

January 30, 2013

Testimony:

My name is Susan Boritz. I have lived in Sandy Hook for 16 years. I am a Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and an Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC). In December 2011, after working in a large group private practice and in a number of large agencies such as The Children's Center of Hamden and Clifford Beers Clinic, I opened up a private practice of my very own. My practice is located at 111 Church Hill Rd in Sandy Hook. I named my practice Pathways Counseling, both because of the personal journey I had to take in order to come home to practice in my own community, and because it is my strongly held belief that healing our wounds and creating needed change is a journey we must make one step at a time and very often involves choosing a different pathway from the one we have been walking.

So, I am both a resident of and a mental health practitioner in Sandy Hook. In addition, I have specialized training that enables me to work effectively with trauma. I work with a great many children and adolescents. I want to briefly offer my perspective on two issues before this committee: Prevention and Response.

Prevention: Preventing what happened on 12/14/12 was virtually impossible as things were and still are. The research is clear that mental illness in adolescents and young adults goes largely undiagnosed and untreated even as risk factors for serious illness and suicide are at their highest point in the person's lifespan. Serious mental illness isn't generally identified in its early stages and if it is, it's very often misattributed or masked. Symptoms are attributed to ADHD, ODD, CD, substance abuse, delinquency, etc. Even when parents and/or school officials are aware that a young person is struggling, getting on the same page about what needs to be done is extremely difficult. And even when there is agreement among the supportive adults about the nature of the problem, the young person himself/herself very often doesn't accept the definition of the problem. Legally, after the age of 18, parents are almost completely powerless to force their kids to comply with treatment. So, even when everyone is on the same page and the kid is compliant, a rare thing indeed, **there is very little effective, affordable and accessible healthcare available for families.** This is especially true when there is a substance abuse issue, which is true in a large majority of cases. These youths wind up in the juvenile justice system and later make up a majority of our prison population.

In the past year, I have worked with clients in Newtown where I was not able to get the services a kid needed because the services did not exist or couldn't be accessed.

Response to Traumatic Events:

As a trauma trained clinician working in the town of Sandy Hook, every client that I meet with has been traumatized by the shooting. They have not all lost loved ones. Neither have I. However, they are all showing signs of the trauma. Marriages are impacted. Parents are struggling to parent. We have lost our sense of safety and security. Our fundamental identities have been shifting. For some of us, myself included, our lives have suddenly seemed to be repurposed. **The circle of traumatization is going to be much, much wider, deeper and longer than we may be currently aware of or are planning for.**

I would, therefore, like to propose that resources be allocated for the development of a family resource center in Newtown, so that trauma