

**Proposed Mission Statement:**

The Justice Center for Children and Families works to reduce trauma, increase safety, enhance the overall well-being of individuals impacted by crimes of interpersonal violence, and end their and abuse through an integrated, collaborative, and multi-agency response. We work to ensure the victims of abuse receive immediate access to effective services and support, treating them with dignity, so they see themselves as survivors and are empowered to end the violence.

**Proposed Vision Statement:**

The team working in conjunction with the Justice Center for Children and Families together ensure all survivors have complete access to our support services which promote a safe, inclusive, and independent space for survivors of abuse to heal from their trauma. Our work empowers victims to see themselves as survivors, end the cycle of abuse, realize they can obtain justice, and grow to a point where they have moved beyond their trauma.

**I. Layout the Issue**

Cattaraugus County, New York, a rural community with a struggling economy, is one example of multiple pandemics plaguing this country: interpersonal violence and underserved communities. Interpersonal violence afflicts communities with domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, human trafficking, and elder abuse. Underserved communities are plagued with a lack of resources as well as further issues including low-income, substance abuse, and, often, increased rates of violence. When interpersonal violence is intertwined within an underserved community, it makes the situation more dire; members of those communities do not know how to, nor do they, seek help. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this issue because of the excess emotional pressure it has placed on individuals by forcing us into isolation. For the average human being, isolation is traumatic, but for victims of interpersonal violence captivity becomes stifling, even life threatening.

Cattaraugus County Law Enforcement reports an escalation of substance abuse and domestic violence reports, citing they received over 1,100 domestic incident reports in 2020, a six percent (6%) increase since 2019 and pre-COVID, not far behind New York City at ten percent (10%) in 2020. Because this county still has to change the culture surrounding interpersonal violence, these statistics may be less than accurate as many crimes still go unreported. Statistically, as reported incidents of domestic violence have been rising since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cattaraugus County identifies a clear need for a planned coordinated response to support the safety and well-being of the many victims impacted by these crimes.

Residents of Cattaraugus County, one classic example of a community underserved by medical and mental health personnel, are prohibited from receiving crucial, local, and centralized services because of limited access to public transportation systems heightened by the reality those providers, as social service, criminal, civil, and legal service providers, are spread across the county at various locations. Such a reality forces victims of interpersonal violence to interact with a complex system and receive contradictory messaging, being further traumatized. Due to the affliction of repeatedly recounting their abuse and frustration over lack of access to local resources, often, victims forego receiving necessary services. Subsequently, they remain stuck in their trauma much longer than necessary without the deserved healing and justice, thereby, missing out on much of their lives.

When violence exists in a home, it impacts the safety of neighborhoods, businesses, and communities. Violence, whether through the victim or the abuser, will present outside the home. An abuser as he/she escalates will exhibit castigating behaviors in other areas of life. Often, an abuser will carry his/her abuse into the victim's workplace. A victim will portray indicators of abuse; they may begin to bully peers, experience difficulty with school or job performance, display an eating disorder or self-harm, or present with drug/alcohol use. If effective interventions to interpersonal violence are not provided in communities, serious health and safety concerns, leading to potential long-term effects on children, youth and adults become an additional community concern. When victims do not receive help, they may become embroiled in the cycle of abuse throughout their lives, continuing to be abused by others or becoming an abuser. Furthermore, we cannot forego mentioning the unmentionable; sometimes, an abuser does kill their victim. As such, individuals exposed to violence deserve services that provide safety, hope, and healing in an environment that respects their dignity.

## **II. Present the Why**

It is evident that trauma changes the landscape of an individual's mind, body, and spirit, altering the trajectory of their lives, throwing them off course. If a victim is fortunate enough to survive their abuse, it is detrimental when they do not receive immediate extensive services required to recover, heal, grow, and obtain justice. When a survivor of violence is neglected or minimized by the civil, legal, and medical and mental health systems, they fail to see themselves as a survivor. If their lives don't spiral fully out of control, they struggle unnecessarily, often for years, perpetuating the initial abuse they suffered. Often, they continue in abusive relationships, believing it is normal. Nonetheless, when a survivor receives immediate all-inclusive services, the cycle of abuse is broken because, as they are assisted throughout their recovery process, they are treated with dignity. To help victims become thriving survivors who have moved to an emotional space beyond where their trauma controls or defines their lives, it is imperative to establish and provide comprehensive trauma-informed interventions.

By developing a multi-agency, multidisciplinary, co-located service center(s), JCCF and partnering agencies ensure a case will not get lost in the investigative process, delivery of services is expedited, resources are shared, and, because there is no longer a duplication of services, victims are no longer forced to continually recount their trauma. This proven method of success works to reduce trauma, increase safety, enhance the overall well-being of children, youth, and adults impacted by the crimes of interpersonal violence by ensuring victims and survivors receive immediate access to effective services and support, treating them with deserved dignity, minimizing anxiety, fear, and chaos.

As a result of the safe, inclusive, independent space JCCT provides and the work our team does with victims of abuse, they will become empowered to see themselves as survivors, learn methods to end the cycle of abuse in their lives, and realize they can obtain justice for themselves and their families.

### **III. What JCCF can do to help**

Justice Center for Children and Families in conjunction with partnering agencies will provide, in a co-location, comprehensive trauma-informed interventions to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, human trafficking, stalking, and elder abuse to help them become thriving survivors, bringing together medical, mental, and wellness services; civil and criminal legal services; child protective services; and advocacy services.

An investigation into interpersonal violence is ultimately enhanced. Expert services provide survivors of violence with assistance in case tracking and review including on-site client interviews, safety planning, filing of Protective Orders, medical treatment and services, education and support services, case management and coordination, and assistance in navigating the investigative and criminal justice systems.