



## PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **DOJ Funds Gang Violence Intervention Initiative in Greater Trenton**

*Initiative is designed to support youth victims and promote public safety.*

**Trenton, NJ | January 22, 2020** – The greater Trenton area was one of only ten sites selected nationally to launch a Department of Justice initiative addressing victims of gang-related violence and crime. PEI Kids is the lead agency for the collaborative project, the Coalition Against Youth Violence, which is funded by a three-year grant from the Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP), to address gang violence victimization among youth under 18.

The federal initiative seeks to support jurisdictions with high levels of gang violence that could demonstrate a willingness and readiness to develop community- and data-driven responses to youth and their families who are victims of gang-related crime and violence. Under this initiative, JJDP expects recipients to provide support services, improve responses to impacted youth, and enhance public safety in their communities.

The Coalition Against Youth Violence project is based on a multidisciplinary team (MDT) response model and will incorporate several local youth-serving organizations as well as the Mercer County Department of Human Services. The project will operate under the Mercer County Gang Prevention & Intervention Task Force which is chaired by PEI Kids' Program Director, Rob Fiorello. Fiorello, who runs PEI Kids' Juvenile Intervention Services for adjudicated youth and youth at-risk of justice-system involvement, explained "This project is a clear victory for youth in our community who are disproportionately impacted by this kind of violence."

PEI Kids will spearhead the Coalition's three-pronged effort which involves providing direct services to young victims, coordinating systems' response to victims, and educating youth-serving professionals in how to identify gang activity and connect victims to services. PEI Kids will also be accountable to DOJ for all programmatic and financial activity and project reporting.

The Coalition Against Youth Violence expects to begin providing direct services to youth in April 2020. According to PEI Kids' Executive Director, Roz Dashiell, "We look forward to working closely with other community-based and youth-serving organizations to make a meaningful network of support available for young people who are vulnerable," explained Dashiell. She added, "Together, by providing quality support and better options, we can develop effective responses for youth exposed to gang violence, and make meaningful contributions in the areas of community safety and in the lives of young residents who are at-risk or impacted by gang-related violence and crime."

Over the next three months, PEI Kids will be conducting planning meetings and contracting with community-based organizations to create a specialized network of services for youth victims. Organizations currently committed to the council include Capital Health Regional Medical Center, Mercer County Department of Human Services, Catholic Charities, Capital County Children's Collaborative/Care Management Organization, Anchor House, YWCA Princeton's Latinas Unidas program, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mercer County, ISLES, and Mercer County Sherriff's Office.

Free gang training is available for any youth-serving organizations or professional groups who request it.

To learn more about the Coalition Against Youth Violence or to request gang training for your group, please call 609-695-3739, email [rfiorello@peikids.org](mailto:rfiorello@peikids.org), visit [www.peikids.org](http://www.peikids.org) or [www.facebook.com/peikidsnj](https://www.facebook.com/peikidsnj).

## **About PEI Kids**

PEI Kids is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization with a mission dedicated to *promoting and maintaining a safe environment for all children*. PEI Kids works with the child, family, educators and caregivers to provide Prevention, Education and Intervention programs relating to personal safety, sexual abuse, delinquency, and the overall well-being of the child. Established in 1985, PEI Kids' school-based Prevention Education programs serve over 10,000 students, teachers and parents annually. PEI Kids' Intervention programs include crisis counseling for child victims of sexual abuse, anger management, juvenile offender diversion programming, and support services for children in foster care.

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