

Children's Connection
a program of the Human
Services Council

Children's Connection director brings strategies, sets goals



Hour photo / MATTHEW VINCI
Kari Pesavento is the new director of the Human Services Council's Children's Connection.

NORWALK
By LAUREN MYLO
Hour Staff Writer

If education and prevention are the goals, Kari Pesavento has the strategies. In March, Pesavento was hired as the new director of the Children's Connection, a program of the Human Services Council of Mid-Fairfield County. The new position is, in many ways, a continuation of the one she held for 10 years — she was the director of

operations of Stamford's Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education before coming to Norwalk.

Both in that position and her newest, she has a spot on the child sexual abuse response/multidisciplinary team, which meets on a monthly basis and includes members from local police departments, the Department of Children and Families, the Norwalk Hospital Department of Pediatrics and the Family and Children's Agency.

One of Pesavento's goals for her new position is to let the community know more about their work.

"(People should know) there's a process and a place and a team in place to help this process," said Pesavento. "It's so important not only intervening when a child is abused but stopping it. When the family feels the community support we're going to reduce the chances of it happening again."

Pesavento said only one in three abuse cases is reported to the DCF, but the abuse statistics themselves are staggering — it's estimated one in four girls and one in five boys will be sexually assaulted before they turn 16.

If abuse is reported to the DCF, it sets up an interview with the child involved through the Children's Connection and the

Center for Sexual Assault. Then, a specially trained forensic investigator conducts the interview so the child only has to tell his or her story once.

"All of our efforts are collaborating," said Pesavento. "We can all come together to make sure no families fall through the cracks. If one . . . agency can't provide, there's another agency around the table that can."

In addition to her work with the team, Pesavento will be working with the Children's Bank — a Children's Connection project which donates holiday and special occasion gifts to abused or neglected children — and the Stop Child Abuse and Neglect team, which offers seminars to local organizations who work directly with children to prevent abuse.

"It's really the most rewarding work I've ever done," said Pesavento. "It's really empowering. . . Other than through prevention efforts, I can't make sure it doesn't happen, but I can make sure it's as easy as possible for the family."

Two people who have worked closely with Pesavento mentioned the same attributes that make her a great person for the

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position — her energy and her ideas.

HSC's executive director Betty Karkut said Pesavento wants to increase the number and types of education programs of all of the communities the Children's Connection serves — Norwalk, New Canaan, Westport, Weston and Wilton.

"She'll be going to schools and whatever other groups would request this kind of service, and she'll be working with the multidisciplinary team to bring in more education resources for them," said Karkut. "I think the most important thing is education and prevention, and Kari has done this in the past, and this is one of her strengths."

State's Attorney Rich Colangelo, the chairman of the multidisciplinary team, said Pesavento recently attended training at National Children's Advocacy Center in Alabama and sent the team about 15 e-mails with ideas about case tracking, case documentation and what the roles of each member on the team should be.

"She comes up with a lot of good ideas, and again what we're doing is we're benefiting the kids, and Kari understands that and that's her first priority," he said.

For more information about Children's Connection or HSC, call (203) 849-1111. If you suspect a child is being abused, call the local police or the Child Abuse Hotline at (800) 842-2288.