

TOWN OF VERNON

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MEDIA ADVISORY

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Town of Vernon Expands FREE Pandemic-Related Mental Health Counseling Services for Residents

New Initiative with KIDSAFE-CT Provides Counseling Services to Children

(VERNON, Connecticut) – The Town of Vernon has expanded its use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to help residents address mental health needs brought on by the coronavirus pandemic by providing free mental health counseling services to Vernon residents. This use was unanimously approved by the Vernon Town Council.

Children ages 3 to 17 can receive free counseling through a unique partnership with KIDSAFE-CT, an affiliate of The Village for Families & Children. The Town has already established a social worker position using ARPA funds to counsel adult Town residents through the Hockanum Valley Community Council (HVCC). The Town has been recognized for its novel use of ARPA funds to provide mental health assistance to residents.

More than two years of the coronavirus pandemic have taken a toll on many people. Illness, grief, loss, social isolation, job loss, uncertainty, stress, depression, and anxiety and other pandemic-driven stressors have caused an increase in psychological distress on a large scale, according to mental health experts.

The partnerships with HVCC and KIDSAFE-CT are intended to help Vernon residents work through any difficulties they are experiencing.

“Two years into this pandemic, our community is recovering and we are making progress,” Vernon Mayor Dan Champagne said. “We cannot forget that there continues to be uncertainty and that these times have been difficult for so many of our friends and neighbors. That is why the Town of Vernon has devoted these federal dollars to provide direct assistance to those who need mental health services.”

“Throughout the pandemic, we have been focused on meeting our community’s needs,” Town Administrator and Emergency & Risk Management Director Michael Purcaro said. “Addressing mental health needs is just as important to our overall recovery plan as addressing the physical health and wellbeing of Vernon residents. That’s why we have partnered with organizations with a strong record of helping families and individuals – HVCC, The Village for Families & Children and KIDSAFE-CT.”

KIDSAFE-CT will focus on the mental health needs of children and families. Treatment will be offered at KIDSAFE-CT's office at 19 Elm Street, Vernon, or in homes or community settings, such as parks or schools, as long as the client's privacy can be protected.

"The pandemic has significantly increased the rate of anxiety and depression in children and stress for families," said Dr. Sandy Kyriakopoulos, Associate Vice President of Clinical & Community Integration for The Village for Families & Children. "The Village is thrilled to partner with the Town of Vernon to provide expertise and much needed access to local mental health services for children, adolescents and their families."

Ashley Galica, a social worker, began work at HVCC in February. She is able to give Vernon residents priority access to care through HVCC. Galica is working with individuals referred by the Vernon Social Services Department, Vernon Youth Services, Vernon Public Schools and Vernon-based health and human services organizations. Galica can also be reached through HVCC.

"Vernon's vision to prioritize the mental health needs of its residents shows that the Town is committed to ensuring that all of its residents have access to care," said David O'Rourke, CEO of HVCC. "COVID has left many aftereffects, not the least of which are anxiety, depression and isolation. This position is a step towards addressing those needs. The impact of COVID will be felt for some time for many of us. The leadership in Vernon recognized this and proactively developed a plan to address the impact."

There are two components to the services Galica is offering. First, she is providing clinical and case management services to Vernon residents in the areas of substance abuse, behavioral problems, food insecurity, domestic violence and hoarding, among others. The second involves collaborating with groups that work with or interact with these individuals, such as the Vernon schools, emergency services, law enforcement and courts.

"HVCC is proud to partner with the Town of Vernon to provide behavioral health services, education and advocacy to those struggling with COVID related behavioral health needs," O'Rourke said.

Initial assessment can take place in the community, while subsequent interactions will occur at HVCC's offices in Vernon. For people who have difficulty with transportation, assistance is available.

For more information, please contact KIDSAFE-CT at (860) 872-1918, HVCC at (860) 872-9825 or the Vernon Department of Social Services at (860) 870-3661.

About the Town of Vernon

The Town of Vernon is a celebrated place to live, work and visit. From its beautiful parks and lakes, to its vast trails and historic homes and buildings, Vernon is a resilient and thriving community that promotes the health and wellbeing of its residents and values the natural environment. With a resident population of approximately 30,000 and occupying 18.03 square miles, Vernon combines a balanced appreciation of history, and a strong economic base for growth, both residential and commercial. Located 15 minutes east of the Connecticut capital of Hartford, and 25 miles from the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, the Town of Vernon is strategically located in "New England's Knowledge Corridor" with close proximity to some of the top colleges and universities in the country.

Designated a certified Sustainable Community, the Town of Vernon offers a wide range of benefits and services to its residents. The Town of Vernon is a full-service municipality that practices a management philosophy of continuous quality improvement. To learn more about the Town of Vernon, please call (860) 870- 3670 or visit www.vernon-ct.gov.

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