

Rural Justice Institute awarded \$300,000 in federal funding

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ALFRED -- The Alfred University Rural Justice Institute has been awarded \$300,000 in funding from the federal government. The money, appropriated through the U.S. Congress Omnibus Bill for fiscal year 2004, will be used to continue the efforts of the Rural Justice Institute to coordinate and improve domestic violence services for families and youngsters in Allegany County. The Rural Justice Institute at Alfred University provides support to social services providers in the development of more effective outreach, treatment and support mechanisms for young people who are the victims of domestic violence. "We are building a network of services to respond to the needs of troubled youth," said Dr. William Hall, a professor of sociology and dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Alfred University, who also serves as executive director of the Rural Justice Institute. "Our goal is to create more of a coordinated effort between the agencies that serve youngsters in the region." With the most recent grant, the project has now received a total of \$1.65 million in the last four years. Funding has been used to develop a long-range plan for improving the delivery of services to troubled youth; fund research for students and faculty on county services that focus on domestic violence response; train personnel at area schools to identify youth at risk and provide referrals for intervention; create the Allegany County Data Partnership, a regional database on the numbers of youth in need of services and the agencies that provide them; and create a model for networking among agencies in order to more effectively and efficiently deliver services. "Previous grants have been used to conduct research and conduct needs assessments," said Dr. Sally Dorman, director of operations for the Rural Justice Institute. "This money will be used to help us implement our plans." The efforts of AU faculty and students are an important part of RJI initiatives. Graduate assistants in the School Psychology program, under the guidance of Dorman and Dr. John Cerio, professor of school psychology at Alfred University, are developing and distributing follow-up surveys for schools in New York state to determine the services and programs available for youth victims of domestic violence. Cerio and Dr. Karen L. Porter, professor of sociology, have been instrumental in determining the domestic violence services available through schools and agencies in the county. The Rural Justice Institute has developed a partnership with the ACCORD Corp. to coordinate services to youth victims of domestic violence. Some of those services will be provided directly by the Child and Family Services Center at Alfred University. Other RJI projects include: The Second Step Violence Prevention Program, now being implemented for pre-kindergarten-fifth grade at Friendship Central School. School personnel are being trained to identify, resolve and prevent incidents of violence. The program will run as a pilot project the remainder of the current school year before being fully implemented this fall. The Rural Justice Institute is working with law enforcement and youth services officials from Allegany County to develop and expand the county's Youth Court. The Youth Court will function as an in-school intervention program for troubled youth, whose cases, rather than going through the criminal court system, are adjudicated by a panel of their peers. Hall hopes the RJI can partner with the Allegany County Sheriff's Department to facilitate referrals to the Youth Court from local police departments. The Rural Justice Institute is in the midst of organizing a national conference that will address issues (including domestic violence) faced by troubled youth in rural areas. The conference, which will be hosted by RJI in the summer of 2005, will attract professionals in law enforcement, juvenile justice, education, counseling and psychology. Dorman said the efforts of the Rural Justice Institute are important to the region because it "shows there are kids in rural areas who need these services." "This will help kids. This project is really a neat model that could become a national model for rural communities." Hall praised the county's representatives in Congress-- U.S. senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton and Rep. Amo Houghton -- for bringing the much-needed funding to the Rural Justice Institute. "The appropriations we've received have been the result of the hard work by Senator Schumer, who has been a strong advocate of our efforts all along. Amo Houghton and Senator Clinton have also been very supportive," Hall said.