

October 1, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Samaritans of Merrimack Valley, I am pleased to provide this letter of support and reference to Riverside Trauma Center in response to their request for a recommendation.

I am the director of the Samaritans of Merrimack Valley, a program of Family Services of the Merrimack Valley. We are a suicide prevention and postvention (after a suicide death) center. We run a crisis help line, do about 50 trainings and workshops around Massachusetts each year, provide numerous support services for those who have lost someone to suicide, and most recently, have developed a training for clinicians who work with middle aged men. We recently started the first support group for suicide attempt survivors in the area.

Samaritans has collaborated with Riverside for more than 7 years. Riverside has earned an excellent reputation of providing the finest trainings, the most knowledgeable and professional staff, and is a leader in the area of trauma focused and postvention services. They are highly regarded by everyone in the suicide prevention field in Massachusetts for their expertise and experience. I have been trained by them in Psychological First Aid and Critical Intervention Training and often go on trauma calls with their staff. We have collaborated with Riverside in trainings and are currently serving on an ad hoc committee with them and other providers to develop a statewide collaborative approach to postvention services. They are a leader in this field and have the capacity and community connections to provide many of these services and trainings throughout Massachusetts.

Larry Berkowitz, Director of the Riverside Trauma Center, and I have co-chaired the Northeast Regional Coalition for Suicide Prevention for about 6 years. Riverside presented their Suicide Assessment and Intervention Training for Mental Health Professionals to a group of about 70 mental health providers and other community stakeholders this past year. The content of the training was detailed enough to provide practical assistance to therapists and also covered enough topics to give the participants a well rounded training. Participants gained knowledge not only about risk factors and warning signs but also of tools for assessing suicide risk, intervening with clients at risk, and managing a suicidal crisis. They also covered the impact on mental health professionals who work with suicidal clients and provided tools for managing their reactions as well as self-care techniques. One of the most significant benefits of this training is that participants reported that they had more confidence and an increased comfort level in working with suicidal clients.

Should you require further information or clarification, please feel free to contact me at 978-327-6671 or email me at dhelms@fsmv.org. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Helms

Deborah A. Helms
Director, Samaritans of Merrimack Valley