



**Eliminating Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment  
in Howard Center's Park Street and  
Transition House Programs**

January 2018 – December 2018

## **About Howard Center**

We help people and communities thrive by providing supports and services to address mental health, substance use, and developmental needs.

We serve children, adults, families and communities as the designated provider for mental health and developmental disability services and the preferred provider for substance use services in Chittenden County.

Howard Center was founded in 1865 as an agency to serve the widows and orphans of the civil war at the Home for Destitute Children. Since then, Howard Center has been a trusted provider in our community for more than 150 years, offering progressive, compassionate, high-quality care and treatment for those members of our community in need.

Today, our staff of 1,500 nurses, support workers, clinicians, teachers, case managers, psychiatrists, and others provide help and support in over 60 locations across six Vermont counties to more than 16,000 people each year. We serve children, adults, families, and communities in a range of settings with a broad array of services for mental health, developmental, and substance use needs.

## **PREA's Applicability**

Howard Center's Park Street and Transition House programs provide residential placement and treatment services under contract with Vermont's Department of Children and Families' Family Services Division – Youth Justice. As a result of this relationship, these programs must comply with the standards in accordance with the federal Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). To that end, Howard Center has updated and developed policies and procedures to address resident safety in these programs.

Howard Center has a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual abuse and sexual harassment of individuals. This prohibition is supported by the agency's Code of Ethics, the Policy Prohibiting Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse of Clients and the Policies and Procedures Addressing the Prison Rape Elimination Act in our operations manual as well as the Violence Prevention and Weapons-Free Workplace Policy in the Personnel Manual. All staff members, contractors, interns, or volunteers working at Park Street or Transition House facilities or having direct contact with residents of those facilities are required to sign a form stating they understand the zero tolerance policy and their role as a mandatory reporter.

## **About Park Street and Transition House Programs**

Park Street provides intensive residential treatment to adolescent males ages 12-17 with sexual harming behaviors. Residents attend the onsite Fay Honey Knopp School, a licensed school that provides a supportive, therapeutic and safe educational environment.

Transition House is a residential program for adolescents and young men aged 16-22 which provides supportive housing and preparation for independent living. This program provides youth with high-risk, harmful and/or delinquent behaviors, an opportunity to live in a supervised setting in order to build the skills necessary to be successful as adults.

## **PREA Compliance Activities**

Throughout the year, the agency continued its efforts to meet the requirements of PREA.

- All staff, contractors and volunteers complete the PREA training annually.
- PREA information is provided to all new residents and their guardians and information is readily available to them at each site.
- All allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment are thoroughly investigated and resulting findings and plans are shared with all staff at the site, guardians and the Vermont Department for Children and Families Residential Licensing & Special Investigations Unit to ensure the safety of the residents.
- During this calendar year, due to the history of sexualized incidents at Park Street, an audio and video camera surveillance system was installed to help deter and guide the process for any incidents of sexualized behavior.
- In January 2018, the certified Department of Justice PREA auditor, Sharon Pette, informed both Park Street and Transition House that their programs achieved 100% compliance with the PREA standards.

**Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment Allegations Data for 2018**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Youth on Youth Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>Staff on Youth Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>Youth on Youth Sexual Harassment</b>	<b>Staff on Youth Sexual Harassment</b>
<i>Park Street Program</i>	0	1	5	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	0	0
<b><u>Previous Years Data</u></b>				
<b>2017 Data</b>				
<i>Park Street Program</i>	2	0	2	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	1	0
<b>2016 Data</b>				
<i>Park Street Program</i>	1	0	6	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>2015 Data</b>				
<i>Park Street Program</i>	0	0	2	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	0	0

**Park Street**

As noted above Park Street is a treatment program for adolescent males with sexual harming behaviors, thus youth enter into the program with intensive sexualized behavioral needs. This year, all of the allegations of youth on youth sexual harassment were substantiated and in four out of five of those

incidents the same youth was involved. It was a reflection of his sexual compulsivity and his struggles in treatment as he worked to manage his sexual risk around others. This youth was held responsible for his actions via his probation conditions and eventually placed in DCF custody for greater oversight and access to additional resources to best address his needs while also keeping others safe (he required 1:1 staffing). The other youth on youth sexual harassment incident involved a highly sexually reactive youth who would lash out with sexually hurtful comments directed at others when his sexual past was triggered. Due to this youth's volatility and unsafe behaviors around others, he resided at Park Street for only one and a half months and was discharged to a more secure placement. While this was a significant increase in allegations of youth on youth sexual harassment from last year, as noted above most of these incidents were attributed to one youth.

One youth alleged that a staff member sexually abused him; it was investigated and ruled unsubstantiated. It involved a youth who attempted to groom a new female staff member in hopes of a sexual relationship. As a result, the program enhanced its onboarding process for new hires to include the teaching of core competencies when working with a highly sexualized population of youth.

There were no allegations of youth on youth sexual abuse or staff on youth sexual harassment at Park Street.

#### Transition House

There were no allegations of any type of sexual abuse or sexual harassment at Transition House.

#### Conclusion

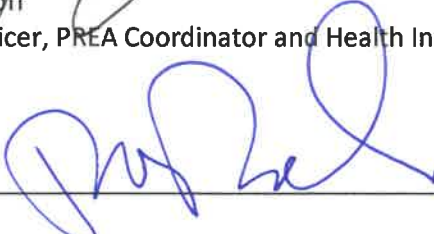
It is anticipated that the addition of the audio and camera surveillance system at Park Street will result in greater opportunity to debrief with staff client behavior and learn ways to better help youth who act out in sexual ways towards others. Having the support of DCF and DMH to access additional staffing for youth at high risk to engage in sexualized behavior helps to maintain program safety.

Staff at both programs will continue to be vigilant in their efforts to protect youth in our facilities and ensure compliance with PREA.



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