



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Strafford County (NH) Family Justice Center

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Rochester, New Hampshire

Jurisdiction population(s): 29,745 (2013 U.S. Census estimate)

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: April Year: 2012

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Daniel Fitzpatrick

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Rochester, NH

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Daniel Fitzpatrick

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Rochester, NH

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2015 Local Government Excellence
Community Partnership Award Nomination
Strafford County (NH) Family Justice Center

Nominated by Daniel Fitzpatrick, Rochester, NH, City Manager

Step inside the doorway of the Strafford County Family Justice Center in Rochester, New Hampshire, and you know you have come to a remarkable place. Soft colors on the walls and overstuffed furniture create a feeling of calm and welcome. The center, which officially opened its doors in April 2012, has helped hundreds of families in crisis by empowering them with a full range of community support and services as they work to break the cycle of domestic violence.

The mission of the center is to provide individuals and families impacted by domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking and elder abuse with the opportunity to create safer, more stable lives for themselves and their children by providing in-depth, professionally supported, comprehensive services. The center is the first of its kind in New Hampshire, and it follows the model established by the San Diego Family Justice Center, bringing together under one roof essential services for this vulnerable population that includes not only the adult victims of domestic abuse, but also children.

According to Casey Gwinn, president of the National Family Justice Center Alliance who consulted with Strafford County as it was creating its center: "In crisis intervention models, it's like you're waiting at the bottom of a cliff in an ambulance just waiting for people to fall off. In the family justice center model

we're trying to get to the top of the cliff and put up a fence."

The power of partnerships

The center operates on a shoestring budget thanks to cooperative efforts of the center's partners which include: three freestanding non-profit organizations (A Safe Place, SASS-Sexual Assault Support Services, and Counseling Connect) which provide counseling and support; law enforcement from four communities and the state (Rochester, Dover, Somersworth and Durham, as well as the Strafford County Sherriff's Office and NH State Police) which work with clients to report domestic violence crimes; legal services (Strafford County Domestic Violence (DV) Project , Strafford County Domestic Violence Unit, New Hampshire Legal Assistance and New Hampshire Pro Bono Attorneys) which provide legal services to victims; and childcare (Rochester Child Care) for parents seeking help at the center.

Additionally, Strafford County provides fiscal and grant administration for Federal Grant 2012-WE-AX-0055, the primary source of funding for the center; the City of Rochester provides the physical location for the center in the city's Community Center on Wakefield Street; and AmeriCorps provides key support staff. Local individuals and businesses provide donations of food, clothing and other essentials to assist clients and their children as they begin to establish independence from their abusers. Community supporters have founded an organization, Friends of the Strafford County Family Justice Center, to help in the center's fundraising efforts.

Importance to the community

In the late 2000s, when planning for the center began in earnest, local law enforcement units and non-profit agencies serving these families in crisis wanted to find a way to break the cycle of domestic violence which, if left unaddressed, can affect generations. One major barrier was the lack of a central location for families and individuals in the Strafford County region to access critical support and services needed in a time of crisis.

“Before, we were all well-intentioned, well-meaning silos of care, whether it was law enforcement, counseling or legal aid. We would help the victim at the time of the crisis, but send them – and often their children – back into the abusive situation. As law enforcement, we found ourselves going back to the same homes again and again, because we were asking individuals in crisis to do all the work running around to find the help they needed,” said Rochester Police Detective Robert Frechette, who heads the city’s domestic violence unit and currently serves as the center’s acting director. “The network of these resources was just too difficult to navigate, especially at the time of crisis.” That, Frechette notes, led to the underreporting of domestic violence cases, ranging from assault and elder abuse to stalking and sexual abuse.

By providing a central location where victims could find the full spectrum of services and support they needed for themselves and their families, communities in Strafford County have seen an increase in reporting and prevention of domestic violence crimes. Since the partners began working together, local and state law

enforcement and county prosecutors have reported a marked improvement in the quality and number of cases that have been submitted for prosecution. Many clients are now able to find the strength to leave their abuser, and those who come to the center but stay in the abusive relationships are better equipped to keep themselves safe. This success can be attributed to them having the support needed to remove themselves and their children from abusive situations.

Expanding the center's reach

The center has continually worked to improve its reach and access to the community and that has significantly increased the number of new clients coming to the center. Originally open just one day a week, the center went full-time during the spring of 2013. That corresponded with a marked gain in new clients from an average of 3.67 new clients monthly to 17.5. In 2014, 210 new clients came to the center, a 51% increase over 2013 (139 new clients). One of the non-profit organizations operating at the center estimates it served more than 200 children in 2014.

The funding barrier

In 2014, the center came up against a significant and potentially devastating challenge. Originally founded with a \$300,000 federal grant, the center was threatened by significant cutbacks or even closure when that grant was not renewed. The City of Rochester, led by Mayor T.J. Jean and the City Council, stepped up, offering 18 months of rent to the center for \$1, so it could continue its

work while center officials have worked with federal officials to reinstate the grant and develop additional sources of funding.

“Without the city stepping up, we would have been out of business just as we were helping more families than ever,” said Detective Frechette.

A model for collaboration and change

The center was the first of its kind in New Hampshire when it opened and is serving as an inspiration for other programs that are in the planning phase, including Merrimack County, New Hampshire. In addition, the center’s partners have collaborated on outreach to the region’s law enforcement community, offering training sessions for officers to help identify and aid domestic victims and improve outcomes in the prosecution of abusers. One recent session was a departure from the usual Powerpoint slide show: the center put together a panel of experts to answer officers’ questions about the process of preparing for and prosecuting domestic violence cases.

“We could have never have done this before because, even though we worked together toward the same goal, we didn’t have as strong or as open working relationship between those advocating for the victims and those prosecuting the abusers,” said Frechette. “Now, we know what each side is up against and that makes us more effective overall.”

PHOTOS: 1-The front hall of the Strafford County NH Family Justice Center. 2- The center hosted an international delegation that was studying the FJC model. 3-Kids are safe and cared for when parents have appointments with the center staff. 4-A recent training session/panel with law enforcement. 5- Sorting donated toys.









