

E-Update (May 5, 2006)



It's everybody's business.

Erie County New York Family Justice Center Celebrates Grand Opening

The opening of the Erie County Family Justice Center in downtown Buffalo is a unique collaboration of 32 agencies working under one roof to help victims of domestic violence. Services range from legal action including forensic medical exams and restraining orders to social support from shelter service professionals and parenting classes. The walls of the center mean “safety for those that are in danger,” said Susan Still, who fled her abusive husband with her two sons. “They mean comfort for those in grief, the difference between life and death,” said Still, who is deeply grateful to the Amherst police for their help in her case, but understands from her own terrifying and confusing experiences leaving her home and seeking help how the new center could provide even better care. “I applaud you and I thank you on behalf of every victim who will walk through that door,” she said. Even though 4,000 domestic violence arrests were made in Erie County last year, many cases go unreported because people don’t know where to turn, said Nathan Cook, the center’s executive director. Prior to the center’s opening, victims sought help from a fragmented system of separate agencies offering uncoordinated services. “Our center offers one stop for all necessary services,” he said. For more information, call the Erie County Family Justice Center at (716) 558-SAFE.

The Erie County New York Family Justice Center is one of the 15 opening as part of the President’s Family Justice Center Initiative (PFJCI) – designed to play a crucial role in developing multi-disciplinary service centers for victims of domestic violence and their children. In October of 2003, President George W. Bush announced the PFJCI, which is administered by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The PFJCI is a pilot program that has awarded more than \$20 million to the 15 communities across the country for the planning, development, and establishment of comprehensive domestic violence victim service and support centers. The Buffalo center was chosen out of more than 160 applications, said Diane M. Stuart, director of the federal Office on Violence Against Women. “Buffalo stood out,” Stuart told the audience at the celebratory luncheon, because of how the area’s agencies had already begun working together to combat family violence.