

My Awesome Job: Sarah Davison-Duffy, Family Health Centers



"Many of our staff come from the Sunset Park community and strongly identify with the populations we serve," says Sarah Davison-Duffy, director of behavioral health clinical operations at Family Health Centers at NYU Langone. "They feel they're working with their community."

Sarah Davison-Duffy, LCSW, director of behavioral health clinical operations at the Family Health Centers at NYU Langone, oversees about 100 social workers, psychologists, and Licensed Medical Health Counselors at the Sunset Terrace location and in 22 school-based health centers. Here, she explains the importance of keeping her staff engaged so they can better serve patients.

A variety of services for a diverse group of patients. Physicians at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn and the [Family Health Centers at NYU Langone](#) refer patients to

us with conditions including depression, anxiety, psychotic disorders, bipolar disorders, and PTSD. When we see a new patient, we listen closely during the assessment. We ask them to describe what they're going through, try to determine what things are impacting their ability to manage their lives, and come up with a strategy for supporting them. We provide first-class behavioral health care, including individual, group, and family therapy and psychiatry assessment and treatment. Beyond behavioral health treatment, we have care managers who help patients with concrete services such as food assistance, supplemental income assistance, and housing assistance. We also offer peer education and connect patients to groups of people who face similar challenges.

Tackling the youth mental health crisis. We have a great team of social workers specializing in caring for children at our Sunset Terrace clinic, and I oversee behavioral health programs in 22 of our school-based health centers. We are experiencing a mental health crisis among youth today. One factor is the Covid isolation they experienced for three years. Instead of healthy social interaction, they mainly learned how to interact on screens. Some lost confidence in their ability to interact with peers. At our school-based centers, children can access specialty groups that help with social skills, coping skills, and crisis management skills. Plus, they can receive individual therapy and family therapy on site.

Helping staff stay positive. While I work with some patients, my main role is to oversee our staff of about 80 social workers, psychologists, and licensed medical health counselors, both directly and through the supervision of their supervisors. I support them so they can be there for the patients. Their job can be challenging. Despite their best efforts, a patient may go home to an abusive environment or face other socioeconomic determinants that impact their mental health. As therapists, we can't just focus on outcomes, because progress can be slow. Instead, I emphasize the importance of focusing on what we can control—the effort we put into the work every day. Over the past few years, with direction from the National Council for Mental Wellness, we have created a workgroup that has developed strategies to help therapists respond to feelings of being overwhelmed.

A steady presence in the community. I've worked in public mental health for 23 years, and I've never seen a clinic that manages to retain social workers like we do. In too many instances, patients see a revolving door of therapists. That's not the case here. And because our therapists stay, we're able to offer the community excellent, consistent care. One reason our social workers stay is that many come from the

Sunset Park community and/or strongly identify with the populations we serve. They feel they're working with and making an impact on their community.

My job is awesome because ... I get to work with people who have different clinical skills, different backgrounds, and different experiences, but they're all motivated to help patients in their community. Plus, my supervisors and the other administrators are super-supportive. They trust me to do what needs to be done to support my team so they, in turn, can support the patients.

TOOLS

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