

## Grant Outcomes Report:

### Dignity Under Duress:

#### Improving Medical and Social Services for Rape/Sexual Assault & Child Abuse Survivors in Cattaraugus and Allegany County

##### I. Executive Summary

Sexual assault and child abuse are public health concerns that have not benefited from the kind of innovation that has improved the quality of care in so many other areas. This \$150,000 grant to the Southern Tier Health Care System supported programs to address the treatment of victims of sexual abuse and violence by providing them with prompt, comprehensive, and compassionate care. Southern Tier Health Care System addressed the problem of inadequate medical and social services for victims of violence and sexual abuse by implementing a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program and a Child Advocacy Center to serve Allegany and Cattaraugus counties.

##### II. The Problem

According to Cattaraugus Community Action Victim Service records, 1,356 rapes/sexual assaults were reported in Cattaraugus County and Allegany County from July 2001 to June 2006. National research suggests that the actual rate of rapes/sexual assaults is likely five to 10 times the number reported. Many of the survivors who do report rapes/sexual assaults feel victimized again when receiving care in busy hospital emergency departments. In addition, medical staff persons need more training in conducting sexual assault exams, as they often fail to gather the evidence district attorneys require to prosecute accused perpetrators.

Further, more than 1,700 cases of child abuse were reported in both counties in 2005, according to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. When these cases are reported, children must undergo multiple interviews, which can further traumatize them.

##### III. Grant Strategy

Southern Tier Health Care System proposed to address the problem of traumatizing, inadequate medical and social services for child and adult victims of violence and sexual abuse by implementing a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program and a Child Advocacy Center to serve Allegany and Cattaraugus counties. The Sexual Assault

## KEY INFORMATION:

### GRANTEE

Southern Tier Health Care System, Inc.

### GRANT TITLE

Dignity Under Duress:  
A Program to Provide Adult and Children Victims of Violence and Sexual Abuse with Care, Compassion, and Counseling

### DATES

January 2007–December 2008

### GRANT AMOUNT

\$150,000

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from July 2001  
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Forensic Examiner program was proposed to enhance the quality and type of care adult victims receive by giving them prompt, comprehensive, and compassionate care. The Forensic Examiners are trained to collect evidence necessary for the District Attorney to convict perpetrators, while treating patients in a sensitive way. The Child Advocacy Center was proposed to reduce trauma for children in the interview process, and to ensure that both the children and their families receive appropriate follow-up counseling.

The proposed projects received strong support from many angles. The region's State Senator and Assemblyman committed funding to launch the initiatives (\$30,000 from the State Senate and \$10,000 from the State Assembly). In addition, Olean General Hospital, a hospital utilized by residents in both counties, agreed to contribute space for both the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner room and the Child Advocacy Center. The hospital also planned to donate supplies to the exam room. Two local physicians volunteered to partner as co-medical directors for the project, though the project today has only one paid medical director.

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## EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

### AS A RESULT OF IMPLEMENTING THE SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAMINER PROGRAM AND THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER, SOUTHERN TIER HEALTH CARE SYSTEM EXPECTED THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:

- A Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner will examine 80% of sexual assault victims in the two-county area who seek medical treatment
- 100% of those examined by a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner will receive the necessary follow-up medical care and counseling
- 100% of the sexual assault cases that go to trial will include testimony by a trained Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner
- 100% of children who need its services will be served by the Child Advocacy Center and will have their cases reviewed to ensure they receive all necessary care

For the last expected result, the Child Advocacy Center planned to include any cases brought to them by law enforcement agencies or Child Protective Services. Once these cases came through the Center, the goal was for 100% of those children to receive all necessary victim advocacy services, including an interview, mental health services, and medical exams.

Southern Tier Health Care System also expected to educate and serve 1,000 residents from its two-county service area through these programs by the close of the grant.

#### IV. Grant Activities

Southern Tier Health Care System acted as a coordinator for a variety of community players to create the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner and Child Advocacy Center programs. Partners included Child Protective Service agencies, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, public health advocates, victim advocates, and members of the medical and mental health communities. The proposed project activities for both the Child Advocacy Center and Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program included:

- developing and finalizing partner agreements;
- hiring and training staff;
- developing written policies and procedures;
- creating a public awareness campaign to announce services to residents;
- preparing the program spaces;
- ordering supplies and equipment;
- announcing services to residents and providers; and
- starting service delivery by the close of the grant period.



The Child Advocacy Center also created an evaluation system to help it meet the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' requirements. The standards set by the Office of Children and Family Services are similar to those of the National Children's Alliance, to which Southern Tier Health Care System submitted an application for national accreditation of the Child Advocacy Center. Two reviewers from the National Children's Alliance conducted an on-site visit at the Child Advocacy Center on July 14, 2009. These reviewers recommended full accreditation for this site to the National Children's Alliance Board of Directors. The Center received full accreditation in October 2009. The National Children's Alliance's evaluation included the number of:

- cases seen at the Center;
- clients seen who received victim advocacy services through the Center;
- clients who received counseling services through the Center; and
- medical exams conducted at the Center versus other locations.

In addition to ensuring the Center meets New York State and National Children's Alliance requirements, the Alliance evaluation helped Southern Tier Health Care System conduct the evaluation plan it proposed in its application to the New York State Health Foundation, which was to track the number of cases served by the Child Advocacy Center.

Trying to implement both the Child Advocacy Center and the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program simultaneously proved to be a challenge for Southern Tier Health Care System. Ultimately, it had to delay plans for the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program while it focused on implementing the Child Advocacy Center. Implementation of the

Center required two years, rather than one year, as Southern Tier Health Care System initially proposed.

Though Southern Tier Health Care System put the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program on hold, it did complete several of the proposed activities during the original grant period and received an extension to complete the remainder of the work. As of September 2009, the program was up and running, and meeting its expected outcomes.

After numerous planning meetings, Southern Tier Health Care System held a five-day Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner training meeting. Nineteen medical providers from both Allegany and Cattaraugus counties attended. Trainees included staff from Olean General Hospital, Jones Memorial Hospital, TLC Health Network, Universal Primary Care, Cattaraugus County Health Department, and Jamestown Community College. The training was the first step providers took toward becoming certified as New York State Department of Health Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners. Additionally, Southern Tier Health Care System helped a local hospital complete an application to be designated as a Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Center of Excellence.

Southern Tier Health Care System received letters of support from partners for the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program from:

- Allegany County Department of Probation;
- Allegany County Victim Advocate;
- Assemblyman Joseph Giglio;
- Cattaraugus County District Attorney;
- Center for Family Unity, Inc.; and
- Olean General Hospital.

Southern Tier Health Care System launched the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program in September 2008 (which technically fell under the NYSHealth grant extension period). It changed the name of the program from the proposed Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program to the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) Program to reflect the fact that a physician is among the providers. The SAFE program is certified by the New York State Department of Health. Though the name of the program changed, it still includes nurse examiners. Six providers have completed the training, five providers applied for their national certification, and five providers are certified through the State as SAFE providers. Since September 2008, 22 victims have benefited from the SAFE program. Southern Tier Health Care System is now moving toward implementing a similar program in Allegany County, along with a second Child Advocacy Center, so that potential victims will not have to travel long distances for services.



#### FUNDING INITIATIVE:

Dignity Under Duress was one of the New York State Health Foundation's inaugural grants, funded under its 2006 request for proposals (RFP). Under this RFP, which sought projects that would have a broad, enduring impact on the health of New Yorkers, the Foundation received more than 600 proposals, and ultimately funded only 23 projects. This project addressed the Foundation's goal to improve the way public insurance programs function.

## V. Challenges

In addition to the challenge of getting two programs off the ground at the same time, Donna Kahm, Project Director, listed a few other challenges:

- **COLLABORATION AND TEAMWORK.** Because many agencies need to be involved in both projects, keeping everyone informed and involved can be a challenge. Southern Tier Health Care System found it beneficial to bring in an outside consultant to help build the necessary multidisciplinary teams. The consultant acted as a neutral third party to conduct any negotiations necessary.
- **DONATED SPACE VERSUS PERMANENT SPACE.** Though donated space helped get the project off the ground, Southern Tier Health Care System realized that a plan to secure a permanent space was necessary for the Center's success. In the case of the Child Advocacy Center, the donating hospital reclaimed the space used by the center to expand a much-needed dental clinic. While Southern Tier Health Care System knew it was important for the Child Advocacy Center to eventually move into its own facility, it was not prepared to move when the hospital requested it.
- **SUPPORT FOR CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS AND SAFE PROGRAMS RESTS HEAVILY ON "SOFT MONEY."** Child Advocacy Centers rely almost exclusively on grants and donations. Though the SAFE program is a resource-intensive service, it is reimbursed at a very low rate. The program has no fees to pay doctors for on-call services, which requires a huge volunteer commitment from providers. In addition, providers must go through a significant amount of training. Between the training and volunteer commitment, it is difficult to keep providers interested. Bigger hospitals can provide on-call pay and absorb the cost, but a rural hospital does not have this ability.
- **SETTING UP SAFE PROGRAMS AND CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS IN RURAL AREAS.** These programs are expected to serve clients from across a large geographic region, which can be a hindrance to anyone requiring services. Yet, setting up more of these services within that region is difficult given the lack of funding (both start-up and ongoing revenue) to support such a venture.



## VI. Results

All activities related to the Child Advocacy Center were completed as planned. The Southern Tier Health Care System Child Advocacy Center opened its doors on September 25, 2007. Between the Center's opening and the close of the grant, it served 100% of children who needed its services. Specifically, the Center provided services to 227 children, though it was only predicting to see 50 children during its first year of operation. Of those 227 cases, 45 were accepted for prosecution. Of those 45 cases accepted for prosecution, 18 were convicted.



## VI. Results Cont.

In addition, through its education efforts, the Center was able to teach more than 1,000 people about sexual and physical abuse and the services it provides. These education efforts included community outreach to local nonprofits and county legislators, trainings with teachers in local schools, and the creation and dissemination of a quick reference guide for all mandated reporters (i.e., professionals, such as doctors and teachers, who are mandated by the State to report any potential child abuse).

Nineteen agencies signed commitment letters with Southern Tier Health Care System under which they agreed to work on the Child Advocacy Center multidisciplinary team and follow the Center's guidelines. These agencies also committed to present their sexual assault and serious physical abuse cases to the Center for case review. These agencies include:

- Allegany County Community Services;
- Allegany County Department of Probation;
- Allegany County Department of Social Services;
- Allegany County District Attorney;
- Allegany County Victim Advocate;
- Cattaraugus County Action;
- Cattaraugus County Department of Community Services;
- Cattaraugus County Health Department;
- Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Office;
- Cattaraugus County Department of Social Services;
- Center for Family Unity, Inc.;
- Jones Memorial Hospital;
- Olean General Hospital;
- Olean Medical Group;
- Rehabilitation Today Services; and
- Universal Primary Care.

Through its experience at the Center, Southern Tier Health Care System learned that—in a large percentage of the cases—perpetrators were also sexually abused as children. The Center's hope is that the Child Advocacy Center program, with all its associated therapy, will break this cycle of abuse. In this way, the program can have an enduring impact in its community. In addition, most of the children helped by the Child Advocacy Center would not have received the bundle of services that they automatically receive through the Center. These services alleviate the burden on the children who often move from agency to agency.



## VI. Results Cont.

In terms of impact to the local community, the National Child Advocacy Center (NCAC) has found that, on average, Child Advocacy Centers save more than \$1,000 per case over traditional investigative and counseling methods. According to NCAC, the average cost for a Child Advocacy Center investigation is \$2,902 compared to \$3,949 for a traditional investigation. An executive summary of this study's findings is available on the National Child Advocacy Center's Web site at [www.nationalcac.org](http://www.nationalcac.org).

## VII. Lessons Learned

Some of the lessons learned through this project were:

- **USE A CONSULTANT WITH EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING A SIMILAR PROJECT.** Grant funds used for this purpose helped the Southern Tier Health Care System avoid mistakes made by other programs. The consultant was also very useful in negotiating agreements between the many parties involved and ensuring that the participating agencies were satisfied. In addition, the consultant kept all parties informed of the project's activities, which is critical in such a small community.
- **CONNECT WITH OTHER CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS AND THE NATIONAL CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER AS PART OF THE PLANNING PROCESS.** Donna Kahm felt it was helpful to visit other child advocacy centers, attend trainings, and link with the National Child Advocacy Center.
- **ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR OTHER FUNDING SOURCES.** The grant writer for the Child Advocacy Center is always looking for new funding opportunities because the center does not expect one source to make it sustainable.
- **HIRE THE RIGHT PEOPLE.** This lesson seems obvious, but the Center spent a lot of time—more than they anticipated—finding the right people for its job openings. The implementation period for any new projects should allow enough time for thorough staff searches. Particularly in a rural area, finding the right expertise can be challenging.
- **EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ABOUT YOUR SERVICES.** Initially, the community was unaware of or did not understand the services the Child Advocacy Center provides. After the Center moved, it began to advertise its move and its services, and has since seen monthly growth in its caseload.



## VII. Lessons Learned Cont.

- MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ENOUGH SPACE TO PROVIDE ALL THE NECESSARY SERVICES.** The team members of the Child Advocacy Center are comfortable working on-site because they have the space and offices they need. In addition, their new site will have a training center, which will be helpful for training community members and offering support groups—services that are not normally available in such a rural area. Finding the right space for a project of this nature can take time; implementation planning should allow for a thorough search.

## VIII. Future

The project will continue beyond the grant-funded period. Southern Tier Health Care System has obtained additional funding for the Child Advocacy Center from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (\$150,000) and the National Children's Alliance (two separate grants). The funding from the State is renewable as long as the Center meets the State's requirements. Southern Tier Health Care System also has the opportunity for future funding from the National Children's Alliance. The Child Advocacy Center's director has formed a fundraising committee, which raised \$25,000 last year. This year, the committee is planning special events to educate the community about the Center before the capital campaign begins in April 2010. The Center also received smaller donations, such as the facility space from Olean General Hospital, toys from Fisher-Price in East Aurora, and \$1,500 from the Renodin Foundation for a case tracking system. The county is supportive of this programming and has offered ongoing funding to the Center. Finally, the Center has some funding through the Crime Victims Board.

Because the Center's services were in high demand, Southern Tier Health Care System applied for and received a second grant from NYSHealth to expand the Center to another site in Allegany County (\$116,446 awarded December 1, 2008 for one year). The Center was also promised a State grant of \$100,000 through the Community Capital Assistance Program, which it has yet to receive. As of November 2009, this State grant was still outstanding; however, the County provided a five-year bridge loan to the Southern Tier Health Care System until the State funds are released. As a result, the Southern Tier Health Care System opened its second Child Advocacy Center in Allegany County in October 2009. A related lesson to the Foundation is to take government matches into account when helping grantees to plan their project timelines.

The Center generally operates on "soft money" donations—there are no Medicaid or health plan reimbursements that can cover this service and help the Center become self-sufficient. Thus, setting up the second Child Advocacy Center has become a more difficult





effort. Given the delay in receiving the State funds, Southern Tier Health Care System's board of directors delayed implementation of the second site.

Difficult questions emerge as a result of both of these grants. While these services are crucial, no solid mechanism exists to sustain them, which raises the question of whether it is possible to replicate and adopt SAFE programs and Child Advocacy Centers. Almost no service reimbursements are available for Child Advocacy Centers—they exist primarily on grants and fundraising. The medical treatments they provide get some cost-based reimbursement, but it is little revenue and only pays for the medical room, heat and electricity costs, and malpractice insurance. SAFE programs are also resource-intensive, and medical reimbursements cover only a fraction of their cost.

One way a state foundation can help is to disseminate information about a project with positive outcomes and use that Center as a live resource for others interested in starting up their own services. Sharing information about potential funding sources would also help others looking to start their own projects. Groups from across the State are already looking to Southern Tier Health Care System as a resource.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Southern Tier Health Care System, Inc. is a three-county rural health care network serving Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties whose mission is to “improve the health and wellness of our rural communities.” It is one of 35 rural health care networks in New York State. Rural health networks are affiliations of health care providers that serve rural areas according to a contract, joint or cooperative agreement, or organized under the not-for-profit corporation law. Typical participants include health care providers and organizations, consumers, local businesses, and government organizations that work together to improve the health care delivery system in their region.

Southern Tier Health Care System was established in 1994 as a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization and is headquartered in Blue Bird Square, Olean. The organization is member-driven, with a membership that includes hospitals, physician groups, county departments of health, home care providers, and ambulatory medical care providers. Southern Tier Health Care System performs extensive community outreach and education programs on various general health-related issues, and on specific issues such as asthma, diabetes, dental health, nutrition and physical activity, tobacco cessation, and developmental disabilities. It is also the lead agency in Cattaraugus County for the State’s Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus insurance programs. As the lead agency, Southern Tier Health Care System has developed a referral system with area hospitals, the Department of Social Services, and other agencies throughout its catchment area to ensure outreach to as many residents as possible.

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