

# New Horizons

## Mental Health, Primary Care and Substance Abuse Hope on the road to recovery

By LISA RYMER

**O**N A RECENT SUMMER MORNING, A LITTLE BOY was admitted to the Frances Langford Center for Children at New Horizons Mental Health, Primary Care and Substance Abuse of Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and Okeechobee Counties.

The six-year-old's eyes were bright and a smile spread from ear to ear as he bounced around the playroom engaging with others. From the outside, you would never know he was there because he posed a mortal threat to himself and his family.

What happens next to this particular child depends on how receptive he is to therapy and the commitment of his caregivers, but he's already got one major point in his favor — he's working with New Horizons, a nonprofit organization where professionals can give him the care and support that he and his family will need for his recovery.

Quality mental health care is not readily available to all Floridians. Despite mass shootings and jails with more than half the inmates needing mental health and substance abuse services, Florida is currently 50th in the nation for funding. Last year, the state ranked 49th.

### New Horizons to the rescue

"Fortunately, we have a community mental health organization like New Horizons to serve the residents of the Treasure Coast and Okeechobee," says John Romano, CEO of New Horizons, where he's worked for 28 years, and current Chairman of the Florida Council for Community Mental Health in Tallahassee.

Established in 1958 by a group of concerned citizens, New Horizons is the region's largest mental health provider with seven facilities serving 11,000 children and adults annually, regardless of ability to pay.

The 104-bed inpatient and outpatient, multi-program agency depends on grants and private donations to help marginalized sectors of the population — very possibly your neighbor, friend or family. New Horizons gives the mentally ill a chance to create their own new horizons.

The mental health center links clients to resources such as case managers, counseling, therapy, doctors, social security and/or disability benefits, Medicare and/or Medicaid, housing, job skills, and medication when necessary.

New Horizons works hand in hand with the local mental health court, law enforcement in every county, school districts, families, and private individuals to build a healthier — and safer — community.

The main campus at 4500 Midway Rd., Fort Pierce houses children in crisis, short- and long-term adult patients, an emergency walk-in clinic, 24-hour emergency mobile unit, outpatient therapies, medication dispensary, primary care clinic, detox unit, and 28-day drug and alcohol treatment.



New Horizon's New Health Clinic's William Joyce, P.A.; John Romano, CEO; and Medical Director Lalit Chaube, M.D.

### Personal challenges

Mental health, like physical health, can change with the ups and downs of everyday life — often due to circumstances beyond control.

A past client, who credits New Horizons with saving her life, was in the throes of alcoholism when she walked through the doors on Midway Road.

A few years prior, she had been abducted from a store parking lot, assaulted and left for dead on a remote railroad track.

Someone found the woman's purse in a shopping cart and called 911. The K-9 units led authorities to her body 25 minutes before the next train passed through the area.

The physical wounds got better eventually. But, it was the emotional turmoil that had her looking for solace in a bottle.

Now, after getting the support and services from New Horizons that she needed to heal, she is sober and shares her story: no matter what happens, recovery is possible.

### Integration of physical, mental, emotional

In addition to the main campus, New Horizons has outpatient clinics in Stuart, Fort Pierce, Okeechobee and Vero Beach, where the nonprofit's second Learning Center will open at 937 20th Place in November — thanks to a transformational \$100,000 grant from Impact 100 of Indian River County.

Like the Learning Center in Fort Pierce, the Vero Beach facility will offer life skills and vocational training to prepare clients to become productive citizens again.

### On our cover:

New Horizons Board of Directors: (bottom arch) SLC Sheriff's Chief Deputy Garry Wilson, President; Vice President Pat Austin; Treasurer John Wolsiefer, Sr.; and Secretary Nicholas Brown, Indian River State College; (top arch) Jo Norris; Carlos Bonet; Public Defender Diamond Litty; John Romano, CEO of New Horizons and Chairman of the Florida Council for Mental Health; Kathryn Hensley, St. Lucie County School Board; Greg Pickett; and Laura Murray

### The key to recovery from mental illness or substance abuse is access to services like the ones at New Horizons

"A sense of self sufficiency combined with the ability to learn, contribute and socialize with others enhances the recovery process," says Programs Manager of the St. Lucie County Recovery Team Michele Topnick, a 26-year veteran of New Horizons who supervises case managers.

"We work with the homeless and people on the brink of homelessness, as well as those with funds who are simply too ill to take care of themselves. They learn to trust us so we can help them," Topnick explains.

The New Health Primary Care Clinic on the main campus provides easy access to medical care from a physician. The clinic is open to all area residents, including mental health and substance abuse clients, who commonly neglect their physical wellbeing.

"Statistically, the life span of people with mental illness is 25 years less than the general population," says Romano. "We're committed to changing that."

Fear of doctors, lack of transportation, undiagnosed diseases, environmental dangers, tobacco use, diet, and chronic substance abuse augment the mortality rate.

"Health is not compartmentalized — it's the integration of the physical, mental and emotional aspects of each person," Romano says. "Having a primary care clinic right on our campus is not only beneficial to New Horizons clients... it's essential."

To learn more or donate, please visit [nhtcinc.org](http://nhtcinc.org) (NewHorizonsTreasureCoastInc.org) or call 772-672-8333.

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