



## Roca Hartford Second Quarter Report

Fiscal Year 2023: January 1, 2023 – March 31, 2023

*Important Note Regarding Confidentiality: This report includes sensitive details related to participants. This information is being shared with you, as a project funder or partner, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges our young people have and continue to experience. While names have been changed to protect anonymity, to honor their and their families' privacy, prior written approval from Roca is required before details regarding young people and/or their families can be shared with individuals outside of your organization. Please submit such requests to Sunindiya Bhalla, Executive Vice President of Women & 2Gen, at [Sunindiya.Bhalla@rocainc.com](mailto:Sunindiya.Bhalla@rocainc.com). Thank you for your consideration.*

### Introduction

The Roca Hartford FY2023 Third Quarter Report reflects data from January 1, 2023, through March 31, 2023. This report includes highlights from the quarter and address core programmatic components and key issues.

Highlights of the quarter include:

- Continued working with the highest-risk young women experiencing unimaginable trauma and instability;
- Began to implement Roca's Transitional Employment Program onsite with participants;
- Participated in Teen Dating Violence panel hosted by the Governor's Council on Women & Girls;
- Participated in the Regional Human Trafficking Recovery Taskforce;
- Finalized a White Paper per Year 1 deliverables of Young Mothers External Evaluation with TIER;
- Administered Roca's annual Participant Feedback Survey; and
- Hired a Director to start during the next quarter.

### Participant Referrals, Eligibility, and Retention

At the time of this report, we are currently serving 71 participants, and are assessing an additional 14 young women for eligibility. From January 1, 2023 – March 3, 2023, we received 33 referrals. Of these, six were enrolled in active slots, two are being assessed for eligibility, and 25 have been placed on a waitlist. Our capacity for this current fiscal year, ending June 30, 2023, is 80 participants enrolled in active slots, and we are on track to fill our caseload.

We have received 83 referrals to date this fiscal year (since July 1, 2022). Whenever possible, we refer young women to other providers and services if we are not able to enroll them. However, there is a clear need for Roca's intervention model for some of the most critical-risk and hard to engage young women who have been placed on our waitlist because there is no other program equipped to relentlessly engage them and work with them intensively.

79 participants were determined to be eligible since the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1, 2022), 73 of whom were still active at the close of the quarter (92% retention). Of the six who were dismissed, four moved out of the service area and remained out of the area for over 90 days. One participant was dismissed for being a high safety risk, and another because her parent declined Roca's services.

73% of Roca Hartford participants are between the ages of 17-22 years old. 16% are ages 14-16, and 11% are ages 23-24. 46% of participants identify as Black or African American, 51% identify as Hispanic/Latina, and 4% are multi-racial. 80% of participants are from Hartford, and 13% from New Britain.

### Participant Risk Factors

Roca Hartford seeks referrals of young women who are the highest risk for negative systems involvement, including



criminal justice and child welfare, disengaged from education and employment, have negative or non-existent social connections, and are involved in, impacted by, or instigating violence. Below is a breakdown of the risk factors of the 79 Roca Hartford participants served to date this fiscal year (since July 1, 2022):

<b>Risk Factors Upon Enrollment</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Criminal Justice Systems Involvement	58	73%
Street/Gang Involved	28	35%
Drug Involved	48	61%
No Employment History	40	51%
No High School Degree/Equivalency	57	72%
History of Victimization	61	77%
Housing Instability	39	49%
DCF Involvement	28	35%
4 or More Risk Factors	58	73%

As staff develop proficiency in administering the Roca Change Assessment, we saw an increase in average scores from the last quarter, giving us a better understanding of the trauma and traumatic life events experienced by the young women we serve. All 79 participants served during the current fiscal year had a baseline change assessment. Of these:

- 100% witnessed at least one Potential Traumatic Event;
- 73% had 4 or more ACES (considered high-risk);
- 77% had experienced domestic violence; and
- 66% were red flagged for PTSD and/or depression.

#### Child Welfare System Involvement

A significant number of participants (45%) have open cases with the Department of Children & Families (DCF). This is higher than the number above, as some participants had cases opened after being enrolled. While the work with young mothers can be challenging, and risk factors like intimate partner violence and housing instability often lead to investigations, open cases, family separation, and even terminations of parental rights, as Roca's young mothers progress through the intervention model, there is also evidence that change is possible. To date this fiscal year, five young mothers have had their DCF cases closed, and two young mothers are on track for reunification.

Amy<sup>1</sup> was referred to Roca in December 2021 by DCF after being arrested following a physical altercation with her older son's father. She completed a family violence program, but once again found herself the victim of intimate partner violence by her younger son's father, and both children were removed. Her aggressor was arrested and incarcerated, but tracked Amy down as soon as he was released and badly injured her. She called the police, and he was arrested, then released, and this cycle repeated itself 2-3 times over as many days as he continued to post bail and violate protective orders and Amy was not provided the opportunity to testify. Finally, with consistent engagement in therapy at Roca and using CBT to examine her own pattern of behavior, she was able to find emotional and physical safety and stability. With Roca's help, Amy secured an apartment and a job. She now has custody of her older son and is beginning unsupervised visits at her apartment with her younger son.

<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed to protect anonymity.



We are currently working with several young women ages 18-21 who are eligible to remain in or re-enter care and receive transitional supports and services through 23 years of age, based on prior involvement and/or placement with DCF. While many young people are eager to leave the care of DCF, there are many services available to them, including but not limited housing, financial assistance, and support with basic needs. Unfortunately, many of the young women Roca serves are not able to comply with the requirements of engaging in post-secondary education or job training, as they are still experiencing significant levels of instability, trauma, and violence. This can present frustration for both young people and Roca staff in trying to access supports from a system that is not designed to support the state's most vulnerable youth they are supposed to protect.

Maya<sup>1</sup> was referred to Roca in September 2022 by a friend. She grew up in and out of DCF custody in foster care and group homes which she frequently ran away from, and has a history of juvenile arrests and probation. At first, she wanted nothing to do with Roca. Then in January, she started showing up. She had just turned 18 and had remained in DCF care, was inconsistently attending her alternative high school with frequent behavior challenges and at risk of being expelled and was staying in an adult shelter. Maya was required to leave her shelter by 6:30AM, but could not arrive at school before 7:30AM, got out of school at 2:30PM, and wasn't able to re-enter the shelter until 6:30PM. She could not store her belongings at the shelter and was not comfortable showering here. She was trying to get her documents to get a job so she could drop out of school and get an apartment. She was hesitant to be around other participants, but slowly began to develop relationships with Roca staff. She began to leave her belongings and shower at Roca after school. We worked with the school to allow her to come to Roca three days per week and meet with her tutor, and she has already made significant progress towards credit recovery, as she was only at a 10<sup>th</sup> grade level in January. She identified an aunt who she could stay with, because until she has her diploma, she does not qualify for a housing program through DCF. Maya's aunt is not willing to allow DCF to visit her home and consider qualifying her as a foster parent, although she would receive money. Maya does not have her own room and utilizes her food stamps and earnings to support the household, also helping to cook and clean. Although she still wants to quit school and get a job and an apartment, we are pleased with her perseverance and hope we can keep her safe, stable, and on track to finish school.

## Outreach, Programming, and TEP

### Relentless Outreach

During the last quarter, 96% of Roca Hartford participants were in contact with Roca staff. 64% were successfully contacted 1x per week, and 43% were successfully contacted at least 2x per week. 72% of outreach efforts resulted in successful contacts.

### Programming Engagement and Highlights

25% of participants enrolled in active slots during the quarter were engaged in formal programming. While lower than last quarter, this is not an unusual dip for Roca's Young Mothers Program. Immediately following the holidays, we typically see a significant rise in crises and critical incidents related to domestic violence, and since the pandemic a rise in illnesses across staff and participants during this time. During this time, staff in all roles conducted outreach to ensure that participants had intentional contacts with Roca staff, were safe and supported in navigating systems involvement including court and DCF, and continued to practice Rewire (CBT) skills. During the quarter, 78% of participant were engaged in the practice of Rewire (CBT) skills. Roca staff intentionally integrate CBT into most interactions, coaching participants on their Think-Feel-Do Cycles using real-life situations they encounter. Whether it is parenting,



relationships, substance use, or navigating the termination of parental rights, these critical life-saving skills are essential to help young women stay out of harm's way, be it emotional or physical. We have been tracking the integration of CBT through teaching of concepts, practice, and intentional conversation. From the results of our annual participant feedback surveys and focus groups which are detailed later in this report, we were pleased to hear that participants continue to feel supported and connected even during staff transitions.

### Transitional Employment

While we hoped to have our Transitional Employment Program (TEP) up and running with one work crew in Hartford by this time, we have been unsuccessful in securing a contract. In the interim, we have been able to begin TEP with internal slots working onsite. The first participant cleared for TEP did not show up on her first day. While this is typical behavior for Roca participants and planning to get to work on time is part of the learning process, we discovered that it was not safe for her to take public transportation as she has been a target of gun violence. For safety reasons, we have rapidly placed her in outside employment and are supporting her to be successful so she can move to a safer area. The second participant cleared for TEP worked on and off for three weeks and was excited to receive a paycheck for the time in her life. However, due to her deep involvement in trafficking, she experienced instability and violence and for safety reasons is currently staying out of the area. The third participant cleared for TEP has been working inconsistently, also having her stability affected by a coercive relationship resulting in instability. However, we are pleased that our fourth participant who was cleared has been working consistently and have just cleared a fifth. The need and urgency for a work contract is clear as we have more participants ready, willing, and able to learn how to work and have a space to practice CBT skills. We are hopeful that the relationships and partnerships we have built will help us secure work for our participants.

19-year-old Sienna<sup>2</sup> was referred by DCF in June 2022. She moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic at age 10 with her mom and did not have stability growing up, becoming pregnant by her (now-ex) stepfather at age 13 and being placed in group homes, subsequently running away, getting involved in and arrested for various street crimes. Her now ex-boyfriend shot two high-school age youth during a home invasion which Sienna was accused of helping to set up, arrested for conspiracy to commit murder. Her boyfriend was incarcerated and after losing custody of her son, Sienna has worked hard to turn her life around. At first, she was afraid to trust Roca and was receiving threats of being targeted in retaliation. With Roca's help, she went to the police, and has since moved for safety reasons and regained custody of her son. While initially afraid to leave the house to work, Sienna started using apps and making videos to make money, and once again found herself being threatened. Feeling safe at Roca, she agreed to try TEP.

### **Participant Safety and Stability**

During this quarter, Roca 19 participants experienced domestic violence, five were arrested, three were incarcerated, and one violated probation. One young woman referred during the quarter was the victim of a nonfatal shooting. Due to the critical nature of this incident and safety concerns for the family, we are not providing details regarding this young woman in this quarter's report. Roca is continuing to see an increase in young women's involvement in gun and street violence, and subsequently increased arrests and criminal justice system involvement, across all three of its Young Mothers Programs. During the first two years of Roca's intervention model, it is not uncommon for participants to continue to engage in risk behaviors including criminal activity. Helping young people to find safety and stability, learn to

<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed to protect anonymity.



practice emotional regulation, and subsequently change their behavior takes time and non-judgement as Roca staff help them navigate relapses in behavior.

We continue to collaborate with partners including law enforcement, the State's Attorney, DCF, Juvenile Probation, and the Connecticut Children's Alliance to support an increasing number of women who are victims of human trafficking. These situations are often complex, and young women are involved with multiple systems due to the presence of guns, drugs, physical violence, theft, and other activity that is inter-related. As we build trust with participants, we are often given information on people or places that may be harmful to young women. Although participants themselves are not ready, willing, or able speak up, we are fortunate to be able to share critical information with trusted entities to investigate to the best of their ability with the information we are able to share confidentially and anonymously. Because human trafficking is challenging to prosecute, simply identifying and arresting trafficking does not necessarily have an immediate impact on the safety and stability of young women who are impacted. The young women we serve look for love, admiration, and economic support and stability wherever they can find it. While at Roca we use every means possible, from collaborating with partners and clinicians, to utilizing cognitive behavioral theory to identify cycles, and our Healthy Habits curriculum to teaching young women how to be safe, sometimes all we can do is give participants a safe space, a meal, and a place to shower, help them with a safety plan, and be there for them when the worst happens.

Shawna<sup>3</sup> was referred to Roca in November 2021. Brought here from Jamaica, she was 18 years old and undocumented, a senior in high school with a two-year-old son in DCF custody. She was a suspected victim of trafficking, the father of her son an older man who she refused to identify. When Shawna was told that her parental rights were being terminated, she experienced a relapse, leaving first a residential program and then the foster care placement Roca found for her. Scheduled to finish high school in June, she fell behind. Roca was able to convince her to remain in care as a transition age youth, and with DCF's support she became a citizen. However, her housing instability put her back on the streets and she moved into a house with a new boyfriend and other young people. While Shawna remained actively engaged with Roca and managed to finish her high school credits remotely, she increasingly got pulled into risk behaviors and there were significant red flags about activity taking place in the house she was staying in, which at one time housed two other Roca participants. She became pregnant, and decided she wanted to leave. Roca was able to have her placed in safe house which she left when she started to miscarry and was intercepted by her boyfriend who convinced her to return to him. Thanks to the work of key partners listening to concerns about the house, it was raided, and many residents were arrested. Shawna was scared enough to consider placement. Although we learned that there are beds for trafficking victims, being in DCF care meant that she needed to be placed in a DCF bed through a report of child abuse and neglect (CAN). However, there were no placements immediately available. Roca was able to place her in a hotel temporarily, but ultimately her safety was compromised as her suspected trafficker continues to track her whereabouts and control her behavior from the detention center where he is being held, calling and writing to her and assuring her that he will soon be free and they will be together. Shawna was finally offered a placement that put her outside of Roca's service area, the one provider she is consistently engaging with Shawna had just started TEP, and while we are trying to use this opportunity to remind her of her goals to go to college, it is difficult when she is once again housing unstable and has constant contact with her suspected trafficker. She declined the placement.

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<sup>3</sup> Names have been changed to protect anonymity.



We continue to do everything we can to increase our knowledge and support staff and participants. During the past quarter, Roca Hartford staff participated in a 2.5-hour Introduction to Child Trafficking in CT training, and a 2-hour training with the YWCA of New Britain to develop skills to better support female victims of domestic violence, abuse, and sexual exploitation and navigate vicarious trauma related to these crises.

### Staffing Update

In December 2022, Roca retained The Human Resource Consortium, a Human Resources and Organizational Design company, to assist in a search for a Director of Roca Hartford. In March 2023, we offered the position of Director of Roca Hartford to Katherine Hannah. Katherine (Kat) has worked in Hartford for over 10 years for various nonprofit organizations that are well known in the community including holding supervisory and management roles in residential programs for young men involved with the Department of Corrections. Kat also brings experience coaching women's ice hockey, a skill we think will serve her well in building a strong team and working with our young women! Kat will begin her role at the end of April, and we are excited to welcome her.

We are working to hire an additional Youth Worker, Educator, and Crew Supervisor to support our increased capacity moving into the new fiscal year and are in the process of determining other staffing needs at the frontline staff and management levels.

### Performance-Based Management and Evaluation

In January, Roca's Performance-Based Management and Evaluation Team worked with each site to administer annual Participant Feedback Surveys. This internal participatory evaluation tool is administered annually and reviewed/revise by a cross-organizational team that reflects on the previous year's results, determines what we want to know from participants, and pilots the survey with a small group of participants prior to administration. The survey link was provided to participants by staff at each site. The objectives of the 2023 Participant Feedback Survey were to determine: 1) what services have helped participants re-engage or develop meaningful skills; 2) whether participants are practicing CBT skills throughout their daily lives; 3) whether participants feel safe at Roca and have trusting relationships; and 4) what additional services can be offered or enhanced.

43 Roca Hartford participants (62% of participants at the time of administration) completed the survey including equal numbers of those enrolled less than one year and more than one year. Below are some highlights of the responses:

- 93% said there is at least one Roca staff member they trust.
- 67% expressed that Roca has helped them work through hard situations or decisions even when they want to avoid them.
- 63% practice CBT cycles in their daily life.
- 60% expressed that Roca helped them learn to identify when they got stuck spinning in a cycle.
- 60% said CBT helped them deal with anxiety or depression, and with everyday frustrations.
- 58% expressed that Roca helped them learn about their values.
- 58% expressed that Roca helped them become aware of their emotions.
- 58% expressed that Roca helped them set goals and start achieving them.
- 28% stopped engaging with Roca, but then came back.

Participants were also invited to participate in a focus group. When asked what trust looks or feels like at Roca, they expressed confidentiality and feeling comfortable, calm demeanor and ability to de-escalate even with young person lashes out, feeling like staff are non-judgmental, the program providing a positive and safe environment, testing staff





loyalty and still have staff being there for them in difficult times, and feeling like Roca changed their mindset and there are good people out there.

Overwhelmingly, participants expressed wanting more assistance with housing.

Roca continues to work with Tufts University Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER) on the implementation and outcomes evaluation of Roca's Young Mothers Program. We have completed the first year of a three-year engagement and are on-track with evaluation activities. Over the last quarter, we worked with TIER on data sharing agreements with state agencies including DCF, DSS, OEC, and CSSD. During the next quarter, Tufts will begin the first round of focus groups with participants and begin to analyze internal data.

TIER also completing the writing of a White Paper titled *How Roca's Young Mothers Program Supports Transformation*. We are pleased to share a summary of it along with this report. The longer version is available upon request.

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