

AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR FOUNDATION

Forty years ago, I started my career as a Jail Screener/Diagnostician for Nassau TASC. My job was to conduct in-depth interviews with inmates who were found provisionally appropriate for the TASC program and then submit forensic evaluations to the Court with a treatment plan. Eight years later, I left that position to try and develop a full time Forensic Social Work/Psychotherapy practice. I experienced the criminal justice system as a corrosive process on virtually all who work in it. I decided to dedicate a portion of my practice to specialize in offering forensic social work psychotherapy to criminal justice system employees and their families. Ironically, I continued to offer forensic social work/psychotherapy services to those arrested and facing criminal charges in Local, State and Federal jurisdictions. There is also a significant percentage of my practice that are not involved in the Court system. When I began my private practice in 1985 virtually all of my friends, colleagues, mentors and professors indicated that they had never heard of anyone operating a full-time psychotherapy/forensic social work practice successfully. Gratefully, I can state thirty-four years later, that I continue to practice a craft that I love.

Much has happened in my career in these forty years. I was fortunate to complete the requirements for Master's Degrees in Criminal Justice and Clinical Social Work and felt very blessed to pass the NYS Certification Exam on my birthday in 1986. I have submitted mitigation reports and forensic social work evaluations for thousands of defendants and others in need of them. I have been privileged to work on cases ranging from Petit Larceny to Murder. My reports have been accepted into evidence in local Family Court, District Court, County Court, NYS Supreme Court, NYS Appellate Courts and Federal District Courts in California and New York. I have offered expert testimony in front of the Bar Association's Grievance Committee to clinically address aberrant behavior by attorneys, as well as, the Bar Association's Character and Fitness Committee in an effort to help individuals gain acceptance into the NYS Bar Association. I wrote the four three-credit social work courses which comprise the Forensic Social Work concentration at Long Island University's Graduate School of Social Work, and are offered at LIU's Post and Brooklyn campuses. I believe the University entered its tenth year, in 2019, of offering this

concentration and I am grateful and proud of this contribution to my “double” alma mater.

After eight years of teaching the forensic social work courses, I resigned from LIU as I did not and do not believe that clinical forensic social work courses should be taught using any method other than in a classroom with a “live” professor. Teaching clinical forensic social work and/or forensic social work psychotherapy through a monitor, television, electronic device or in a blended fashion compromises the integrity of the material and the educational process. These methods foreclose the possibilities of “role playing”, guest speakers, spontaneous discussions regarding events which occurred on the day of class such as difficulties with clients in their internships as well as interpreting unconscious and/or non-verbal responses by students to the professor’s questions. These vital components of the chemistry between professor and student are compromised when offered through an electronic monitor. (Sadly, this approach is being used more often by universities and not just LIU). There were several times, following a lecture on the symptoms suffered by those who have a history of being sexually abused, that a student asked to speak with me privately after class. They had shared that they had been sexually abused and I was able to direct them to competent clinical services and to a therapist. Numerous times when lecturing about the family disease of alcoholism, students would share about some of their personal and intimate experiences in class and their classmates offered support and direction for obtaining assistance. The dimension of “in person” classroom support and networking not only for clinical resources but also for obtaining employment following graduation is so clearly enhanced. Participating in a traditional classroom setting with a “live” professor is a more intimate, effective and is purely more educational than learning this material through a monitor, television set or other electronic device.

Establishment of the Robert Mulligan Foundation for Forensic Social Work

In early 2019, I was approached by my friends and colleagues: Mr. Hugo Lopez, LMSW, CASAC, and Ms. Jennifer Coden, Esq. wherein it was suggested that we build a non-profit organization in the field of forensic social work. We decided to adhere to the premise that many individuals involved in the Court

system needed forensic services – employees, their families as well as criminal defendants and juveniles involved in Family Court. Additionally, matrimonial cases were replete with the need for forensic services for husbands, wives and children. We believe, quite strongly, that the profession of clinical social work is uniquely prepared to meet the diverse clinical mental health needs of these populations. Additionally, adequately trained forensic social workers are ideally educated to provide therapeutic services in any treatment modality. We are quite aware that there are few entities which are designed to not only offer forensic social work evaluative services but also meet client’s treatment needs. The Foundation will be capable of meeting both evaluative as well as treatment needs for its clients. Additionally, we have structured the Foundation to offer “in-person” ongoing education for social workers and attorneys who want to obtain continuing education credits. The Robert Mulligan Foundation for Forensic Social Work has been in existence since June 2019.

Intentions and Goals of the Robert Mulligan Foundation for Forensic Social Work

- Presenting numerous CEU conferences for social workers and CLE conferences for attorneys with a variety of topics generally related to psychotherapy, different aspects of the Court systems (Criminal, Family and Matrimonial) and/or the interface of those two topics. The conferences will have a clinical focus on conscious as well as unconscious processes together with behavioral approaches and strategies. Conferences will also integrate same with the legal system. The conference presenters will be forensic social workers/psychotherapists with many years of experience and, at times, experts in the field of law, including Judges, attorneys and court personnel.
- Preparing different types of mitigation and forensic reports for various legal purposes, including sentencing of a defendant; reaching a plea arrangement between defense counsel and the prosecutor; assisting the Family Court with cases of custody / visitation of children as well as Domestic Violence matters, PINS petitions, allegations of Juvenile Delinquency; and helping the New York State Supreme Courts with Forensic Social Work reports as they would pertain to custody / visitation cases.

- **The Foundation will serve as a treatment and teaching facility, offering mental health services in all relevant areas of therapeutic practice. Trained and seasoned psychotherapists and forensic social workers will be onsite to offer clinical services to those in need, and these skilled clinicians will work and communicate with the patient's attorney, making Court appearances, when or if necessary. It has been my experience that making a personal appearance in Court sends a very clear message to the Court and benefits all parties to the case. Social workers will also be able to conferences presented by attorneys and Judges offering first hand experiences, cases and feedback regarding what the Court is seeking within reports.**

- **The Foundation will also be available for prospective inmates to correctional institutions (both jails and prisons) and can assist the defendant's family in making this very complex and complicated adjustment. The Foundation may assist the inmate and family in preparing the pre-parole release plan in an effort to facilitate the inmate's release back into the community, i.e. accessing information for appropriate drug and/or alcohol treatment facilities, exploring potential employment opportunities and educational options, etc. This process may require the social worker to complete an interview with the potential parolee at his or her correctional facility and collaborate with counselors at the institution to document their rehabilitative efforts. It must be noted that the Foundation would be situated to train prospective social workers on how to operate professionally within the correctional institution and understand the professionalism of correctional personnel. This type of training is not typically readily available to mental health professionals, making this a unique service offered by the Foundation.**

- **Offering specialized treatment services for those who work in the criminal and/or juvenile justice system and their families. As previously indicated, working in the Court system can be an emotionally corrosive process. The DSM 5 indicates that a criterion for a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis is, "Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g. first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse.) The job**

requirements of Local, State and Federal law enforcement personnel, Probation and Parole Officers, Correction Officers, EMS Personnel, Defense Attorneys and Prosecutors oftentimes requires that these individuals become intimately and thoroughly familiar with the details and evidence of a case (i.e. horrific pictures of human remains; viewing child pornography videos in an effort to best prepare their case, etc.). There is no question that each of the above professions have Employee Assistance Programs to assist their respective employees, however the rank and file are understandably suspicious of these services. In fact, it is not uncommon for law enforcement agencies to take the employee's weapon simply for sitting down to talk to an EAP counselor and there may also be uncertainty with respect to intra-departmental confidentiality. The Foundation is not passing judgment on these departmental processes but is simply attempting to educate forensic social workers who wish to learn how they can best provide treatment and clinical services to this population and their families. Additionally, the Foundation will offer these services directly to the justice system personnel and their families.

- The Foundation will also offer regular conferences on the topics of violence in schools including bullying and shootings on school grounds. Members of the Foundation have decades of experience of exploring, evaluating and offering mental health treatment for cross sections of defendants who have committed a variety of crimes – non-violent as well as violent. There is available research which suggests very significant information on the subject of violence in schools which appears to be ignored. We, as a community, seem to believe that the solution to the issue of school shootings rests with law enforcement – by the time the law enforcement professionals are called it is frequently too late. Many school shootings occur with both rifles as well as handguns. These two beliefs have something in common – they ignore the research and literature. We at the Foundation are saddened that not too much has been learned since Columbine and Sandy Hook except, perhaps, install bullet-proof glass, spend more money on a more effective lock on a door and hire armed guards/ off-duty police officers. The solutions rests with a collaboration of professions and professionals and it clearly requires an examination of our community priorities in schools.

- **The Foundation will look closely at issues surrounding immigration and will offer bilingual services to those who are in need of a forensic social worker or psychotherapist in the areas of criminal law, civil and matrimonial law, as well as, immigration and ICE involvement. It has been the Foundation personnel's experience that those who are arrested and do not speak English can be vulnerable and we believe they, too, have inalienable rights. The Foundation has deep concerns for the children and adolescents who have lived in the United States and/or its territories for most, if not all, of their lives and who are being deported to another country. These children and teenagers have had no real voice in their ability to live their lives and we at the Foundation believe, quite strongly, that it is this cultural and residential powerlessness which fuels their attraction to the gangs.**

The above was written in an effort to further introduce the Foundation to the general public and to elaborate on our unique mission. There are precious few mental health professionals who are equally trained in the arenas of clinical social work and forensic social work. We at the Foundation are committed to offering services to all whose lives have been impacted by the criminal and/or juvenile justice system. The Foundation's commitment also includes an effort to contribute quality clinical services to all those involved in the Family Court - husbands, wives and children. These services are offered without prejudice or judgment – whether the client is a grieving widow of a fallen law enforcement officer or a defendant in criminal court.

If you are interested in learning more about the Foundation or offering the Foundation assistance in any way, please contact us.