

The Rowan Center's Request for the City of Stamford

Mission Statement: We counsel victims and survivors as they process their experiences of sexual violence from the past, we advocate for them as they navigate the circumstances of the present, and we educate our communities to prevent sexual violence in the future.

Programs:

The Rowan Center offers a range of free and confidential services that impact thousands of Connecticut individuals annually. Our key programs are available in English, Spanish, Haitian-Creole and French, including:

1. **Crisis Counseling:** We provide trauma-informed crisis counseling to survivors of sexual violence, ages 10+, helping them process their trauma and begin healing. We serve approximately 680 clients annually, offering free individual counseling to primary and secondary victims.
2. **24/7 Hotline:** Our free and confidential hotline is available 24/7, offering immediate support and resources to survivors and their loved ones. Our state-certified Sexual Assault Crisis Advocates operate the English and Spanish hotline, where they are available to listen, empower and connect callers to the resources they need.
3. **Advocacy Services:** We accompany survivors to hospitals, police stations, and court proceedings, advocating for their rights and ensuring they receive the support they need during medical and legal processes. Our trained advocates help child, teen or adult victims, and their families, navigate complicated systems, including the OVS Victims Compensation Program or build trust with law enforcement. Our Justice Advocacy program also collaborates and trains local law enforcement on sexual assault trauma and best practices.
4. **Empowerment Groups:** We offer a safe place to share personal experiences, feelings, and coping strategies through different support groups, including an English Group, Spanish Group, Men's Group, Women's 40+ Group and a Queer Survivor Group for victims in lower Fairfield County and throughout the State. The Groups are well suited for easing trauma survivors' emotional stress, including feelings of isolation, loneliness, depression, helplessness, and hopelessness, with a focus on creating a sense that victims are not alone.

5. **Educational Programs:** Our prevention education programs reach over 20,000 students annually across lower Fairfield County. We provide age-appropriate, developmentally tailored lessons on sexual violence prevention and healthy relationships to students in K-12 schools. Our priority is to provide quality education that allows children to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences that build resilience and reduce risk factors for violence. We also train teachers, healthcare workers, law enforcement, and community organizations on sexual violence awareness and response.
6. **Trafficking Prevention:** Our trafficking prevention program delivers targeted education in both English and Spanish to vulnerable populations in Stamford and other areas of lower Fairfield County. The program focuses on identifying warning signs, understanding risk factors, and equipping children and community members with the tools to recognize and prevent sex trafficking. By addressing this critical issue head-on, we aim to protect children and reduce exploitation in our communities.
7. **Postvention Education and Crisis Response Program:** This program is a timely and compassionate initiative developed to support schools and community organizations in the aftermath of sexual violence crises. Activated after mandatory reporting to DCF and the completion of police investigations, the program provides tailored education, trauma-informed counseling, and advocacy to address the unique needs of youth-serving organizations and their communities.
8. **Trauma Recovery Clinic:** We offer long-term, outpatient therapy to HUSKY-insured adults experiencing any form of trauma—examples include sexual assault, domestic violence, gun violence, homelessness, addiction, racism, and combat trauma. This initiative addresses a significant gap in Connecticut’s mental health care system, particularly for low-income and marginalized populations across the State.

For 45 years, The Rowan Center has provided free services to the eight cities and towns of lower Fairfield County: the cities of Stamford and Norwalk, and the towns of Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Weston, Westport and Wilton; a catchment area of approximately 400,000 people. As one of nine independent sexual violence prevention and intervention agencies serving Connecticut, we are long-time members of The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance) and the only center providing services to lower Fairfield County. Over 70% of our clients are low-moderate income and 65% are BIPOC. The Rowan Center serves all survivors of sexual violence in our

region, regardless of age, sex, immigration status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or religious beliefs.

Potential Challenges in FY25-26:

- Addressing the growing demand for services while maintaining high-quality, culturally competent care.
- With government funding cuts, we must ensure sustainable funding to support program growth and the addition of staff to meet the demand.
- There will always be a need to hire more educators to reach more schools in Lower Fairfield County

Potential Accomplishments in FY25-26:

- Doubling the size of the Trauma Recovery Clinic to potentially include uninsured individuals or other insurances, ensuring financial barriers do not prevent access to care.
- Strengthening partnerships with Stamford Hospital, Stamford Public Schools, and Stamford Police to create a cohesive network of support for survivors, especially for child and adult victims of sex trafficking.
- In Connecticut, marginalized populations, including BIPOC communities, immigrants and asylum seekers, face significant barriers to receiving adequate mental health services. We will increase community engagement through enhanced outreach and culturally sensitive awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage utilization of services in minority populations.

The Rowan Center respectfully requests \$25,000 from the City of Stamford to support our programs, which provide critical services to the community. This funding will enable us to continue addressing the mental health and safety needs of Stamford residents, particularly vulnerable populations, and ensure access to resources that promote healing, resilience, and prevention.

Major changes: We do not anticipate any major changes to our programs or services. Our focus remains on sustaining and enhancing the impactful work we do, ensuring continuity in providing critical support, education, and advocacy for the communities we serve.

Funding concerns: The recent 30% cut to Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding has posed significant challenges for organizations like ours that rely on these resources to provide critical services to survivors. To address this shortfall, we are actively seeking support from alternative

sources, including individuals, foundations, and corporate partners, to ensure we can continue offering essential counseling, education, and advocacy programs. By diversifying our funding streams, we aim to sustain and expand our impact despite these financial setbacks.

Service levels: Last year, Stamford Hospital spent \$160 million on undocumented healthcare needs, where mental health issues are often a root cause. Our Trauma Recovery Clinic provides specialized care to address these challenges, reducing reliance on emergency healthcare services and easing the financial burden on hospitals and taxpayers. Additionally, with sexual assault remaining a persistent issue, our crisis counseling, prevention education, and advocacy services will always be essential to supporting our community.

Staffing requests: To meet the growing demand for our services, we are seeking to hire a Bilingual Educator, Bilingual Counselor and an Outreach Coordinator to enhance support for survivors and strengthen community connections. Additionally, given the significant volume of work we do in Stamford—especially in addressing the dangers of sex trafficking affecting children—we envision dedicating a full-time educator solely to this area. This focused role will enhance prevention education and outreach efforts, ensuring we tackle these urgent issues effectively and provide critical support to vulnerable populations.

Program expansions: We are exploring the possibility of providing outpatient services in our Trauma Recovery Clinic to uninsured populations or individuals with other insurance. Following its opening in July 2024, we anticipate doubling its size over the next year. We are producing a multi-year strategic plan that will consider all opportunities for expansion, including potential community partnerships and large grant proposals.