



Family Service of Rhode Island

F O R B R I G H T E R F U T U R E S

Healing the Effects of Violence

In 2003 Family Service of Rhode Island and the Providence Police Department joined forces to create the Police Go-Team. Under this innovative program, Family Service clinicians are available twenty-four hours a day to provide on-scene crisis intervention to victims of violence and trauma.

Police have always had the option of recommending that victims and witnesses seek counseling after a crime. Why is it so important to have clinicians right at the scene?

Susan Erstling, Vice President of Trauma, Intake and Emergency Services at Family Service explains that immediate intervention is essential.

“We know that when children are exposed to trauma it impacts all aspects of their development, including their trust in others, sense of security, focus in school, and even ability to play. By responding immediately we can help reduce the impact and start recovery.”

Go-Team members have accompanied victims to the hospital, stayed with family members to give support



and comfort, and provided access to food, clothing, and shelter when a family couldn't return to their home safely.

The Go-Team is based on the Child Development – Community Policing Program model developed in 1991 in New Haven, Connecticut. A young mother had been violently murdered in the city. When police arrived at the bloody scene they advised her terrified young children to watch television and keep their

feet up so they wouldn't get blood on them. In the aftermath, the police chief went to the Child Study Center at the Yale University School of Medicine and asked for help. The Child Development – Community Policing program was the result.

Colonel Dean Esserman, now Chief of the Providence Police Department, was the deputy chief in New Haven at that time, and part of the initial program. He recalls that the department's motivation for the



Left to right: Lt. Anthony Sauro; Lt. Mary Day; Lt. George Stamatakos; Susan Erstling LICSW, PhD; Major Monty Monteiro; Carla Cuellar, BA, Intake Coordinator/Police Liaison; Capt. Keith Tucker; Capt. Steve Melaragno; Maj. Paul Fitzgerald; Lt. Detective Hugh Clements

collaboration arose from the difficult situations the police were experiencing again and again.

“Police officers work every day with families and children exposed to violence, and so they have a better understanding than most people of the short and the long term ramifications of that kind of experience. Giving police officers access to trained clinicians - who can treat victims right at the scene as well as provide follow-up - is a much welcomed resource. It’s like giving police officers another tool for their belt.”

The model has since been replicated in twelve cities, and numerous research studies have supported its effectiveness in addressing the needs of victims. This evidence helped persuade the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Justice Commission to provide initial funding for replicating the model here. Recently the United Way of Rhode Island

awarded additional support to the program.

Sergeant William Merandi of the police department’s Special Victims Unit says it’s not just the victims who benefit from the presence of the Go-Team clinicians. “The work of law enforcement is focused more on the perpetrator of the crime. We don’t have the training or even the time to be able to deal with the real emotional needs of the victims, even though we want to help. Before our partnership with Family Service, I’d often feel like I had nowhere to turn to get help for a victim.”

Police Lieutenant George Stamatakos, District Commander for District Two in Providence, concurs. “When the police were working alone, we would do what we could, but we really didn’t have many resources. Now it’s completely different. Now we can go on with our work, knowing that the victims will get all the help they need.”



Colonel Dean Esserman, Chief of Police, Providence Police Department, and Margaret Holland McDuff, CEO, Family Service of Rhode Island

Family Service Go-Team members: Clinicians: Lois Colwell, LCSW, Kathie Flynn, LICSW, Dave Graziano, MS, Jeanne Rheaume, LICSW, Lisa Walker, LCSW, Stacey Muise, LICSW; Coordinators: Karen Carlson, Beth Ladouceur, Carla Cuellar, Tiana Ochoa, Karen Townsend

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Additional facilities in Lower
South Providence, Mount Pleasant,
Smithfield, North Smithfield,
Bristol, and East Providence

Family Service of Rhode Island Brings Funding, Services to North Kingstown Schools



Less than a year after opening our first office in North Kingstown and the South County area, Family Service of Rhode Island is bringing nearly \$50,000 in funding from The Rhode Island Foundation as well as services to North Kingstown students.

“We have received a warm welcome and a strong willingness to partner with us,” said Margaret Holland McDuff, CEO of Family Service of Rhode Island.

The Rhode Island Foundation has granted \$48,000 to the agency to support a school-based mental health program in North Kingstown schools. The Rhode Island Foundation is a charitable community trust serving the people of Rhode Island.

“We are pleased to be a partner in this needed service for at-risk children and their families,” said Dr. James Halley, North Kingstown superintendent of schools. “By bringing these mental health and family support services directly to our schools, the project can address significant barriers to learning without having to send students out-of-district to more costly educational alternatives.”

This is a pilot project based on

one the agency has been providing in the Providence school system for several years.

It involves placing a mental health clinician at Davisville elementary and middle schools, and North Kingstown High School. The clinician will provide training and consultation to regular and special education teachers on recognizing mental health and substance abuse issues. “This will include techniques to prevent bullying and to resolve conflicts between students,” said Ms. Holland McDuff. The training and consultation may be provided to faculty in other schools, if time permits, she noted.

“We hope it’s a win for the involved student, his or her family, the other students in the schools, the faculty, and, ultimately, the North Kingstown taxpayers,” said Ms. Holland McDuff.

The grant from The Rhode Island Foundation is the result of months of planning involving school staff, the Davisville Child Opportunity Zone, Family Service of Rhode Island, and the foundation. “The Rhode Island Foundation was a great partner in this project,” said Ms. Holland McDuff.

Open Your Heart and Home to a Foster Child



All across Rhode Island there are children who need foster homes. Whether due to physical abuse, mental health problems, or a family emergency, at times foster care is necessary.

Can you help?

"All caring, secure, supportive families are valued," says Christina Londono, Foster Care Recruiter.

Foster parents receive a nearly \$12,000 annual tax-free stipend, a \$750 annual clothing allowance, medical coverage for the child, and other benefits. Family Service's program places boys and girls who are six years old and older.

For more information, please call Christina Londono at (401) 331-1350 ext. 3371.



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Our Mission is to respond creatively to the unmet needs of individuals, families and the community by building partnerships that *"help people help themselves."*