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Rotary Club of St. Croix Advances Youth Mental Health with Pediatric Training Scholarships

A collaboration with Boston Children's Hospital offers vital training for Virgin Islands Pediatric Primary Care Practitioners

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Rotary Club of St. Croix Harborside President Sandra Gerard Leung announced a significant stride towards mental health care for youth with twenty scholarships for Pediatric Primary Care Practitioners (PPCPs).

The scholarships will fund training at Boston Children's Hospital in the course "Building Bridges of Understanding: Behavioral Health Education for Pediatric Primary Care."

This training, Gerard Leung explained, is designed to "provide a comprehensive overview of the identification, assessment, and management of anxiety, depression, and attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder in primary care settings." The initiative aims to equip PPCPs with enhanced skills to diagnose mental health issues in children and young adults effectively.

Funded by a 2023 District 7020 Conference Committee grant, the Rotary Club's effort in partnership with Mental Health Initiatives Rotary Action Group and Rotary Club of Naples, Florida, aspires to improve community health outcomes.

Rotarian Bob Anthony, chair of MHIRAG, highlighted the potential impact, noting that a single PPCP could influence the care of over a thousand youths annually. The training and accompanying toolkits will enable parents and practitioners to manage common mental health symptoms more effectively and promptly.

Dr. Salvatore Anzalone, Pediatric Medical Director at Healthcare Network, who has promoted similar training in Florida, emphasizes the program's ability to allow non-psychiatrists to deliver competent mental health care. "It's satisfying knowing that if not for your efforts, that child would not have gotten care," he said, stressing the importance of early intervention.

Rotary Harborside's initiative confronts a concerning statistic: on average, it takes a decade from symptom onset to mental illness diagnosis in children, with only half ever receiving a diagnosis. This program aims to significantly reduce that duration.

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