

# How The Motherhood Center Came To Be

## *Dr. Catherine Birndorf's Story*

Established in 2017 with just six employees, we opened our doors to treat pregnant and postpartum women in our perinatal day program. Today, with more than 50 staff members and trainees, I am incredibly proud that despite the pandemic, The Motherhood Center has been able to expand care both in person and virtually to women suffering from Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs).

For 20 years as a reproductive psychiatrist in both academic and private practice settings, I had been treating women with psychiatric illness between menses and menopause, though primarily those who were pregnant and postpartum. However, my acutely ill patients needed more than outpatient therapy or medications, more than well-intentioned family support, more than sleep or lactation consultants, and more than neighborhood classes. I knew there was a need for a different, specialized level of care. But none existed.

My vision was to create a daily intensive outpatient treatment program designed just for pregnant and new moms – like one I wished existed for my own patients. They would not have to separate from their families or babies. They would be able to sleep at home each night. I was confident that there was a need for a freestanding center with specialized care for this vulnerable and much overlooked population of women. These women did not require inpatient hospital care. They needed comprehensive, specialized daily treatment in one place, that would help them to get better, faster. I was sure that this high level of care, distinct and outside of a traditional hospital or private practice, could do this.

I met with many people providing myriad programs for women with perinatal needs. With Billy Ingram, a healthcare industry entrepreneur, who was open to exploring unique models of care, I began to envision the kind of center that many of my own patients needed. We partnered with Paige Bellingham, LMSW, a PMAD survivor who crafted legislation for screening pregnant and postpartum women which was adopted by the NY state legislature (and our current Chief External Relations Officer).

We worked with the ideas and help of Margaret Howard, PhD, who created the first perinatal day treatment program in a hospital setting. And with advising from a good friend, both business consultant and attorney, Allison Carmen, JD (our current Chief Financial Officer and General Counsel), The Motherhood Center was established in 2017. I stand on the shoulders of these people and many other mentors and mothers to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude.

Since its inception, The Motherhood Center has achieved its goal of providing exceptional treatment as well as support and education for the many maternal mental health needs previously unavailable to women. We created a freestanding, day hospital program in a warm and inviting community setting with an on-site nursery for babies to be cared for while we “mother the mother” as she gets the intensive treatment she deserves. With our comprehensive care model, we also provide outpatient treatment including therapy and medication management for less acute patients as well as support groups and education.

In the past seven years, we have transformed the lives of mothers as well as their babies and families for generations to come. I am proud to say that we have truly changed the landscape of maternal mental health care. And we have only just begun.

I invite you to learn more about The Motherhood Center and our programs.

Warmly,



Catherine Birndorf, MD  
Co-Founder and CEO