

Children, Families and the Northside Center for Child Development: A Lasting Legacy in Harlem

In 1946 Drs. Mamie Phipps Clark and Kenneth B. Clark established the Northside Center for Child Development (originally the Northside Testing and Consultation Center) to address and assist the social, emotional and psychological needs of Harlem's youth.

Originally conceived by the Clarks to supplement established social services agencies in the Harlem area, the Clarks recognized a lack of services for youth in Harlem and the urgent need for a comprehensive multi-service facility providing mental health services for individualized care and psychiatric treatment for neglected and delinquent children and children of normal intelligence with problems of school retardation. Distinguishing itself from other community mental health centers, Northside offered a non-traditional approach to the problems of children and their families. The Clarks combined clinical therapeutic work with educational and recreational services to meet the needs of children, youth and their families with emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties in a holistic manner.

Envisioning the center as a potential alternative to the alienating child welfare system in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s, the Center officially opened on March 1, 1946, in a one-room basement apartment of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Houses on West 150th Street and Seventh Avenue, becoming the City's first comprehensive agency to deal with the psychological and social needs of African American children.

With a modest ground-floor suite and no funds except for a small loan of \$936 from Mamie's father to furnish and renovate the space, Northside began serving the needs of Harlem with a staff of part-time volunteer psychiatrists, psychologist pediatricians and social workers. Serving sixty children in its first year, the Center quickly outgrew its space in the Dunbar Houses within two years and relocated to the New Lincoln School (currently the Lincoln Correctional Facility) at 31 West 110th Street on the 6th floor overlooking Central Park. In 1974 the Center relocated to the Schomburg Towers at the corner of 110th Street and Fifth Avenue where it may currently be found.

Today, under the leadership of Dr. Thelma Dye, Northside serves over 2,000 children and families annually. Offering a combination of mental health and educational services, including traditional psychological therapy and diagnostic testing as well as remedial reading and math tutoring programs, nutrition workshops and parenting classes, Northside is continually expanding. Now in its six decade the center is a lasting legacy in Harlem meeting the changing needs of Harlem's youth and families with a school, daycare, day camps and head start programs.

1. Drs. Mamie and Kenneth Clark at Northside.
(Photo courtesy of Northside Center for Child Development)

2. A youthful Dr. Clark at Northside.
(Photo Courtesy of Northside Center for Child Development)

3. Psychologist testing client at Northside.
(Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)

4. Dr. Clark with a group of children on the Plaza of Schomburg Towers.
(Photo courtesy of Northside Center for Child Development)

5. Assembly of children and staff at Northside's third-floor gym at the Schomburg Towers.
(Photo courtesy of Northside Center for Child Development)

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