

SILO Newsletter: June 2026

A Message from the CEO

May was declared Mental Health Awareness Month, but the end of May should never mean the end of the conversation. Mental Health Awareness Month is a vital catalyst, but mental health doesn't follow a calendar—it is a 365-day-a-year reality.

While Long Island has incredible organizations, passionate advocates, and forward-thinking community leaders, the local system is stretched to its absolute limit.

Long Islanders frequently face long waitlists for psychiatric care, a shortage of bilingual clinicians, and high costs that insurance doesn't always cover.

Mental illness doesn't happen in a vacuum. When an individual struggles, their parents, children, and spouses ride the emotional and financial rollercoaster with them. True support means funding respite care, family support groups, and systemic education.

To "think big" and turn May's momentum into permanent change, the focus must shift toward aggressive advocacy and sustainable infrastructure year-round.

We must continuously pressure county, state, and federal lawmakers to treat mental health funding with the same urgency as physical healthcare infrastructure. This means funding mobile crisis stabilization teams, school-based mental health clinics, and affordable housing for those with severe diagnoses.

The professionals on the front lines—social workers, counselors, and community health workers—are notoriously underpaid and overworked. Funding must be allocated to competitive salaries to prevent burnout and attract talent to the field.

Normalizing mental health means integrating it directly into primary care physician offices, schools, and workplaces so that intervention happens before a crisis occurs.

Please give us a call at SILO, ask for the New York Connect office. So that we can provide that bridge you may need to long term mental health services. Our services are free.

The discussion cannot stop. We need to keep the spotlight on mental health year-round is how we break the stigma for good, secure the funding our communities desperately lack, and ultimately save lives. Let's keep pushing forward.

Joseph M. Delgado

Chief Executive Officer

We Are Talking Baseball

By Judy Wieber

The crack of the bat, the smell of hot dogs, and the roar of the crowd; these are some of the aspects of baseball that make me smile. Being in the stands on a warm sunny day. When I had vision, the green color of the grass, the brown dirt, white lines, white bases, the players in their uniforms, contrasting against the field were all appealing to my eyes. Today, these memories bring back fond thoughts of going to a game with my husband, Harold, or attending a little league game of our son, Hayden. Those were fun and happy times.

Harold would say that he was the biggest Mets fan on the planet. You could find him, radio in hand, sitting up in the nosebleed seats with his friends, Mike and Dan, on Opening Day, no matter if the weather was cooperative. It could be raining, or the threat of rain. He might be there freezing his butt off. It did not matter he would be in the bleachers. He was one of the fans back in 1986, when the Mets won the National League championship, that needed to take a piece of the field home with him. Then again in 2006, this time with three-year-old Hayden at his side, Harold was there, cheering the Mets to victory as they won the Division.

It was exceedingly rare that he missed listening to a game. He, too, was blind and preferred to bring a transistor radio to the stadium, since it gave a good narration of what was happening on the field.

Harold was a devout Mets fan. Hayden wanted to be a Yankee fan. In those days, Harold had a rule. Harold would say to Hayden, "Okay, if you would like to be a Yankee fan, or any team for that matter, you must learn the names of the players and their stats before I consider you a devoted fan." This greatly motivated Hayden to learn all the team members and what kind of player they were. Impressing his dad, Hayden gained the respect of his father as a true Yankee fan.

Though I cannot say I was a big baseball fan like Harold, or even Hayden, I did enjoy playing beeper baseball back in the 90's when I was in my twenties, before even knowing Harold. I was blind and had never heard of blind people playing baseball before. There had been a demonstration game in the field at my church, and it was suggested that I go and find out what it was all about.

The team manager, Charlie Meisenheimer, was blind and a retired Verizon Telephone Operator. He met with me and told me how the game was played. Charlie explained that everyone on the team is legally blind, except for the pitcher and catcher. Their job is to help the batter make contact. The ball, the size of a large softball, has a beeping device inside of it. There are sighted volunteers called Spotters. "The umpire, too, is sighted, but I suppose that could be debatable," chuckled Charlie. Charlie instructed: though like baseball some adaptations were made. Instead of four balls and three strikes, players get one

ball and four strikes. Players are allowed to listen to the ball once before the first pitch, so they can gauge the speed of the ball as it is tossed, beeping, over home plate. It is also recommended to take a few swings of the bat before things get started. It enables the pitcher to get a good sense of timing, and where to place the ball, since everyone has a different swing.

Contact and setting the ball sailing is the name of the game. In Beeper Baseball, the pitcher is on your team. As opposed to sighted baseball, where the pitcher is on the opposing team, doing everything in their power to avoid contact. Let's face it, making contact with the ball without sight is no easy feat. If, after your four strikes, you have not made contact, you are issued an out. If you are skilled enough to make contact and send the ball into play, then the batter must listen to the call of the spotter, who shouts out to which zone the ball has been sent. The spotter also signals either first or third base to sound their beacon. Players must listen before they run, avoiding running in the wrong direction. I must say, this is a challenge. My knee-jerk reaction was: make contact, run to first base. Players listen first, then run. This took a little to get used to. If the player gets to the base before the players in the field, who are also blind, it is considered a home run. If the opposite occurs, and the players in the field get to the ball before the batter makes it to base, the player is out.

Coincidentally, while on a fishing trip last fall, I met Alex Barrera, who is now the captain of the New York Bombers Beeper Baseball team here in the tri-state area. Alex and I got to talking, and I realized that he probably knew a friend of mine who played for the Babylon Beepers, Jim Hughes.

Jim and I were teammates on the Babylon Beepers. Jim, in the mid 1990's, left the Beepers to follow his friend Steve to play for the Long Island Bombers, a team organized by Ted Fass. The LI Bombers primarily played in Nassau County, while The Babylon Beepers played in Suffolk.

Unfortunately, as the players on the Babylon Beepers were dwindling, and our manager, Jack Scherr, passed away, the Suffolk County team broke apart, and a new Nassau team appeared.

I, personally, did not want to travel to Nassau, so as the Babylon Beepers dissolved, so did my participation.

While speaking with Alex, I thought it would be nice to get an article about beeper baseball for our newsletter. Alex agreed to have me interview Jim, since he is still incredibly involved with the NY Bombers and served as team captain for several years.

The following is my interview with Jim:

Judy: So, you say the Bombers have been around since 1998?

Jim: That sounds right. I would say, yes. '97 or '98. We started as an organization when Ted Fass, who was our executive director until he passed two years ago, started along with another gentleman, and a friend of mine, Steve Guerra. I was one of the original players. Yes, I've been involved with them since the beginning, but now my involvement is more on an administrative level. I do not play full-time anymore. I am kind of retired, but I am there for the scrimmages or I do a lot of community outreach for them, or if they do any educational programs. So, I am still involved, just not necessarily at the competitive level.

Judy: Well, that's great. So, do you get a lot of new young players?

Jim: Yes. See what happened was, Alex Barrera, he took over for captain when I had some health issues related to my hearing. So, he took over, and he's, he's done a nice job in the last few years of expanding the outreach to not only Long Island, but more of the, the metropolitan area. So now, we've rebranded from the Long Island Bombers to the New York Bombers, and as a result, I was able to recruit a lot of players.

Judy: Ah, so the LI Bombers became the New York Bombers, fantastic!

Jim: We are recruiting from the Manhattan area, Westchester even. And it's just, it's growing. How we used to struggle to fill the team of six or seven. Now they have 20 players.

Judy: Wow!

Jim: It seems to be growing. So, they're more involved with the different blind athlete associations in Manhattan, and it just gives them a lot more resources to tap into.

Judy: Do they practice in Manhattan or in Nassau County?

Jim: They do both. They practice, in Rockville Center on Long Island, and then they also practice at Marcus Garvey Park in Manhattan. So, again, those two options allow players more choice and flexibility. If you can't get to Long Island because it's a hardship or you're not near Penn Station, you could practice with players in Manhattan. But, if you're a 'wuss', like me, and don't want to go into Manhattan for practice, we practice in both regions, which you get is nice, because you're allowing for more opportunities.

Judy: First, I would never use the word 'wuss' to describe you, Jim (smile). And it sounds like everyone's travel situation is taken into consideration.

Judy: And is it basically the same game? You recruit volunteers, and you play beeper ball?

Jim: Yeah. It hasn't changed much. I don't know if the bases were 90 feet at the time, but they're a hundred feet away now. It's still one take and four strikes, and you still have six players on the field. And then you have a sighted spotter. Some teams use two. I think we flirted with that idea. But you could use one or two spotters, and then there's the pitcher and the catcher on your team who are sighted, as you probably recall. The placement of the bases being drawn out a little further. And some teams use two spotters, again, you can only call out one zone... So, you must be coordinated, with one spotter on one side of the field, and the other spotter on the other side. And, hopefully, they call it correctly on their side, because if you call too many zones, they can call that a run. So, you must be careful.

Judy: So, if too many zones are called?

Jim: A zone. Oh, okay. So, let's say first base is a zone, a ball hit down the first base line is in zone one. In between second and first might be a two, directly up the middle might be a three. Short stop, four, the third base, five, again, depending on how many players are in the field. And then, if the spotter calls one zone, that's all they're allowed to say. So, if they say zone three, the ball was probably hit directly up the middle. So, the four players would slide over to their left. And the other players would slide over to their right. Hoping to block that zone and stops the run from being made.

Judy: Oh, wow. I got you.

Judy: And it's not that they must throw it over the home plate. Right? You must get to the base before they get to the ball in the field to get a run?

Jim: Right? Correct. If you gain possession of the ball on defense and you need to show it, you must lift it up. If you do that before they get to the base, the batter is out. And now, if they get to the base before you gain possession of the ball, it's a run.

Judy: So, when we played the game, we would play sighted teams who wore blindfolds. Is that the case here?

Jim: I would say the sighted team idea is an anomaly for this group, so they may do that once a year, and I don't know if they're going to expand that down the road, but they mostly play other blind teams, so... The East Coast, we have the Beast of the East, which is a tournament that we play Boston, and New Jersey, and Philadelphia. And now Boston has a second team, so there's at least a few teams in our region that we can play. And sometimes, we'll scrimmage the double header with one of the Boston teams or the Jersey team. So, and then there's, there's other regional, and other tournaments they can go to. But the major one is the NBBA's World Series, the NBBAs, the National Beep Baseball Association. They have a World Series. It's basically a week long. The games are from Tuesday through Saturday. And the World Series can move all over the place. It's been in St. Louis, it's been in Houston, it's been in Minnesota and Iowa, so it moves, around the nation, especially the Midwest. I guess they have the land, and it's not as expensive. You must stay in a hotel each time, it is an expensive proposition. 'Cause you have the travel expenses, you have the hotels, and your meals. So, the Bombers have done a nice job with their fundraising. I think they're pretty solvent.

We were at The Kelly Clarkson Show last year, which was cool.

Judy: Oh, wow! Really? Ah, that is so cool! Yes, I must check that out. I could probably find it somehow on the internet.

Jim: Right. Yes, for sure, so that was cool. And as a result, we got a nice donation which we used for equipment and uniforms.

Again, Alex has done a wonderful job expanding our donors from not only Long Island, but now into Manhattan, where you have a better chance of raising money.

Judy: That's true. And then, too, does everybody travel as a team to a tournament, or do players have to get their own way there?

Jim: When it comes to the World Series, they mainly travel as a team, but they go to Boston, and some take a train. Some will take a car; some will take a bus. Depends on their work schedules as well. So, each finds a way. And they also travel in groups. Once the team arrives, they all stay in the same hotel.

As you probably remember, it's nice for socialization and networking. Not only just playing the game. It's a nice opportunity, especially for the new players. It may be the first time they ever heard of anything like this. They may not have even known or known that something like this even existed. It helps because it shows how the blind are doing things that they may not have even known it was possible to do!

Judy: Well, this was fun. Thank you, Jim, for your time.

If one wanted to learn more about the New York Bomber, how would they go about it?

Jim: NYBombers.org, which directs you to the Facebook page.

PSEG Outreach

On May 20, Patrick Davis, HEALI Community Health Worker, outreached with NY Connects Director Kelly-Rae Douglas and I&A Specialist Codi Hill at PSEG in Melville. Together, they discussed at length the many services offered at SILO, including the HEALI program. PSEG were very interested in SILO's services, which they believe are relevant to many of their own clients, asking additional questions about each of SILO's programs, and assuring they would be referring clients to us soon.

I Swear is, in fact, up to some good.

By Kelsey Kalafut, LMSW

As a proud card-carrying AMC A-List member, I love going to the movies. And I especially love it when I see something that can make me laugh and cry at the same time. This week, I saw a movie that might not get much attention. It was the opening night, and it was already playing in a smaller theater. I was one of seven in attendance, despite it having just won two BAFTAs. *I Swear* tells the real-life story of John Davidson, a born-and-raised Scot living with Tourette's Syndrome.

Tourette's Syndrome is a neurological condition that causes a range of motor and vocal tics. These tics are a compulsion that cannot be held back. Think of a tic as trying to hold in a sneeze; it eventually needs to come out. Tics do not care if you are in a library, at work, or at the ballet; so much so that people living with this condition may avoid these areas for fear of discrimination. *I Swear* shows how debilitating this condition can be and what society can learn.

The movie opens with adult John receiving one of the UK's highest honors, the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, but not before hurling an exploitative at Queen Elizabeth II. This sets the stage for the next two hours: a rollercoaster of laughs and heartbreaking moments, sometimes co-occurring. We travel back to 1983, where 12-year-

old John is starting a new school, on track to be a football player, and has a paper route. This is when John starts to develop his tics. This is a time when Tourette's Syndrome was not a household understanding, and we see John having to navigate bullying and being 'othered' by his classmates and family. Without spoiling too much, as John gets older, he finds solace in the company of an old school friend, Murray, his family, and, specifically, Murray's mother, Dottie. Opening their arms to welcome John, he now begins to feel a budding acceptance and motivation for independence.

I will not sugarcoat it, this movie depicts heavy but real topics of suicidal ideation, abuse, and assault. Real components of John's life; despite the horrors, he found a community that saw the amazing soul he really is and encouraged him to begin an initiative to educate hospitals, law enforcement, and schools about Tourette's Syndrome. Although there is no cure, the most important piece of Tourette's is education.

If you have the opportunity to see this film, do so. You will leave with the sentiment that all you need is a few people to believe in you, and you can do amazing things.

Employee Spotlight:

Arianna Yannetta

This month, we honor Arianna Yannetta for all her hard work! Arianna is our Intake Coordinator in the Housing Department. She is helpful, patient, kind, and extremely passionate about her work. She is great at training new staff, as she takes her time to thoroughly explain each step. She is an amazing asset to her department, bringing a positive attitude to work every day. Thanks for all you do, Arianna!

Simone Kelly

This month, we honor Simone Kelly for all her hard work! Simone is an OHS Housing Specialist. Her coworkers describe her as efficient, professional, compassionate, and inspiring. She builds great rapport with colleagues and clients, manages all her tasks effortlessly, and is quick to help with resources and advice. Thanks for all you do, Simone!

Over Exerted: A Warning

By Angel Vasquez

Here we are. Witnessing the emergence of the summer solstice. Some of us have a health and fitness routine in place, and some of us do not. For those who are aspiring to get into a fitness routine, an exciting step in improving our health, it's also important to be aware of our limitations. Setbacks will occur along the way. This often necessitates adaptation and adjustments in order to work out both effectively and safely. If we do not adhere to this, we can end up injuring ourselves, which can be very serious.

Last month, I was finally able to schedule a time to meet with my personal trainer at the Patchogue YMCA. At the time, I was very excited to meet him and to get right into our workout schedule. When we walked into the gym, on my very first day, he asked me what I would like to do first. I showed him a workout routine that I had been practicing during my first days in the YMCA gym. I wanted to do this to make sure that he was on board with my game plan. To my surprise, he was. The first thing we did was the Stairmaster. Since this was my first time working with a trainer, I was slightly nervous and wanted to get a feel of what such an experience would be like. This was not what I would normally do.

Normally, I would focus on lifting weights first and then do some cardio. Instead of spending four minutes on the Stairmaster, which is what I would normally do, I spent ten minutes on that fateful day. I also had increased the Stairmaster to a faster speed than I was used to. When I got off the Stairmaster, I felt very exhausted, my ears were ringing, and I was extremely lightheaded. My trainer asked me if I was doing ok. He could see I was not in a good way. I told him I just needed to cool off. Not only had I failed to tell him how I was really feeling that day, I also did not inform him about my heart condition. My heart has leaky valves which cause mild regurgitation. I could have triggered a serious aggravation within my heart. I then sat down on the floor. I tried to cool down, but to no avail. This was when my trainer realized that something was seriously wrong. Acknowledging this, he went to tell my support staff.

I could not catch my breath and continued to hyperventilate as I sat on the floor. Before I knew it, several gym-goers surrounded me, offering their assistance. One of them was a nurse.

She positioned my legs so I could be more comfortable. I exhaled in her face, but I apologized. She had no problem with it. Her main concern was my well-being. Another woman came to my aid. She was the one who gave me and my support staff a tour of the Patchogue YMCA when we first started traveling there. She asked me if I knew where I was. I was able to tell her my exact location. Everyone else stayed with us until an EMT crew arrived. I was then given a chair to sit in. After a couple of minutes, I was able to stand up and walk out of the gym alongside the EMTs. I received nothing but best wishes on my way out. One of the YMCA staff members even held the door for me.

When I arrived at the hospital, the doctors and nurses did a checkup on my heart. They monitored me for one day in the Immediate Care Unit. Before I knew it, I was discharged from the ICU in the dark of night. Neither I nor my family knew exactly how serious my heart condition was. The main lesson that can be learned from this is to disclose any and all health conditions one may have to the trainer before engaging in physical activity. It is also essential to research one's own conditions and understand thoroughly how exercise may impact it and vice versa. I made a critical mistake in not disclosing my condition because I had not researched it myself.

Luckily, though, my mistake turned out to be a fortune in disguise. Because of this, I was able to see a cardiologist regarding my heart condition. It turns out that I have mild regurgitation from my heart valves. The doctor informed me that as a result of my condition, I should avoid very rigorous exercise. I learned that I can continue to walk as I love to do, but that I should not run fast or sprint. Needless to say, I won't be trying the Stairmaster or the treadmill again any time soon. There's been more of an effort to monitor and treat my heart condition. Thankfully, I will be having a follow up soon. That way, I will have a better understanding of where my heart is at.

Now I know my limits, and luckily, this incident did not become a more serious emergency. I learned as well how important it is to be in a supportive, comfortable environment. Had it not been for the generosity and care of the community at the YMCA who helped me, it's possible things could have been much, much worse. When I was on the ground,

hyperventilating and sweating profusely, I did not expect to receive the help and concern that I did. At that moment, I felt very safe. As I conclude this article, I cannot help but think to myself: it's going to take more than a Stairmaster to kill me.

An Exercise of Self-Love

By Stephanie Konarski

What is self-love? Sometimes this question can leave us stumped for an answer. While some find it easy to appreciate aspects of themselves, others may struggle to come up with anything at all. I encourage you to take a moment to ask yourself: “What is one thing that you love about yourself?” There is no right answer or response to this question, and we can all learn a lot from our reaction to it. If you can bring to mind something that makes you feel good, then that is wonderful! If this feels difficult, consider trying to approach the resistance from a place of curiosity. At times, we can be our own biggest critics, but underneath that harsh voice, we can find things to celebrate. Self-love can show up in infinite ways, and it does not have to be something big to be meaningful. This question that I have posed to you, I have also asked the team at SILO. I am here to share our exercise of self-love with you in hopes that you are inspired to appreciate yourself a little bit more.

The idea for this practice came to me while planning an activity for SILO’s monthly bulletin board. February is often a time centered on romantic love, but focusing only on this type of love leaves a lot of people out, which for many can enhance feelings of loneliness and grief. There is one type of love that anyone can cultivate, which is love for ourselves. When I asked the SILO team to come up with a self-love affirmation, there were a variety of reactions. Initially, there was hesitation from some who worried that it would be boastful to share something they admired about themselves, while others could immediately think of something. After a few bravely shared their affirmations with me, our bulletin board began to fill up with so many insights. It became clear that self-love can be discovered in many ways if we give ourselves the time to pause and reflect.

The first affirmation shared with me reads: “One thing that I love about myself is that I am aware of my weakness as well as my strengths. I know me, I know what I need to work on,

or work around, or what I can rely on. I have become comfortable with this realization. So, I guess I love being human in the same boat as everyone else.” This can teach us that we do not have to be perfect to love ourselves. Another wrote: “I love that despite how dark I sometimes feel, I can be a light for others.” This shows us that we can find self-love in how we show up for others, which can in turn help uplift us through our own challenges. The following affirmation reminds us that caring for our health is an important act of self-love: “I love that over the years I have learned to manage and maintain my diabetes, always keeping my health as a priority!” There were many more responses where people recognized that they loved their unique traits, whether it be their sense of humor, loving heart, creativity, or the way they are a safe space for others. Everyone’s reflections came together to show how limitless self-love can be and how uplifting it is when we lean into it. Taking the time to acknowledge what you can love about yourself can have positive effects on your self-esteem and overall well-being. When we notice even the smallest aspects of ourselves, it can help us tune into the many ways in which we can love who we are. I hope that you were able to uncover something to celebrate about yourself while reading this. If it still feels difficult to do so, consider asking a friend or loved one to share something that they love about you. This could be a great starting place to cultivate a better appreciation for yourself. I will end this by sharing the final affirmation shared with me, which reads: “All human beings need is love and peace. I have found both! But in the finding of both, I learned what life is all about. It’s keeping a balance between love and peace.”

Upcoming Events:

Virtual Bingo: 6/16

Visit our website to register and learn more! www.siloinc.org/events

Dave & Buster’s Fundraiser

Thursday, June 19th, 2026, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

1856 Veterans Memorial Hwy, Islandia, NY 11749

Americans with Disabilities Act Celebration – 36th Anniversary of the ADA

Friday, July 24th, 2026, 11:00 am – 2:30 pm

3253 NY-112, Medford, NY 11762; Parking lot of building 10.

www.siloinc.org/ada

Upcoming Closures:

Friday, June 19th – Juneteenth

Friday, July 3rd – Independence Day Observation