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Leaders of RI State Victim Assistance Academy Receive RI Attorney General Justice Award

An educational-outreach initiative of Family Service of RI and RWU, leaders from both institutions shared the honor at the 12th Annual Justice Awards



October 6, 2016 | Public Affairs Staff

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The leaders of the **Rhode Island State Victim Assistance Academy**, an educational-outreach initiative of Family Service of Rhode Island and Roger Williams University, were honored Wednesday for their dedication and excellence in educating victim-service providers by Rhode Island Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin in the 12th annual Justice Awards.

Attorney General Kilmartin joined past attorneys general at the annual ceremony to honor a number of individuals and organizations. Justice Awards are given in recognition of individual and organizational excellence and commitment to justice and the community. Each Justice Award is presented in honor of one of eight previous Attorneys General: Arlene Violet, Richard Israel, Herbert DeSimone, Dennis Roberts, James O’Neil, Jeffrey Pine, Sheldon Whitehouse and Patrick Lynch.

The Rhode Island State Victim Assistance Academy received the Attorney General Arlene Violet Justice Award for Domestic Violence Prevention.

“We have a lot to celebrate in Rhode Island, especially the many people and organizations that work to make the state a better, safer place,” said Attorney General Kilmartin. “The Victim Assistance Academy helps law enforcement better support victims of crimes by educating victim-service providers and empowering their work within the justice system.”

Since 2008, the Rhode Island State Victim Assistance Academy at Roger Williams University has provided professional training for more than 200 victim-service providers, from mental health professionals to trauma center staff and police officers, across the state.

“Victims come to the table with a host of issues, from mental health to financial issues and more,” according to Robert W. McKenna, dean of the [School of Justice Studies](#) and director of the [Justice System Training and Research Institute](#) at Roger Williams University, which hosts the annual Rhode Island State Victim Assistance Academy. “Our purpose in the Academy is to train the people having interactions with victims in the field on how to deal with the myriad issues that will arise and best navigate the justice system to get them that help.”

A wide range of topics are covered in each annual Academy, including an overview of the justice system, domestic abuse, child abuse, working with cultural groups and LGBTQQ cultural competency issues, victim services and ethics, among others. In addition to offering professional development aligning with federal best-practices standards, the Academy provides participants with the opportunity to build collaborative relationships and encourage creative problem-solving among the victim-services community.

“The Academy’s mission is to raise the level of professionalism for victim-service providers and to raise the standard of care for victims to reflect federal best practices,” says Susan S. Erstling, senior vice-president of the Trauma and Loss Center at Family Service of Rhode Island. “Because the fields of victim services and trauma-and-response services are growing, there is greater need for more advanced training and education.”

The Attorney General Arlene Violet Justice Award for Domestic Violence Prevention is shared between Family Service of Rhode Island and Roger Williams University.

“This is an acknowledgement of all the hard work that’s occurred to fill this critical need within the community, but more importantly, how groups of people working together can accomplish great things,” says McKenna.

“Gaining the respect and recognition of the Attorney General’s Office – which deals with our most serious criminal cases – is tremendous for us,” says Erstling. “This is a true community-based outreach initiative, and I can’t imagine a better partner than Roger Williams.”

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