



## Office of Refugee Resettlement Refugee Program Physical and Behavioral Health Promising Practice



### Jewish Family Services of Western New York Forensic Evaluation Partnership

In 2013, Jewish Family Services of Western New York (JFSWNY) received a grant from the New York State Health Foundation to begin the Forensic Evaluation Partnership and decrease wait times for clients with scheduled asylum court dates. Through this grant award JFSWNY partnered with the Human Rights Initiative (HRI) at the University of Buffalo to provide the forensic evaluation service.<sup>1</sup> HRI is comprised of a medical director and medical students who work on a voluntary basis, gaining valuable medical experience in addition to gaining education on cultural and community considerations through their work. Together JFSWNY and HRI provide access, transportation, interpretation, and appropriate forensic evaluation locations to those in need.



### Practice Description

JFSWNY and HRI partnered to expand forensic evaluation availability to survivors of torture in 2014. Currently, 16 medical students and one medical director volunteer their time to complete timely forensic evaluations. Through this partnership clients have access to transportation, interpretation services and are provided with referrals for medical follow-up recommendations as required. JFSWNY and HRI also work in collaboration to provide education and outreach to various community stakeholders.



### Need for the Practice

Prior to the implementation of the Forensic Evaluation Program, JFSWNY and HRI noticed a waitlist of individuals requiring forensic examinations as part of their asylum court hearing. The Forensic Evaluation Program was created in response to the demand of forensic examinations and to ensure completion of these examinations prior to scheduled asylum hearings.

<sup>1</sup> The Human Rights Initiative at the University of Buffalo is part of the university's medical program. HRI and JFSWNY extended service delivery within the Survivor of Torture program in 2014.



## How to Implement the Practice

JFSWNY and HRI described the following key steps to implement this practice:

- Identify potential community partner to work with outlining which partner will conduct forensic evaluations and which partner will provide supportive services (e.g. transportation, interpretation, medical referral follow-up, evaluation locations).
- Upon identified need, initiate contact with medical partner to start the referral process for forensic evaluation.
- Conduct trainings with community organizations to determine additional partnerships that can support forensic evaluations such as organizations that can provide conference rooms for examinations or free x-ray services.
- Provide support and ongoing training to medical staff to ensure understanding of trauma and cultural indications.
- Provide ongoing training, orientation, resources and workshops to educate external entities on the purpose of the partnership (e.g. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, legal partners, other referring agencies).
- Work from a treatment team approach ensuring partnering agency staff and clients are well informed of any follow-up needs of recommendations.
- Consider applying available funds to support medical students educational costs to offset number of hours spent volunteering for the program.
- Appoint agency staff member to oversee the program – ensuring ongoing communication with forensic evaluation partner.



## Preliminary Results

JFSWNY and HRI provided output data used to inform changes to and measure the effectiveness of this practice. Specific examples include:

- JFSWNY and HRI saw an increase in the number of asylum court cases and were able to ensure scheduling of evaluations prior to scheduled court hearings.
- JFSWNY and HRI saw an increase in understanding of the program's intent by entities such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Through meetings and trainings, such entities were able to see the value and objectivity of the program.
- JFSWNY staff are now able to track client referral outcomes and follow-up medical recommendations to ensure clients understand the next steps in their care.



## Inputs/Resources

Agencies should expect to invest some funding and time to implement this practice. Below are key inputs and resources needed to adopt this practice.

- Structured medical training and support. Training should also include an investment in resource materials to support ongoing learning and professional development.
- Training for medical staff to ensure trauma and cultural competency in providing forensic evaluations.
- Consideration of other partner organizations/agencies required to support forensic evaluation partnership.



## Contextual Considerations

Agencies should consider the following contextual factors that may impact implementing this practice.

JFSWNY and HRI also work to ensure their partnership can accommodate individuals who are currently detained. Therefore, the program has factored in the need for alternative examination locations to account for these constraints. Currently, the program works with Erie County Medical Center to utilize conference space to complete examinations which allows for a setup where a client may need to be in shackles throughout the duration of the examination.

JFSWNY and HRI also partner with Western New York MRI as a provider who can provide free x-rays to clients.

**What is a Promising Practice?** A promising practice is a unique and/or innovative approach, method, or technique that has demonstrated effectiveness and is replicable. ORR's Refugee Program primarily identifies potential promising practices during recipient and subrecipient monitoring and engages in a validation process to ensure the practice meets the standards to classify it as "promising." Each practice falls under one of the following domains: Physical and Behavioral Health, Employment and Economic Stability, Education and English Language, or Social Adjustment and Integration.