

new horizons

Domestic Violence Services

a program of Community Health Center, Inc.

MIDDLETOWN

P.O. Box 1036
Middletown, CT 06457
Phone: 860.344.9599
Fax: 860.344.9953

CLINTON

P.O. Box 52
114 East Main Street
Clinton, CT 06413
Phone: 860.664.0787
Extension 8417

COURT SERVICES

Family Violence
Victim Advocate
Middlesex Superior
GA-9 Court
1 Court Street
Middletown, CT 06457
Phone: 860.343.6470
Fax: 860.343.6474

Testimony Regarding

HB 5005, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Department of Social Services

Appropriations Committee

February 19, 2020

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee. New Horizons provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Middlesex County. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

I am writing to urge your support of our request for funding under the Department of Social Services (DSS) to fully fund one full-time Child & Family Advocate in each of Connecticut's 18 domestic violence organizations, including New Horizons.

Last year we provided services to 72 children and 1,543 adults. Because our Child & Family Advocate is not a fully funded position, we must combine the work with another full-time advocate position. In the end, because this is not a fully funded position, our Child & Family Advocate does not have the full amount of time ideally necessary to best meet the needs of the children and survivors they serve.

It is important that children who experience family violence in their home are provided a comprehensive and holistic approach that takes into account their different needs. Families benefit from services that incorporate a multi-faceted approach involving both large and small scale change. By working with the family unit, service providers gain greater insight into the level of violence experienced by all members of the family and can assist in the continuous development of age appropriate safety planning.

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Currently our Child & Family Advocate utilizes a number of trauma-informed, evidence-based and resiliency-driven approaches to their work including the Devereux Early Child Assessment (DECA); Mom's Empowerment and Kid's Club curricula; play, music and art therapy, and child-specific responses to trauma and violence. The Child & Family Advocate will support the non-offending parent in identifying protective factors that will enhance the relationship with child(ren). Building protective factors are about helping to ensure the basic needs of the family are met, such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as connecting parents and children to various services they request.

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Our advocates successfully worked with a family of three for approximately 10 months helping them to transition to independent living. The mother came to New Horizons not speaking a word of English. Through the support of her advocates, she was able to utilize services to help her improve her English to the point of not requesting interpreters when she went to medical appointments. Advocates provided a large amount of emotional support to this client who was prevented from leaving her home by her abuser on many occasions including to receive prenatal care for her youngest child. The trauma that she endured caused advocates to advocate for her to participate in parenting classes, attending counseling sessions and to think about filing for a divorce. Her young children were also affected by the abuse they witnessed. Her son acted out on what he saw with his family, teachers and classmates to the point of having to involve Mobile Crisis services. While advocates advocated for her son and helped him to receive services, having a dedicated child advocate specifically assigned to him at all times would have been crucial to his continued success.

Providing supportive evidence- and strengths-based resiliency services for children and the non-offending parent/survivor is paramount to the overall safety and stability of the family, but is not sustainable under the current funding structure. The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, of which we are a member, is requesting \$954,000 in state funding under DSS to support one full-time Child & Family Advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence organizations. We urge your support of this request as it will have a substantially positive impact on our ability to meet the needs of the children and survivors who come through our doors each year.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

Denetra McBride

New Horizons

860-590-4237/mcbridd@chc1.com

Middlesex County