

LI counseling nonprofit to use \$500K grant to expand program for mental health of veterans and families

By Olivia Winslow

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A Hicksville-based nonprofit that provides mental health and substance abuse treatment services to adults and children announced Friday it has received a nearly \$500,000 grant to expand mental health services to military veterans and their families.

Advocates say the need is great, noting Long Island has one of the largest concentrations of veterans in the country. According to the 2023 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey's 1-year data, more than 81,000 veterans live in Nassau and Suffolk counties.

CN Guidance and Counseling Services said it had received a \$498,000 grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation that will enable it to expand its "Bridging the Gap" program that provides connections to psychiatrists and therapists to military veterans, officials said.

CN Guidance officials said in a statement that the nonprofit's Bridging the Gap program has received funding from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation since 2022. The program, it said in a statement, "has been bridging mental health and substance use disorder treatment gaps for military-connected individuals on Long Island by providing connections to local psychiatrists and therapists," reaching more than 5,200 people.

Jeffrey Friedman, CN Guidance's CEO, said in the statement officials were "grateful" to the foundation's ongoing support.

A spokesman for CN Guidance, Andrew Weissberg, wrote in an email that Bridging the Gap served veterans and active duty service people, as well as family members. Weissberg added the program was free and that "no insurance is required."

Ralph Esposito, director of the Nassau County Veterans Service Agency, in an interview Friday, said of Bridging the Gap: "That's a good thing. We need that. We need a lot of mental health [services] for our veterans. I have veterans in every day that are mentally unstable."

The grant is among 539 the foundation gave across the state in 2024, totaling \$208 million, the foundation said in a statement. The foundation said it had distributed more than \$1 billion in grants since it was established in 2019.

Daniel Frascella, Mother Cabrini Health Foundation's chief programs and grants officer, said in an interview that support services for veterans was among the foundation's priorities, and that CN Guidance's Bridging the Gap was a "worthwhile investment."

"We have certainly heard more widely across the state of the needs and challenges that face veterans" as they return to civilian life, Frascella said. He said there was a "tragically high rate of suicide ... The hope is that CN will engage hundreds of veterans toward getting services and treatment."