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JFS BUFFALO LAUNCHES WESTERN NEW YORK CENTER FOR SURVIVORS OF REFUGEE TRAUMA AND TORTURE WITH JUNE 10 PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WORKSHOP

(Buffalo, NY) Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County (JFS Buffalo), a longtime regional leader in the successful resettlement of refugees from around the world, has launched the **Western New York Center for Survivors of Refugee Trauma and Torture**.

"The interdisciplinary program will address the complex medical, psychological, immigration, legal and social service needs of an estimated 15,000 torture survivors in Western New York. We will be serving survivors of political and state-sponsored torture. Our goal is to increase self-sufficiency and support the healing process," Marlene Schillinger, president and CEO of JFS Buffalo said.

Erie County is among the five Upstate New York counties that are home to 94 percent of the refugees resettled in the state from Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and other conflict-ridden countries, according to 2013 data from the Bureau of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (BRIA).

The Western New York Center for Survivors of Refugee Trauma and Torture is funded by a $250,000 grant from the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth), the result of a 10-year vision articulated by Schillinger and project director Pam Kefi. It is being crafted and implemented in concert with Journey's End Refugee Services, Vive La Casa, Lake Shore Behavioral Health and **University at Buffalo Family Medicine** - and in regional partnership with Rochester Catholic Family Center.

The collaborative initiative officially began June 10 with a daylong workshop at the Buffalo Club by Physicians for Human Rights held at The Buffalo Club.

About 45 attorneys, law interns and legal aid representatives; social workers; doctors, medical and health care professionals; and social workers attended "Asylum Training: Medical, Legal and Psychological," presented by JFS Buffalo in partnership with American Immigrant Lawyers Association (AILA)-Upstate New York Chapter, VPL-Erie County Volunteer Lawyers Project and UB Family Medicine.

PHR presenters included Asylum Program Manager Jillian Tuck, JD, and volunteers Sarah Kimball, MD, who is finishing her Internal Medicine / Primary Care Residency at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Massachusetts; and Judy I. Eidelson, Ph.D., and adjunct fellow at the Penn Center for Public Health Initiatives.

Among others, the goals of the Physicians for Human Rights workshop were to:

- increase the capacity of WNY immigration attorneys to successfully represent asylum-seekers

- increase the number of physicians and mental health practitioners who know how to conduct a forensic evaluation and document signs of torture and human rights abuses in medical affidavits

- prepare attorneys to work effectively with health care professional expert witnesses in asylum cases.

In addition to government sanctions of torture, the broad scope of the inhumane suffering experienced by refugees may include food insecurity, familial displacement and separation; loss of personal income, property and national identity; and untreated illness, Kefi said.

"This community-based initiative will provide support to refugees, asylees and other immigrant survivors seeking specialized care," said Kefi, who is also JFS Buffalo director of program development and integration.

"We want to develop a referral network of medical, legal and social service professionals with the skills and experience necessary to address the complicated needs of vulnerable populations."

Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County helped displaced Russian Jews transition to a new life in Buffalo during the 80s and 90s. Today, the agency assists as many as 200 new people a year through the challenges of change from refugee to "New American."

In addition to its Refugee Resettlement program, JFS Buffalo services include a comprehensive Behavioral / Mental Health Outpatient Clinic, Children's Mental Health Program, Gambling Recovery Program, Mental Health First Aid Program, ACCES-VR and Elder Care Program, among others.

For more information about Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County, the **Western New York Center for Survivors of Refugee Trauma and Torture** and other programs, call 716-883-1914 or visit www.jfsbuffalo.org