



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

January 2019 – December 2019

## **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.

**Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment Allegations Data for 2019**

<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	0	1	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	0	0
<b><u>Previous Years Data</u></b>				
<b>2018 Data</b>				
<i>Park Street Program</i>	0	1	5	0
<i>Transition House</i>	0	0	0	0
<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. There was one substantiated incident of sexual harassment that took place when one youth made several sexually

disparaging comments during a school activity where his other peers were the victims of his harmful choice of words. This youth was held responsible for his actions via additional treatment to address his inappropriate sexualized behavior and placed on an individualized plan where he was kept separate from his peer group until he was able to complete reparation with his peers where he earned trust to safely reenter both the school and residential milieu environment with others.

There were no incidents of youth on youth nonconsensual or abusive sexual acts.

There were no incidents of staff on youth sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. It is believed that the use of audio and video surveillance cameras, the implementation of the restorative circles model and the specific profile of sexualized youth served at Park Street in 2019 was helpful in decreasing the number of PREA incidents compared to previous years.

#### Transition House

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

#### Conclusion

The one allegation the agency received in 2019 is the lowest number since the agency began tracking PREA related allegations. This is reflective of the efforts and steps taken by the agency and program staff to utilize additional resources to further enhance the safety of residents.

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

In September 2020, a certified Department of Justice PREA auditor has been scheduled to conduct an audit of both Park Street and Transition House programs for compliance with the PREA standards.



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