

# Impact thank you!

**YOUR compassionate support helps connect hundreds of people with mental illness to treatment**

Rhode Islanders experience a psychiatric or substance abuse crisis every day. But because of stigma, they're often criminalized for their mental health condition, and families are forever changed.



As a diversion *Jessica Zira, lead clinical therapist for the Community Diversion Program* clinician at

The Providence Police Department for The Providence Center, Jessica Zira responds to calls for help evaluating those in need, and partnering with police to determine critical next steps.

"Our work is scary and sometimes dangerous, but always inspirational," said Jessica. "A crisis does not care if you are rich or poor – it does not discriminate. It happens in a split second and it turns your world completely upside down."

It is at that crucial moment when the police arrive. And, Jessica feels honored to partner with the police on these calls.

Since 2012, The Providence Center's Community Diversion Program has been helping to divert people struggling with mental illness away from the criminal justice system and into the treatment they desperately need.

Jessica recalls one particularly touching case.

"We responded to a call on the South Side of Providence. Upon entering the home, I was approached by a mother who tearfully explained that her 19 year-old son suffered from schizophrenia, and had been lying motionless for over five months."

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He was in a catatonic state. Obese, his family could not move him. He was not able to bathe or to take care of his most basic needs. He had not uttered a word in months. He was simply expressionless. All of his brothers and sisters hovered as his grandmother just sat sobbing. They felt hopeless.

Jessica quickly worked to assess the young man and prepare his psychiatric evaluation. He was not capable of assisting himself in any way, so Jessica needed to speak with each family member to determine exactly what he was suffering from.

“While I documented the necessary medical information, the police came up with a plan to stage a rescue. Additional police officers arrived to help as well as members of the Providence Fire and Rescue team. His family and neighbors also rallied together – it was so emotional.”

***“Your compassion works to care for people on the worst days of their life.”***

Together, they compassionately lifted the young man and carried him into the ambulance in such a way that preserved his dignity. Upon Jessica’s recommendation, he was transported to the hospital.

**Providence Center clinicians  
embedded in  
Providence & Warwick  
Police Departments provide:**

- ***Crisis evaluations***
- ***Assistance to officers with de-escalation***
- ***Hospital admission coordination***
- ***Continued follow-up with clients to assist with arranging/ensuring continuum of care***
- ***Client/family follow-up***
- ***Law enforcement training to new and existing officers***

The Community Diversion pilot program has been so successful that it was recently expanded, adding a mental health clinician in West Warwick Police Department, and a second clinician to the Providence Police Department.

“This patient, like many, was not able to advocate for himself. I acted as his voice. Upon arrival at the hospital, I presented my clinical evaluation to hospital staff as well as to the attending physician. I confirmed he was admitted and worked to ensure he received the proper mental health supports he needed to start his journey toward recovery.”

Before he was discharged, Jessica continued to advocate on his behalf. She collaborated with the on-site hospital liaison to ensure he was connected with the right people and right level of care from intensive outpatient services at The Providence Center.

Two months later, Jessica followed-up. The young man was healthy and happy. He had plans to apply to the Community College of Rhode Island to study science.

Your compassion works to care for people on the worst days of their life.

Together, we have helped more than 750 people in just the last year to stay out of jail, to find hope and to discover promise for their future.

# Investing in the future, one student at a time

*You're helping young children succeed, not only in school, but ultimately in life*

**Meet Sandra A. Stuart, Principal of George J. West Elementary School in Providence. Thanks to YOU, The Providence Center has been able to develop an innovative partnership between Sandra and her staff to offer additional critical in-school mental health services to young students and their families in need.**

A number of students at George J. West have experienced serious trauma including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. A Providence Center clinician is on-site during school hours to work one-on-one with students in distress, providing the caring supports they need in a safe and familiar environment.

In a recent Q&A session, Sandra explained the positive changes she's observed since beginning this partnership in early 2016.

***Q. In your role as Principal, what are some of the common struggles you've seen students deal with? How have these issues affected their capacity to learn?***

***A. The most serious situations students have experienced are physical, mental, and emotional abuse. A large percentage of our students are diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, anxiety, mood disorders, and post-traumatic stress. Without the necessary support, these issues lead to a number of students misbehaving, receiving poor grades or skipping school altogether.***

***Q. What are some of the challenges your students and their families faced when seeking treatment prior to this partnership?***

***A. Before we offered mental health services on-site and during school hours, not all students were fortunate enough to receive an appointment with an outside clinician. Others were placed on a waiting list – a very long waiting list – which felt even longer if a child was experiencing a crisis.***

***To make things more difficult, a lot of our families don't have cars and often had to rely on public transportation, which can be costly. Many parents work double shifts, some multiple jobs, and simply weren't available to take their child to appointments.***

***“A number of students experienced serious trauma... a Providence Center clinician is now on-site... providing the caring supports they need.”***



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Cultural concerns like language barriers or stigma also kept families from seeking help. The goal of this program is not only to provide these families with the clinical treatment they need, but to remove these barriers and provide a safe and familiar environment in which to receive care.

***Q. Has this program positively impacted the lives of your students?***

*A. It's made a huge difference! Student attendance has increased, but even more notable is the increase in academic achievement. We've also seen a decrease in behavior referrals as well as in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Students looking to communicate their issues to a caring adult now have access to an extra level of support, in addition to the school faculty.*

***Q. Is there a particular success story that really touched you?***

*A. In my eyes, every child who participates in our program is a success story. This program has touched the lives of at least 50-60 of our students. Without this partnership they likely wouldn't be able to receive necessary treatment and support. Many have learned strategies to combat anger, anxiety, and/or developed basic life skills to live mentally healthy lives.*

***Q. What would you like to say to the donors who have supported The Providence Center and this critical program?***

*A. Statistics tell us that one in five children have been diagnosed with an emotional, behavioral, and/or mental health disorder. Often times this impairs how they function at home, in school and in the community.*

*With your generous contributions, students receive early detection and intervention. They can have a chance to succeed, not only in school, but ultimately in life.*

***“ With your generous contributions, students receive early detection and intervention. They can have a chance to succeed, not only in school, but ultimately in life. ”***

**With your help The Providence Center is offering clinical services to children and their families at six Providence Schools including:**

- **George J. West Elementary School**
- **Carl G. Lauro Elementary School**
- **Nathan Bishop Middle School**
- **Gilbert Stuart Middle School**
- **Nathanael Green Middle School**
- **Roger Williams Middle School**

**The Providence Center**

528 North Main Street, Providence, RI 02904  
**(401) 528-0123**  
[www.providencecenter.org](http://www.providencecenter.org)

*For more information on how to include The Providence Center in your will or other planned gift opportunities, please contact **Lisa Desbiens, Chief Development Officer** at 401-528-0127 or [ldesbiens@provctr.org](mailto:ldesbiens@provctr.org).*



Graphic design and photography: Angela Gora Design and Communications  
401.354.9229