

BRONX PEOPLE

Dedicating her life to aid kids in crisis

BY BILL EGBERT

TWENTY-EIGHT years ago, Grissette Calderone applied for a job at the New York Foundling Hospital, mainly because her uncle worked there. But once she saw the children, she was hooked.

Calderone started working at Foundling's Crisis Nursery and she never left, turning down promotions so she could stay with the children as a caretaker.

"When I met my husband, I brought him in and told him he's going to have to share me with the nursery," said Calderone, 48, of Castle Hill. "I told him, 'This is my life. This is my first love.'"

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and that's the mission of the Crisis Nursery, at 590 Sixth Ave. in Manhattan, which provides a safe place for the kids of parents nearing the end of their ropes before their situation deteriorates to the point the children must be removed from the home.

Struggling mothers can voluntarily leave

their youngsters at the nursery for up to 28 days while they work with social workers to stabilize their home lives.

Though it's mainly the Foundling's social services staff that deals with the mothers who bring their children to the Crisis Nursery, Calderone offers them a sympathetic ear and tips on dealing with stress in ways that don't burden their children.

"We're here to nurture the kids," Calderone said, "but sometimes the mothers come and talk to us, too. A lot of them call later and thank me for the advice."

Even when she's not at the nursery, Calderone's trained eye notices potential problems all the time in her daily life.

"I'll see a mother in a restaurant and I can tell from how she talks to her child that she's under too much stress," said Calderone. "I give out the [Crisis Nursery] number all the time."

New York Foundling operates a 24-Hour Parent Helpline at (888) 435-7553.



Grissette Calderone offers sympathetic ear to kids and parents in crisis.



GRISSETTE CALDERONE

BIO BITS: Grew up in Mott Haven; applied for a job at the Crisis Nursery in 1982 because her uncle worked for New York Foundling; moved to Castle Hill when she got married and raised two children — one of her own and a stepchild — now ages 19 and 27; briefly took in a foster child who tracked her down to thank her 16 years after he was returned to his family.

BEST PART OF JOB: "Being able to help turn families around and help them stay together."

WORST PART OF JOB: "When I can't get a child to come around, and sometimes they have to go into the hospital for psychiatric treatment or into foster care."

FAVORITE LEISURE ACTIVITY: "Oh, I don't have free time. I'm always coming down here [to the Crisis Nursery]. I can't stay away."

SECRET TALENT: "I can tell when something's wrong by looking at someone. I can sense if they're having a problem."

PHOTOS BY DANIELLA ZALCOWAN

Lehman HS whiz kids give Fed words of advice

BY BILL EGBERT

IT'S NOT every day that a group of Bronx high school students can give advice to the most powerful bank in the world.

That's what happened at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York when a trio of Lehman High School students participated in the Fed Challenge.

The annual event had teams from schools as far away as Connecticut come to the New York Fed's fortresslike downtown Manhattan headquarters and present economic analyses patterned on those the Federal Reserve relies on to set interest rates and steer the American economy.

The Lehman team, Taisia Ambers, Victoria Fung and Crystal Naraine, spent weeks studying how different factors like unemployment, consumer spending and household wealth interact to drive wages and prices up or down, and how the Fed's interest rate can influence them.

"You hear about these things on the news and you may not understand them at first," said Taisia, 16, "but they all fit together."

"My friends think I'm talking in a foreign language when I talk about this stuff," said Crystal, 17.

Crystal and Taisia had already learned



Lehman High students Victoria Fung (l.), Crystal Nabine (c.) and Taisia Ambers visit Wall Street with teacher Raymond Morales for Fed Challenge. Photo by David Handschuh/Daily News

a bit about how the Federal Reserve sets monetary policy in their entrepreneurship class, taught by Raymond Morales, who also coaches Lehman's Fed Challenge team. But Morales recruited Victoria for the team from outside the class.

"My friends were like, 'What's that?'"

said Victoria, 17, of her unusual choice of extracurricular activity. "But they sort of expect it from me — they think I'm kinda nerdy."

In their presentation — one judge called it one of the best he'd seen in their division — the girls went over a series of charts showing data they had

gathered but also used real-world examples — like a two-for-\$5 sale on flip-flops at Old Navy — to illustrate continued weakness in the economy.

Pointing to high unemployment, low consumer spending and a persistent "output gap" between what the economy could produce in theory and how much it actually does, the team said inflation was unlikely in the short term. So the three recommended the Fed keep interest rates at the current historic lows — at least for the time being.

On the other hand, they noted that the recession wiped out a staggering \$7 trillion of America's household wealth, and warned that as the job market recovers, the need to rebuild household savings may eventually cause workers to push for higher wages — another source of inflation.

The Lehman team recommended that in the longer term, the Fed would have to be ready to raise interest rates if necessary.

All three budding macroeconomists are juniors, and after their presentation they all said they would be interested in participating in the Fed Challenge again as seniors.

"I can't wait until next year," said Victoria.