



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

Mary Whittier

TED O'BRIEN May 13, 2014



Women of
DISTINCTION
HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

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Award: HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Year: 2014

Mary Whittier, founding Executive Director of Bivona Child Advocacy Center, has changed the way child sexual abuse is investigated, treated and prosecuted in the Greater Rochester area.

Under Ms. Whittier's guidance, Bivona is a non-profit organization providing streamlined, compassionate, coordinated care for the child and family at one safe, welcoming, child-friendly place. Before Bivona, children were subjected to a chaotic and traumatizing abuse investigation, forced to repeat the gruesome details of their sexual abuse to multiple professionals in mixed settings. Children were interviewed in the back of police cars or on the very couch where they were raped; families were dragged all over town and often fell through the cracks.

Bivona opened its doors in 2004, bringing all of the agencies involved in child sexual abuse investigation under one roof. In its first ten years under Ms. Whittier's leadership, the agency has tripled in partners, staff and clients. Since its inception, Bivona has evaluated 12,000 children for sexual abuse. Due to the multidisciplinary team approach at Bivona, these children experienced reduced trauma on their path to healing.

Child abuse is an epidemic. The problem is real, crosses all socioeconomic boundaries, does not discriminate, and cannot be ignored. Thanks to Ms. Whittier's leadership, the local community is paying greater attention to the issue. She spearheaded efforts to raise awareness of abuse and prevention by building the countywide Darkness To Light Collaborative with 12 other child-focused agencies. The goal is to educate 5% of Monroe County adults – 28,000 people – in the next five years on how to identify, prevent and responsibly report child sexual abuse.

Ms. Whittier has worked with children and families for almost 30 years. She sits on the board of the NYS Chapter of the National Children's Alliance and the Rochester Police Foundation Board. She was awarded Social Worker of the Year for program innovation in 2000, the Human Services Worker of the Year Award for the private sector in 2006, is the only female recipient of the Carl S. Hallauer Award in 2008, was nominated for the ATHENA Award in 2011; and received the Edward Mott Moore Award for outstanding impact on the medical field in 2013.

Ms. Whittier holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Buffalo and an undergraduate degree in social work from Buffalo State College. She is married with two children.