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How is Long Island Reach rallying the community for critical services?

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From rooftop concerts to community golf outings, Long Island Reach's fundraising efforts help sustain vital mental health, substance use and educational programs for more than 1,000 local residents each year.

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Brandi Calhoun

For more than 50 years, [Long Island Reach](#) has been a cornerstone of hope, providing vital services in mental health, substance use treatment and education. From counseling individuals struggling with addiction to operating the [Harriet Eisman Community School](#) for students who have not thrived in traditional classrooms, the organization's mission has always been clear: support the community in times of need.

That mission has never been more urgent.

"As a community-based organization, we really depend on the support of the community," says Executive Director Joe Smith. "Now more than ever, we have that need... we've been through crises before... and we're confident that we're going to continue to be able to do that, but we can't do it without the support of people in the community."

Fundraising with purpose

While Long Island Reach receives some funding from government sources, that support alone cannot sustain the scope of its work. This is where fundraising — and the generosity of neighbors — comes in.

Board Chairperson Scott Nigro explains, ““We run fundraising events, as well as asking for donations on our website, just like other organizations.”

Two major annual events have become staples of Long Island Reach’s fundraising calendar: the spring golf outing and the fall [Rock for Recovery concert](#). The golf outing draws a loyal crowd each year for a day on the links followed by a dinner at a local restaurant.

But it’s Rock for Recovery, Nigro says, that really strikes a chord — literally and figuratively. “We have rock bands... and we have done it live after our initial virtual event during the Covid pandemic. This year we’ll have three acts. It’s an exciting evening out with music, food and fun times, all in aid of a great cause.”

The event will once again be held on the rooftop of the Allegria Hotel, offering sweeping views of the Long Beach boardwalk and ocean. Local restaurants donate the food, and participating bands perform free of charge.

“A lot of the local bands are very enthusiastic about joining us... because they know the agency and they want to help,” Nigro says. “The lineup this year is really spectacular... we’re hoping it will bring people to come and listen, have an enjoyable evening, and get the sponsors that we need.”

Why the work matters

Long Island Reach’s programs touch every corner of the community. “There isn’t a family that hasn’t been touched by one or more of the struggles that our programs are designed to help with,” Smith says. “Whether it’s a family member or a friend who’s been touched by substance use, someone who’s experienced a level of emotional distress, or a youngster who’s not able to function within a traditional educational environment — everybody is affected.”

The agency currently serves more than 700 individuals through its programs, and over the decades, has helped thousands more. Each of those individuals represents a family that has felt the ripple effect of support. “All of these families want to know that these services are going to continue to be available,” Smith says.

That’s why events like Rock for Recovery are more than just fundraisers — they’re community rallies for a cause that affects everyone.

Adapting and persevering

The past five decades have tested Long Island Reach in ways both predictable and unexpected — Hurricane Sandy, Sept. 11, the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, to name a few. Through it all, the organization has adapted and persevered.

“We’ve never had it easy financially,” Smith notes. “We’ve always had to struggle with limited funding and therefore... the need for supplementing our funding with additional funds through fundraising.”

Nigro adds that public awareness and outreach are key. “We need people to open their hearts as well as their wallets to help us to continue providing the services,” he says. “As much as people talk about mental health issues and substance abuse issues, there seems to be a reluctance... to actually put the money where their mouth is in terms of government. That makes it tougher for us sometimes.

Do you want to help support the Long Island Reach mission?

Smith emphasizes there are many ways to help: attend events, make a donation online at <https://longislandreach.org>, keep an eye out for other special events throughout the year, join the board, volunteer at the Harriet Eisman Community School, or simply spread the word about the organization's mission.

"I would encourage everybody to come out to Rock for Recovery," he says. "You get great food, a beautiful venue overlooking the ocean, incredibly wonderful music, and at the same time, you get to demonstrate your support for the critical services that this organization provides. So, it's a great cause. It's also a lot of fun."

Whether through financial contributions, volunteering or showing up for events, community support ensures Long Island Reach can continue to be, in Smith's words, "a phone call away" for anyone in need.

"We've been here for over 50 years," he says. "And we plan on being here for the next 50 years — but we need the community's support in order to ensure that we can do that."

For more information on how you can support Long Island Reach, visit <https://longislandreach.org/>.

