months. But I ultimately felt like it wasn’t the right fit for [my child] down the road. So then I went back to Silver Hill, said “This isn’t working. I think [my child] needs to meet with someone in person. [My child] can’t sit still through the Zooms. We just need something in person.”

Ingrid and her child met with Silver Hill “pretty quickly,” and Ingrid was put in touch with the therapist her child is now seeing. Treatment is going well, and the therapist accepts insurance, which Ingrid called “a big thing.”

Ingrid is happy with the Assessment Program. Her contact at Silver Hill will reach out and ask how things are going. “And ‘It’s great.’ We feel like, ‘this is working.’ They do check in. And I do feel like if I get to the point where I have something else, I’ll happily reach out and they’ll get back to me.”

Regarding privacy, Ingrid said, “I was never really concerned about privacy, and [my child is] kind of comfortable with what’s going on. It’s just been great.”

Ingrid said the barriers to care involve therapist supply and finding providers who accept insurance. If medication is needed, a family may need a psychiatrist as well as a therapist, adding expense.

Working with Saxe and its guidance counselors, whom Ingrid called “amazing,” has been important.

“I’m very close with the guidance counselors at Saxe, and they have a lot of kids right now with anxiety or mental health worries,” she said.

Ingrid also cited “Spaces,” which she described as “a therapy program for parents to help manage and help their kids overcome anxiety. It was founded by a doctor up at Yale. So a lot of therapists — all the therapists we’ve seen — have brought it up. Saxe did a program for parents where they brought parents in.”

“I thought that was great,” Ingrid said. “There were about eight moms that met every Friday, and it was also just kind of a place to talk about what’s going on in a private setting and be able to get help from your peers and then the guidance counselors.” Much of the program, she said, helped parents recognize behaviors that can enable a child’s behavioral health issues, “and to try to work through

that, so that as a parent you stop enabling it, which can then, in turn, help your child.”

The support from other parents facing similar challenges has been important to Ingrid.

“I’ve quickly found two friends that were going through the same things with their kids. We still send each other hilarious text messages about things that are going on. But you have to have people that you can talk to.”

She added: “As the caregiver, you can’t be dealing with this all by yourself, or just you and your husband. You have to have people that you can ... Whether I’m calling my friend and I’m saying, ‘Hey, what prescription anxiety medicine is your ... Where is he at? What medicine is he on?’”

“I just had someone text me saying, ‘My child started it. He’s tired all the time. Is that normal?’ You need to find people you can talk to.”

One recommendation Ingrid has for Saxe is to host “an open door every Friday, just to allow parents to come in and have someone to talk to.” She said there will be a reunion soon of her Spaces group “just to get everyone back in the room.”

Behavioral health issues involving a child can also affect parents’ relationship with each other.

“I feel like the beginning is rough,” Ingrid said. “You don’t know if you’re making the right decisions. It’s difficult to watch. It’s just hard. You sometimes — and they talk about this in our meetings — you’re supposed to both be on the same page, but that doesn’t always happen, and that can be hard. You just have different opinions. I also think something else that was said in all these meetings, a lot of it, whether you’re a working mom or not, it falls on the mom. That’s just the reality.”

Although many groups in New Canaan host valuable behavioral health programs, attending them can be difficult for Ingrid. “I got to get to that one. That one’s screaming my name,” she said. “However, a lot of them are either at 9:30 AM or 7:30 PM and I have [several] kids.”

Ingrid summarized her Assessment Program experience this way: “I’ve brought it up in the meetings I’ve been in with these other moms, ‘Take your kid in and use them. It’s a resource that New Canaan residents are so lucky to have, and it’s free. So take advantage of it.” She added that “it’s a great place to start because they’ll help you find the right type of help you need.”

The guidance counselors at Saxe know the program and “work really closely with the Silver Hill Assessment Program,” Ingrid said.

“I do think there’s a lot of people, not just this town, but there’s a whole mental health crisis I think, and it either gets swept under the rug or people don’t know what to do, or where to go, or how to handle it,” Ingrid said. “And it’s better to get it out there and get some help.”

George: Therapy Saved My Life

George is a senior citizen who had been suffering from depression.

Just prior to accessing the Assessment Program, George had tried a similar program organized by an area hospital group, but he “did not have a good experience.” He was in “a really dark place.”

Fortunately he soon learned about the Assessment Program after finding a brochure at New Canaan Library.

George was familiar with Silver Hill, “so when I saw the brochure, I thought, ‘Oh, that looks really interesting.’”

He contacted Silver Hill and the response was prompt. “I think I was there the next day,” he recalls.

George said of the initial meeting, “They were very nice. I felt very comfortable talking to them.”

When he met with Silver Hill he was on Medicare, and finding therapists who accept insurance is “a huge issue.”

Silver Hill recommended therapy, as well as medications, which he termed a “tripod” approach.

Was George happy with the provider recommendations Silver Hill made? “Yeah, absolutely.”

One of the benefits of the Assessment Program, said George, is because “you’re overwhelmed already from your issues, and it’s hard to even know where to start.”

George continued, noting it “can be intimidating when you’re reaching out for help.”

“I had reached a point where I was thinking about ‘you have to do something, otherwise you’re not going to be around for much longer,’ said George. “And it was just by luck that I saw the brochure [for the Assessment Program] in the last year. So I kind of think of it as it was meant to be in a way.”

“One thing that therapy helped me with when I first started was learning how to do what I should do if I’m going into a dark place: not being isolated, being out among people, being productive, even just in little ways. So to get through the day, you clean out a

***“I think a lot of times the issues that you have, you push them down, you don’t want to deal with it, you don’t know how to deal with it, but you can only push feelings like that...down for so long. They’re always going to resurface. So I think the sooner that you could deal with it, the better, because they’re not going away on their own. They’re not.”***

closet, you get something done, or you pay your bills... There’s lots of tricks they teach you to deal with mental health issues.”

Despite the fear of asking for help, “therapy quite honestly saved my life,” George said bluntly.

Regarding his views on the Assessment Program, George said, “I can’t say enough good things about them.”

George is also a supporter of dealing with behavioral health issues quickly, of not ignoring them.

“I think a lot of times the issues that you have, you push them down, you don’t want to deal with it, you don’t know how to deal with it, but you can only push feelings like that, like any feelings, like anxiety and all that,” said George. “You can only push them down for so long. They’re always going to resurface. So I think the sooner that you could deal with it, the better, because they’re not going away on their own. They’re not.”

Isabel: The Effects of Bullying

Isabel is a stay-at-home mom in her 40’s, and has a child in middle school. She and her husband emigrated from Latin America a number of years ago.

The difficulties started when Isabel’s child was in grammar school, and being bullied.

“[Our child’s] ‘not preppy. So [our child’s] not, let’s say, the typical New Canaan kid,” said Isabel. Rather, the child has a changing, eclectic personal style that is atypical for New Canaan. “And I see every [child] when I drive [our child] to school. Super preppy, super nice and my [child] is not that way. So [our child’s] the different kid, and we are okay with that. We always told [our child] ‘whatever you want to be, or whatever you want to dress, as long as you’re comfortable.’ But [our child] stands out a little bit, and that is what everybody sees, ‘Oh, you’re different.’”

As to the bullying, Isabel said that one student – the “meanest [student]” -- was the leader. “This [student] was so bad,” and pushed other students in the class to not speak with Isabel’s child. “So [our child] was isolated,” suffering in silence.

When this matter did come to Isabel’s attention, she promptly contacted her child’s teacher, who claimed not to know anything about it. However, the teacher said the bullying details would be added to the child’s file, and that as the school year was ending, and the child would be entering Saxe, Isabel’s child would not be in the same classroom as the student who led the bullying.

Once at Saxe, Isabel started to feel more upbeat: “Okay, new school, new kids. [Our child’s] away from that (bullying) kid. [Our child] didn’t have any more problems with the same kid.” So far, so good.

However, when Isabel spoke with her child’s new teacher at a conference, Isabel was told that “nothing is in the file” about her child’s difficulties and the past bullying.

Fortunately, said Isabel, her child was “fine” and the child’s “grades never went down.” But later that school year, Isabel learned from her child that the child was having “trouble with some [students].”

We said to our child, “Just don’t listen to them. You have other friends.” But their child said, “No, they are in my classroom and I have trouble with them. I try to ignore, but they are even physical with” me, sometimes kicking and pushing.

Things took a turn for the worse towards the end of the school year.

A “counselor called me and she told me that my [child] had told her that [the child] wants to [self harm], and that she gave [the child] resources of what to do. They made a plan of if [the child] feels ... willing to [self harm] ... who or where to call, or what help to get. And she called me and she told me about the assessment” program at Silver Hill.

Isabel said the Saxe counselor’s opinion was the renewed bullying was the cause of the child’s distress.

The next day Isabel received a call from the principal that her child had been in an altercation, “and the principal said, ‘[your child’s] not in trouble because we know [you child] defended [themselves] because the other [child] has been bullying [your child] and she (the principal) said they were going to open an investigation.’ Isabel was never informed of results of the investigation. This was towards the end of the school year.

Isabel’s child had been informing Saxe staff “every time that anything happened. My [child] went to say to a teacher or to the

counselor and said, ‘Hey, today this happened. Today this [student] did this to me, or today [this student] kicked me.’ Isabel had no sense anything was being done by Saxe staff about the ongoing bullying of her child. “They (Saxe staff) never told me anything.”

Isabel does not think the bullying of her child was due to the child being Hispanic. “We always ask our kids that if they feel that’s something, but no,” says Isabel, continuing to note that “we are White, so I always say, until people know my name, or I start speaking,” no one would think we’re from Latin America.

Given the very worrisome ‘self harm’ comment from the Saxe counselor, and the altercation the following day, Isabel decided that new, decisive action was required, and she contacted Silver Hill seeking help for her troubled child.

An email and a voice mail to Silver Hill resulted in a call back the next morning. They wanted to start with a private conversation with Isabel’s child, which happened that afternoon. After the conversation with the child, Silver Hill met with Isabel and her child two days later, and began making therapist recommendations.

“What I love and I’m so thankful (for) is that, well, I received a call out of the blue, ‘Your [child] wants to harm [themselves].’ And we haven’t ever been to therapy, so I felt like, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ They (Saxe counselor) told me, ‘Well, here. It’s free for people from New Canaan.’ So we came here and then when they told me, ‘Yes, we (Silver Hill) really says that [the child] needs to see someone and go into therapy,’ they help me. I told them I really want (the therapy) to be part of my insurance.

“So they took my insurance, and what they did that was amazing,” Isabel continues. Silver Hill not only sourced therapists who accepted Isabel’s insurance, but “they called them. They explained what’s happening, and when they felt that it was a good match for my [child], they let me know.”

Besides help finding Isabel a therapist for her child, Silver Hill counseled her on resources and methods to use if her child had a crisis needing immediate attention.

Silver Hill “did a really long follow up. They didn’t stop sending emails until I said, “No, [my child has] a therapist. [The child’s] fine. [The child’s] stable and thank you so much.”

Does Isabel recommend the Assessment Program?

“Yeah, especially if they don’t know anything about therapy, this is a good beginning. I hope nobody needs it, but if it’s necessary, it’s a good way to understand what is happening with your kid and, from here, where to go. I didn’t know what to do. I was in shock. We have never been in therapy...So I felt like, ‘there’s no one I can ask for help, or to know where to go.’ The counselor at school gave this place (Silver Hill) as a start point. So yes, I would really recommend using this. It’s free.”

Isabel’s child is in therapy, and is doing well. The child insisted on a therapist who could really understand the child’s middle school and demographic status. No mental health diagnosis has been made. The matters discussed between the child and therapist revolve around how to handle people, and to best manage the social dynamics the child faces – including problematic people.

The child’s difficulties were a challenge, and learning experience, for the parents.

“It was more of a shock for him (my husband) because in [our home country where] we grew up, mental health doesn’t exist. If you are depressed, just smile more or something like that. But yeah, it was hard for him to understand, but he now is understanding. I keep telling him, ‘We’re not in [our home country] anymore. You need to understand the kids now, and the culture here, and just be more open about it.’ But yeah, at the beginning he thought, ‘How does [our child] want to kill [themselves] when [the child] has everything here?’”

Isabel continued, observing, “We are alone in this country. So we have learned to deal with everything,” and “that this is our reality,” concluding with “Here mental health is an issue, and we need to help our [child].”

Isabel recalled the positive changes in her child from therapy, with both parents pleased with the child’s progress, and glad they took the step to seek help. “I always tell [our child] that I’m happy that [they] asked for help,” noted Isabel.

“Even if we were shocked or we were angry at the beginning, at the end the most important thing is [our child], and we will help [our child] in any way we can.”

## How the Assessment Program Works

*A New Canaan partnership with Silver Hill Hospital*

**STEP 1**



Contact Silver Hill to schedule an intake screening.

**STEP 2**



An assessment appointment is typically offered within 48 hours of the intake call.

**STEP 3**



The resident meets with a psychiatrist and a social worker for an evaluation.

**STEP 4**



Silver Hill provides tailored referrals and a warm hand-off for ongoing care.

**Who can use it?**

Children, adolescents and adults who are New Canaan residents.

**Cost**

**NONE**

**203-801-2390** | **ASSESSMENT@SILVERHILLHOSPITAL.ORG**

**BY THE NUMBERS**



**7.5** appointments per month



**More than half** of participants have been under 19



**About two-thirds** have been under 30

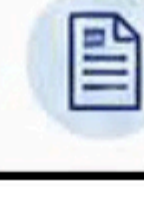
**WHAT RESIDENTS SAID**

“It’s a great place to start because they’ll help you find the right type of help you need.”

“It kind of saved my life.”

“If it’s necessary, it’s a good way to understand what is happening with your child and where to go.”

 The program was formerly known as the Urgent Assessment Program. The word ‘urgent’ was dropped to encourage residents to seek help early.

 **Source:** Silver Hill Hospital and reporting for the New Canaan Sentinel series.

## Where to Get Help in New Canaan

*Local contacts and crisis support*

**1 If it is an emergency**



- Call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- Call **911** if someone is in immediate danger
- In a psychiatric crisis, ask for a CIT-trained officer and clinician

**2 Silver Hill Assessment Program**



**Phone:** 203-801-2390  
**Email:** [assessment@silverhillhospital.org](mailto:assessment@silverhillhospital.org)  
**Admissions:** 1-866-542-4455  
**Web:** [silverhillhospital.org/assessment-program](http://silverhillhospital.org/assessment-program)

For New Canaan, Weston and Westport residents; NO COST for New Canaan residents.

**3 New Canaan Human Services**



**Phone:** 203-594-3076  
**Web:** [newcanaan.info/departments/human\\_services](http://newcanaan.info/departments/human_services)

Support for mental health, substance use concerns and times of crisis.

**4 New Canaan CARES**



**Email:** [caresinfo@newcanaancares.org](mailto:caresinfo@newcanaancares.org)  
**Web:** [newcanaancares.org](http://newcanaancares.org)

Programs and support for youth and families.

**5 New Canaan Parent Support Group**



**Phone:** 203-564-6374  
**Email:** [paul@ncparentsupportgroup.org](mailto:paul@ncparentsupportgroup.org)  
**Web:** [ncparentsupportgroup.org](http://ncparentsupportgroup.org)

Weekly support meetings for parents and caregivers.

**6 New Canaan Health Department**



**Phone:** 203-594-3018  
**QPR info:** 203-594-3020  
**Web:** [newcanaan.info/departments/health/community\\_health\\_programs.php](http://newcanaan.info/departments/health/community_health_programs.php)

Free QPR suicide-prevention training and community health programs.

 Check official websites for current schedules and program details.