

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO



### Dear Friends,

Appropriately, our Summer 2020 newsletter resonates with the theme of change that entered our lives this past spring. You will read stories that center around the unanticipated changes that affected the people who receive our services and their

families, staff members and our community of supporters. No one could have predicted fully the profound impact of the pandemic caused by an outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Our Day Habilitation program closed its doors temporarily. Individuals in our 18 residences began sheltering in place. Clinicians shifted to telehealth services to continue meeting with individuals, families and groups remotely.

I would like to commend our staff for doing a phenomenal job. Throughout our organization, in every department, staff members came together to support each other, collaborate and find solutions. The outpouring of support from friends and community partners has also been greatly appreciated.

This time period has also come with sadness, as we mourn deeply for the individuals who did not survive the virus. While these months have been challenging, the EPIC Family of Human Service Agencies remains strong. The health, safety and protection of the individuals in our care has always been and will continue to be our priority.

Thank you to one and all for the part you played in keeping EPIC Long Island strong. Together, we will continue to provide extraordinary care to the individuals and families we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom".

**Tom Hopkins**

## MISSION STATEMENT

**EPIC Long Island will enrich the lives of those we serve through quality care, a broad range of services, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.**

## MANY CHILDREN EXPERIENCED A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

For most children, structure is important. At the onset of the pandemic, for many children, it seemed that the world had turned upside down. One thing that remained constant, however, were the programs of EPIC Long Island.

"What was shown to kids during this pandemic is that people cared for them and remained consistent no matter what," said Shari Lurie, Sr. Director of Mental Health Services, EPIC Long Island. "They know that we are there for them."

As therapists at the mental health clinics of EPIC Long Island and South Shore Child Guidance Center adapted quickly to offer remote sessions, children responded positively. Many took pride in showing therapists their rooms. Seeing home environments gave clinicians more insights into the lives of their clients.

Therapists engaged younger children by playing games online. Such activity gives therapists an opportunity to identify how children are feeling and provides opportunities to offer solutions.

"At first, we were not hearing a lot about the crisis, but as children were home longer, the issues of financial problems, family members getting sick from the virus and food insecurity rose," Lurie said, noting that there was additional stress for children who didn't have laptops or the proper technology to keep up with school assignments.

"This affects kids emotionally, psychologically, educationally and socially," Lurie said. "Being away from friends also adds to the stress. It was so abrupt. Kids had to adapt so quickly. They had fears that were hard to articulate."

With adults working from home or struggling after a job loss, stress inside homes increased. Domestic violence or

substance use that was already occurring exacerbated the stress.

For many children, there has been previous trauma. Some are children of undocumented families or may have crossed the border alone. Others have seen parents and family members killed.

"For those who are traumatized, a therapist is a consistent contact who is valuable and can be life-changing," Lurie said. "The therapist is the person who stays with them no matter what is going on. Staff and patients have been incredible. All these relationships were maintained with video or phone sessions."

Our thanks to the clinicians and therapists who are a life support for children and people of all ages as they experience a world that has turned upside down.



# THANKS TO TELEHEALTH, OUR CLINICAL SERVICES KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Almost overnight in mid-March, the clinical services offered at EPIC Long Island in East Meadow and South Shore Child Guidance Center in Freeport shifted gears and began offering telehealth services.

"When the pandemic hit Long Island, it required fast maneuvering to adapt our clinics to offering telehealth sessions," said Jennifer Colbert, Vice President of Clinical Services at EPIC Long Island.

Clinicians were mobilized with laptops and VPNs to keep Electronic Medical Records secure. Group, individual and family therapy was offered through videoconferencing or telephone, depending on individual preferences.

"Understandably, the Covid-19 crisis has created additional stress for children and adults alike," Colbert said. The stress was immense, particularly for people with substance abuse issues, those who lost family members, people living in poverty and individuals who suffered job losses.

Some benefits of telehealth are emerging. Colbert noted that attendance at appointments has been high, as people no longer have to put up with transportation issues when traveling to a facility.

Technology has also enabled more groups to form, thanks to the Zoom platform. Along with individual therapy, EPIC Long Island is offering support groups for first responders, for children who have lost family members and for teenagers who are losing out on milestones such as graduation or prom.

As Colbert reflected upon the adjustment to telehealth, she noted that staff members and clients didn't miss a beat. "Despite a pandemic that brought much of the world to a halt," she said, "our clinical services kept moving forward and people are taking part in everything we offer."

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS CAME THROUGH WITH FLYING COLORS AT HEIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC

EPIC Long Island is grateful for the outpouring of support from the community at the height of the pandemic. Clients and staff throughout our agency benefited from donations of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), as well as wonderful lunches and dinners.

Borrelli's Italian Restaurant in East Meadow has always been a favorite of EPIC Long Island. To both support this local restaurant and to keep our residents and staff nourished, EPIC Long Island partnered with Borrelli's to have delicious, nutritious hot meals delivered to residents in group homes and for the staff who worked in the residences around the clock.

Special thanks to Kristen Smith, Senior Manager at our Yaphank residence, who took the lead in obtaining PPE supplies for the agency. As a result of Smith's tenacity and research, EPIC Long Island had the masks, gowns, gloves

and hand sanitizer it needed. To Kristen and the many organizations who helped us out, we say thank you!

We were delighted to receive a wonderful gift from Girl Scout Troop 1234 in Setauket. Troop members made masks during Nurses Week and donated them to our frontline workers.

EPIC Long Island board member Joel Ackerman generously donated scrumptious meals from local restaurants to our residences. Soon, other families began responding to the individual cravings of our residents, donating food from places like McDonalds, Boston Market, Taco Bell and KFC. For Easter and Passover, families arranged for food deliveries as well. Our individuals were overjoyed to be able to celebrate beloved traditions with meals suited to the occasion.

# FRONTLINE WORKERS ARE TRUE HEROES

Every day of the year, EPIC Long Island relies on a wide array of staff members to care for the individuals in our programs. When the pandemic struck, our frontline workers—clinicians, Direct Support Professionals and nurses—went into action to continue providing services. They were supported by staff members throughout the agency who collaborated from the sidelines by making sure they had everything they needed, including PPE supplies.

We salute everyone who went beyond the call of duty in gestures large and small. Here is a glimpse of some of the heroic efforts that made a huge difference in the lives of the people in our care:

## ***Maintaining Connection with Day Habilitation Participants***

When the Day Habilitation temporarily shut its doors on March 17, several of our dedicated Day Hab staff began working in the residences, some even staying in quarters where individuals with Covid-19 were in quarantine. Others made sure that individuals who live with their families were contacted through video or phone chats. Several members took on the morning shifts and brought Day Hab activities to the group homes, where they set up activities and kept individuals on track with their goals.

Allen Siegel, Director of Day Services and Transportation, offered high praise for staff members who made sure that Day Hab participants maintained a sense of community, even while in isolation.

"I think our staff adjusted very well and helped maintain continued Day Hab activities for participants in the group homes," said Siegel, adding that many employees had to drive farther than usual and many adjusted their regular shifts to accommodate the needs of individuals in group homes.

## ***Community Habilitation Specialists Keep Individuals Inspired***

Baking cookies, making macaroni and cheese and even learning to draw are among the creative ways that Community Habilitation Specialists at EPIC Long Island are keeping individuals in the Community Habilitation

program motivated. Doxie.me, FaceTime, Zoom, cell phones and land lines are providing the technology to keep people connected. In addition, staff members are adding a dose of inspiration during a challenging time.

"Our Community Habilitation staff are helping maintain the health and well-being of individuals in Community Habilitation," said Abbe Reichman, Community Services Coordinator for EPIC Long Island. "They're reviewing outcomes, offering encouragement and helping people stay on their course."

For example, Community Habilitation Specialists check in with clients to review things like making the bed, doing laundry and brushing teeth. They have also assisted individuals through tandem projects on Zoom or FaceTime.

"Our staff have been so creative," Reichman said. "They've been baking cookies, brownies and cupcakes and crocheting blankets. A staff member joined a car parade to celebrate the birthday of one of the individuals."

For those in the Community Habilitation program, EPIC Long Island provides services that help bring people into the community and keep them from becoming isolated.

"This program can make a world of difference in their lives," said Reichman, adding that Community Habilitation Specialists work with all ages, from teens to seniors. "The families have been so thankful to the staff. Improving the quality of a person's life is what this program is all about."

*Jane L. made this beautiful blanket after Yvette Downie, a Community Habilitation Support Specialist, taught her how to crochet.*





Some photos were taken pre-COVID19 pandemic.

## UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE, RESIDENCES MAINTAIN SENSE OF CALM

"Extraordinary." That's a word that has long described the many services of EPIC Long Island. It's also the word that Amy Walsleben, Senior Director of Residential Services, uses when relaying the remarkable efforts that were made—and continue to be made—to protect 140 individuals in 18 residences who had to suddenly shelter in place because of the pandemic.

Walsleben, who has been with EPIC Long Island since 1989, said the Residential Services team rose to the occasion in extraordinary ways to keep the individuals in residences safe and protected. She pointed out that people from departments across the agency worked in conjunction with her staff to support and help meet every challenge.

"From getting food to getting PPE supplies, to disinfecting the residences after every shift, the diligence and dedication was remarkable," she said.

Walsleben said that daily conference calls made sure that staff were coordinated in their efforts, following the often-changing guidelines and regulations from national, state and local government sources.

Nine of 18 residences had individuals with positive cases of Covid-19, so residents had to be in quarantine and staff members were quarantined with them.

With a vulnerable population to protect, behavioral specialists helped individuals understand the importance of social distancing and wearing masks. Structure and routine became an important part of daily life.

While it was heartbreaking for individuals who missed in-person visits from family members, virtual visits via FaceTime and Zoom were arranged. Residents participated in activities such as tie-dyeing and painting with water guns.

They learned new cooking skills, created arts and craft projects and also spent time outside in the residential back yards. To keep spirits high, birthdays were celebrated too.

Pat Nidds, Nursing Supervisor, started working at EPIC Long Island on March 2, 2020. "It's a great team to work with," she said, adding that she was immediately impressed with the cohesive camaraderie of the agency. Nidds was instrumental in tracking the health of individuals and staying in close contact with healthcare professionals to keep EPIC Long Island management and administration up to date on the latest medical news.

Knowing that individuals take great joy in visiting with their loved ones, our programs are following official guidelines and taking all precautions as we find ways to assure that visits are safe for everyone involved.

Kudos to the staff members agency-wide who went to extraordinary measures—and continue to do so—to work together and keep our residents safe.



# IN MEMORIAM FOR INDIVIDUALS WE LOST

At EPIC Long Island, the people who live in our residential homes are family. We bid a peaceful farewell to those we lost

Mark—Westbury  
Rose—Westbury  
Doug—East Meadow  
Joan—Yaphank  
Michael—Yaphank  
William—Yaphank  
Eddie—Port Jefferson  
Joanne—Crestwood  
Denise—Medford

## SUPPORT GROUPS

EPIC Long Island

**Grief Support Groups for Adults and Children who have lost loved ones to COVID-19**



Contact Dana DiGregorio, LMSW, at 516-739-7733, press option 1, then ext. 725 or [clinicintake@epicli.org](mailto:clinicintake@epicli.org) for more information.

EPIC LONG ISLAND

**Support Group for First Responders & Medical Personnel Managing the COVID-19 Crisis**

Contact Debra Cahill, LCSW, at 516-739-7733, press option 1, then ext. 324, or [dcahill@epicli.org](mailto:dcahill@epicli.org) for more information. Individual services are also available.



## REMEMBERING ASSISTANT MANAGER ANTOINE JAMES (1979-2020)

It is with deep sadness to everyone at EPIC Long Island that Antoine James, an Assistant Manager in Residential Services, passed away on March 30, 2020. He is missed greatly by his many friends and colleagues.

Antoine started his career as a Life Skills Specialist at the Epilepsy Foundation of Long Island, working in the residential program, where he was beloved by residents. In the words of Amy Walsleben, Senior Director of Residential Services, he will be remembered as “the nicest person you would ever want to meet.”

Our deepest condolences to his family members and friends, who lost a dear man with a beautiful soul.



# LEAPING INTO THE NEW YEAR, JUST IN TIME

It was truly an evening to remember, as EPIC Long Island held its 35th Annual Dinner Gala on Friday, February 28, at the Garden City Hotel. With the visionary theme "Leaping Into 2020: Our Perfect Vision for the Future," the evening sparkled with hope and promise as more than 300 people gathered together.

A musician playing an electric violin and a magician strolled through the event. Every seat was taken, as people gathered to support EPIC Long Island and recognize a group of distinguished honorees. Undoubtedly, as this event was one of the last public gatherings for many organizations, it remains an indelible memory for all.

"As we look back on the 35th annual gala celebration, it simply reinforces our commitment to providing a better future for individuals with epilepsy and for those with developmental disabilities and behavioral health challenges," said Tom Hopkins, President & CEO, EPIC Long Island. "The event was

held in a leap year, and we indeed leapt forward into an era that no one could have predicted. I'm so proud of our organization for meeting every challenge, including those brought on by the pandemic."

Among the highlights, a mission auction drew a huge response, especially when an anonymous foundation agreed to match donations up to \$50,000. The match spurred many to give generously, raising more than \$120,000 to support the mission. Overall, it was the agency's most successful winter gala, raising in total more than \$200,000.

"It was a wonderful show of support for our mission and our programs and services," said Irene Rodgers, Director of Development and Epilepsy Services at EPIC Long Island. Rodgers credited her predecessor, Eileen Colletti, the Development team and the Gala Committee for leading the effort in creating such a successful event.



**Professional Leadership Award**  
Jacqueline A. French, MD



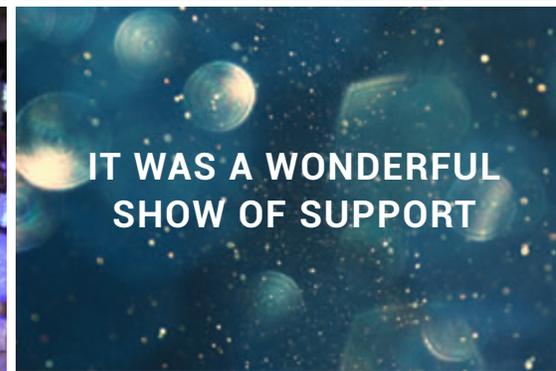
**Corporate Leadership Award**  
Matthew G. Deckinger



**Naomi and Barney Silverman  
Family of the Year Award**  
The Schmidt Family  
Marla, Madison and Orrin



**South Shore Child Guidance Center  
Community Service Award**  
Detective Patrick Franzone



## EPILEPSY EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

### *Giovanna Veteri Goes to Washington for Teens Speak Up*

We're so proud of Giovanna Veteri, who represented the Epilepsy Foundation and EPIC Long Island at the Teens Speak Up program in Washington, D.C. on March 1-3, 2020. She met with U.S. Representative Tom Suozzi to impress upon him the importance of support for epilepsy education. After explaining how epilepsy has affected her life and informing him of national and New York State epilepsy statistics, he assured Giovanna of his support in upcoming opportunities to fund epilepsy research.

Giovanna and her parents, Mike and Ginny Veteri, reflected on the trip in a write-up that was included in Giovanna's school newsletter during her senior at Locust Valley High School. Here is an excerpt:

"The event included two intense days of training in preparation to meet our Senator and Congressman on Capitol Hill. The training included a presentation from Politico (a reporter's perspective on healthcare on the Hill), learning about new innovations to assist people with epilepsy, current epilepsy statistics, the legislative process of how a bill becomes law, how to advocate for persons with epilepsy and proper etiquette when meeting with U.S. Senators and Congressmen.

"Giovanna really enjoyed being involved with the group of teens that have epilepsy and sharing their experiences and difficulties living with this disease."

2020 has been a stellar year for Giovanna, who received the following senior academic awards: NYS Comptroller Award and a scholarship for her advocacy on Capitol Hill. The EPIC Long Island family offers our most sincere congratulations to Giovanna on her many accomplishments and wishes to

thank her family for their support.

The advocacy efforts will continue in August and early September when virtual meetings with Senators and Representatives will be held.



## Without Missing a Beat, Epilepsy Outreach Continued

The disease of epilepsy doesn't take a break. The world may change in drastic ways, but individuals and families who are grappling with epilepsy continue to have questions and need services.

During the coronavirus outbreak, as people began sheltering in place, staff at the Epilepsy Foundation of Long Island knew that providing training, information and referrals would be as important as ever. The many services

were transformed almost overnight. Community Education and Outreach efforts pivoted to the Zoom platform, and offered workshops, as well as webinars and training, remained on schedule.

A huge thanks to our team for continuing these important programs and services throughout the most unusual and unimaginable of times.

## WORKSHOPS



The Sheila and Fred Abrams Community Education Center Presents a Zoom WEBINAR on:

**"Management Recommendations for Women with Epilepsy in the Reproductive Years"**

Wednesday, August 12, 2020  
6:30—7:30 PM

Presented by:  
**Rebecca Spiegel, MD, MA, FAES**  
Director, Stony Brook Comprehensive Epilepsy Center  
Associate Professor, Stony Brook Medicine

Topics of Discussion:

- Choosing appropriate anti-epileptic treatment
- Drug registries
- What to expect during pregnancy
- Folic acid supplementation
- Breast feeding
- ...and more

Space is limited. Please Register in advance at: <https://bit.ly/2NHEMaY>  
After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the meeting.

**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION**  
Long Island

Funding provided in part by the Epilepsy Coalition of NYS, the Thomas & Jeanne Elmezz Private Foundation, and Sterling National Bank Charitable Foundation.



THE SHEILA AND FRED ABRAMS COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER PRESENTS A WEBINAR ON:

**SEIZURE TRACKING & ACTION PLANS FOR BETTER SEIZURE MANAGEMENT**

Presented by:  
Candice Zizias, MHA, MSN-NP  
Medical Science Liaison, Aquestive Therapeutics, Inc. and  
Christopher Diemich, PA-C  
Medical Science Liaison, Aquestive Therapeutics, Inc.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2020**  
6:00 - 7:00 PM

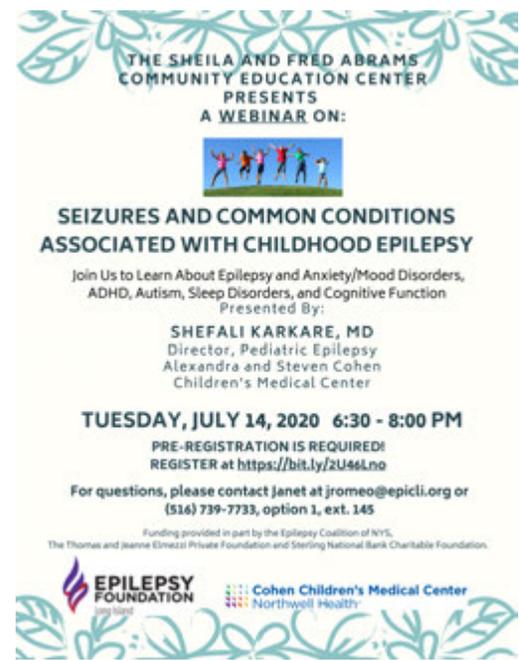
SPACE IS LIMITED. PLEASE REGISTER IN ADVANCE AT <https://bit.ly/3es1AoR>

AFTER REGISTERING, YOU WILL RECEIVE A CONFIRMATION EMAIL CONTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT JOINING THE MEETING.

**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION**  
Long Island

**Aquestive**

Funding provided in part by the Epilepsy Coalition of NYS, The Thomas and Jeanne Elmezz Private Foundation and Sterling National Bank Charitable Foundation.



THE SHEILA AND FRED ABRAMS COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTER PRESENTS A WEBINAR ON:



**SEIZURES AND COMMON CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDHOOD EPILEPSY**

Join Us to Learn About Epilepsy and Anxiety/Mood Disorders, ADHD, Autism, Sleep Disorders, and Cognitive Function

Presented By:  
**SHEFALI KARKARE, MD**  
Director, Pediatric Epilepsy  
Alexandra and Steven Cohen  
Children's Medical Center

**TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2020 6:30 - 8:00 PM**

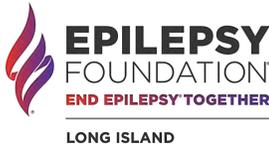
PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED!  
REGISTER at <https://bit.ly/2U66Lno>

For questions, please contact Janet at [jromeo@epicli.org](mailto:jromeo@epicli.org) or (516) 739-7733, option 1, ext. 145

Funding provided in part by the Epilepsy Coalition of NYS, The Thomas and Jeanne Elmezz Private Foundation and Sterling National Bank Charitable Foundation.

**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION**  
Long Island

**Cohen Children's Medical Center**  
Northwell Health



## UPCOMING EVENTS:

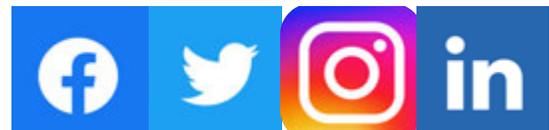
The Annual Don Luneburg Golf and Tennis Classic was celebrated online this year from July 20 – 27. While many missed being on the golf course, we generated excitement by holding a virtual auction and raffle. This year, we recognized the Direct Support Professionals and Nurses at our Day Habilitation, Community Habilitation and Residential Services and the Clinicians of our Specialty Clinic and EPIC Clinical Care, who have worked so hard and provided outstanding service throughout the pandemic. The funds raised will support these programs, which are vital to the individuals we serve.

### Online Fundraiser for South Shore

Join us for our online fundraiser to benefit the South Shore Child Guidance Center. Check out our Facebook page for details, along with a wonderful video presentation that captures the many programs offered by South Shore. Thanks to the Sparkles, our committed group of young adults, for working together to clean up Cow Meadow Park. We look forward to many more projects with the Sparkles in the future.

### Annual "Walk to End Epilepsy"

Mark your calendar: October 17



### GET SOCIAL WITH US!

**EPIC LONG ISLAND**  
1500 HEMPSTEAD TURNPIKE  
EAST MEADOW, NY 11554  
[WWW.EPICLI.ORG](http://WWW.EPICLI.ORG)

FACEBOOK - @epiclongisland TWITTER - @EPICLongIsland

INSTAGRAM - @epiclongisland LINKED IN - EPIC LONG ISLAND, INC.



**EPIC LONG ISLAND**  
1500 Hempstead Turnpike,  
East Meadow, New York 11554  
516.739.7733

**EPILEPSY FOUNDATION  
OF LONG ISLAND**  
1500 Hempstead Turnpike,  
East Meadow, New York 11554  
516.739.7733

**SOUTH SHORE CHILD  
GUIDANCE CENTER**  
91 Guy Lombardo Avenue - Unit 1,  
Freeport, NY 11520  
516.868.3030

[info@epicli.org](mailto:info@epicli.org) | [www.epicli.org](http://www.epicli.org)