



Interviewing Nicole. Giambavlo

We are highlighting a peer leader who is active in the community. Nicole Giambavlo is the Nassau County Family Support System of Care Youth Engagement Specialist.

1. What do you believe to be your greatest accomplishments while working as the Youth Engagement Specialist in Nassau County?

One thing that I feel has made a huge impact on youth-guided care in Nassau County is my having a seat at the Nassau County SPOA meetings. I have served as a youth advocate for youth being placed outside of the home. I feel that being

able to support the youth who represent themselves at SPOA in advocating for their needs is a very important accomplishment.

2. Why do you come to work every day? What do you love about your position?

I come to work every day because I truly believe in the principles of youth-guided care and youth empowerment within the mental health system. I love being able to work with youth and young people. The resilience of Nassau County youth truly inspires me.

3. How has your role helped you grow personally and professionally?

My role has led me to pursue a second master's degree in social work (MSW). Previously, I always knew I wanted to work with children, youth, and young adults, but didn't really have a sense of what exactly I wanted to do. Working in both a direct-service and administrative capacity at Nassau County Family Support System of Care (NCFSSOC) has shown me what changes I can make within young people's lives through hard work and dedication.

4. What battles do we still need to fight to make sure all children and youth get the support they need in New York's child serving systems?

I think that education about what youth empowerment and youth-guided care principles really mean and can look like within child-serving systems is the first step to achieve the goals of the movement. I also think that more youth should have access to and be involved in advocacy trainings.

5. I have heard about the Rise Up 4 Youth Blog. What inspired this? Can you tell us about it?

Our "riseup4youth" tumblr was inspired by some of the youth involved in the NCFSSOC. Many youth told me that they found recovery blogs on tumblr that helped them cope with the challenges they were facing either at home or at school related to their mental health needs. I worked with many of the youth in the program to design and create the blog as a space for the youth of Nassau County to post things that give them hope, as well as any information that might be important to them.

6. What inspired you to get involved in the Youth and young adult advocacy Movement

My experiences as a youth led me to get involved in the movement along with my desire to work with children, youth, and young adults. I began working with LGBTQ youth in after-school programs across New York City and continued on from there.

7. What is something interesting that most people do not know about you?

Well, if you have ever shared a meal with me you would probably know this, but not everyone knows that I am vegan, which means I abstain from eating or using animal products including meat, dairy and eggs.

8. Pretend you have the power to change anything in the world. What would you change?

I think that I would change people's ideas about what "justice" means. I'd hope that all people saw justice as a form of equality connected to fair distribution of resources and information for everyone.

9. What goals are you currently working toward in your life?

I'm currently in my first year of the MSW program at SUNY Stony Brook. That is a major goal that I'm working towards!

10. Tell us a favorite quote or inspirational saying that helps you in your advocacy work.

What after all has maintained the human race on this old globe, despite all the calamities of nature and all the tragic failings of mankind, if not the faith in new possibilities and the courage to advocate them? – Jane Addams

11. You are talking to a young person who is walking on a similar path as you once did. What words of wisdom or perseverance can you offer?

I would tell him or her not to lose hope and to try to connect with other young people who have experienced similar challenges. I would tell him or her that knowing that you're not alone can sometimes be the most powerful knowledge you can gain. I have

seen the amazing changes that can occur when a group of young people come together in solidarity.

12. Who do you look up to in the advocacy world?

bell hooks (she doesn't capitalize her name). She is an amazing writer and social activist.

13. Are you working on any innovative projects that you want us to know about?

RiseUP!, the Nassau County youth group has recently began building an executive board and will be working on a "What Helps? What Harms?" focus group project. I'm very excited about this!

Here are some of what her co-workers had to say about her:

"Nicole is an amazing young woman – intelligent, caring, perceptive. She has a way of identifying without judging, caring with sincerity, and infusing hope and a vision for bright futures! "

-Eileen Kadletz , L.I.F.T Program Manger

Nicole is one of the most dedicated, team oriented people that I have ever worked with! She is full of great ideas and the way she takes initiative and helps out when needed is applaudable. As a coworker and friend, I will always appreciate Nicole for her smarts and how able she is to recognize injustice and fight to make things fair and equitable. Working with her is an honor.

- Norissa Atingdui - Director of Cultural & Linguistic Competence

Nicole is one of the most hardworking individuals I know and I am blessed to call her my coworker and friend. Nicole is a dedicated children's mental health advocate as well as a solid role model to the children and youth that we work with. Through her honesty and openness, she inspires youth to believe in themselves.

-Denine. M Anderson Regan , Social Marketing Coordinator L.I.F.T & Nassau County Family Support System of Care

Nicole is the Teen Whisper

- Susan Burger , L.I.F.T Executive Director