

Rhode Island One of Six “Supercommunities” Helping Traumatized Children

State Transitioning to Trauma-Informed Social Services for Children

Rhode Island has kicked off its efforts to transform social services across the state to being “trauma informed.”

“Abuse, neglect, crime, violence; these are common in the personal histories of the children being served at social service agencies across the state,” said Janice DeFrances, Ed.D., director of the Rhode [Department of Children, Youth and Families](#) (DCYF). “This new effort will provide care-givers the knowledge and skills to approach care with this in mind and will help us assess our current practices and develop more responsive systems.”

Rhode Island is one of only six areas in the nation chosen to participate in a federally funded project led by San Diego’s [Chadwick Center](#) for Children and Families. The goal of the project is to transform child welfare organizations so their services recognize the role trauma plays in the lives of children and families in their care.

“We chose Rhode Island because of the leadership of [Family Service of RI](#) and DCYF on child trauma issues, not only in the Northeast but across the nation,” said Lisa Conradi, Psy.D. of the Chadwick Center. Dr. Conradi will oversee the project, which also includes two counties in California, and counties in Florida, Oklahoma and Minnesota. Rhode Island’s is the only statewide effort.

“This will build on the work we started nearly a decade ago when we developed a partnership with the Providence police department to respond 24/7 to children at scenes of crime and violence,” said Margaret Holland McDuff, Family Service of RI CEO.

Family Service of RI, DCYF and Providence police department staff have presented the “Rhode Island Model” at a number of national gatherings. The model includes a 24/7 response to children and families exposed to trauma; a focus on prevention and early intervention; and strong partnerships with police departments.

Recently Family Service of RI was awarded a \$1.6 million federal grant to reduce the impact of trauma on the state’s children, with a priority on military families. “This new project with the Chadwick Center will be integrated into that grant’s efforts,” said Susan Erstling, Ph.D., who heads Family Service of RI’s child trauma center.

Steps to be followed in the months ahead include:

- a community assessment of the trauma-informed nature of the state's child welfare system;
- development of a "Supercommunity Trauma-Informed Implementation Plan";
- technical assistance and training to implement the plan.

Hundreds of staff from government and non-profits from across the state are slated to participate, said Dr. Erstling.

The kick-off took place Thursday, April 4th, at a reception at the Rhode Island Foundation in Providence.