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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**STARFISH FAMILY SERVICES' ANNOUNCES EXPANDED PROGRAM TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA**

***National expert Dr. Bruce Perry leads forum on impact of trauma on public health***

**PLYMOUTH** – (May 3, 2017) Starfish Family Services, a leading provider of services for at-risk children and families in metro Detroit, announced today that it is the first agency in Michigan to incorporate the nationally recognized Trauma Smart initiative into its early childhood programs.

Trauma Smart, based on cutting-edge science and tested therapies, enhances Starfish's uniquely comprehensive integration of early childhood education and mental health services to address the impact of trauma – including violence, abuse, neglect and household dysfunction – on children's health, learning and behavior.

The multi-year initiative to equip staff, parents and communities with the tools to help families address trauma in healthy ways was announced during the "Building Resilient Communities Forum 2017," hosted by Starfish and held at the Inn at St. John's in Plymouth. The keynote speaker was national childhood trauma expert, Dr. Bruce Perry, a psychiatrist and senior fellow of the Child Trauma Academy in Houston.

Starfish has been a pioneer in successfully incorporating mental health supports in early childhood care and education settings to better support the well-being of children, families and communities. Childhood trauma is considered one of today's most serious public health threats, potentially harming social-emotional development and physical health through adulthood.

"To best support our children and families, we are well on our way to building a trauma-informed culture here at Starfish, and Trauma Smart is a transformational step in that journey," said Ann Kalass, Starfish CEO. "We also hope to further understanding and stimulate action across the state to help build resilient communities."

Research shows that when children are repeatedly exposed to trauma their brains and physiology are negatively impacted. They may have trouble learning and controlling their emotions. Prolonged exposure to trauma causes toxic stress, which can lead to illnesses such as hepatitis and COPD, and self-destructive behaviors such as suicide and drug use.

Michigan is among states with the highest percentage of children who have had two or more adverse childhood experiences, according to the National Survey of Children's Health, 2011/12 NSCH. In Michigan, 28.5 percent of children had two or more adverse experiences; the nationwide average is 22.6 percent. <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2257&r=1&r2=24>

Research shows that key adults in a child’s life can be trained to help children cope with trauma. Starfish will help train teachers, administrators, parents, grandparents and others to spot the signs of trauma and help children heal.

“With Trauma Smart, we are gaining new perspective,” Kalass said. “Rather than asking ourselves, ‘What’s *wrong* with this child?’ we must ask, ‘What *happened* to this child?’”

Trauma Smart is working in early childhood centers in many states including Missouri, Wisconsin and New York, but Starfish is the first Michigan agency to implement the researched model.

Children in Starfish early childhood classrooms automatically receive trauma screenings from staff professionals at enrollment. Already more than 125 Starfish staff at eight sites in Southeast Michigan have begun training in the model and are better able to support the nearly 600 children and their families at these centers.

“Starfish recognizes, builds on and validates individuals’ strengths while helping them recover from trauma and build resilience to carry them through life’s ups and downs,” Kalass said. “Starfish Family Services is proud to be at the forefront of this important work.”

**About Starfish Family Services:**

Founded in 1963, Starfish Family Services is a private, nonprofit agency serving vulnerable children and families in metropolitan Detroit. Our passion is early childhood development. We strive to prepare young children for a successful start to school. Our programs and services uniquely recognize and respect the important role of parents and other caregivers in the long-term success of children. As a leading provider of Early Head Start and Head Start programs we embrace a comprehensive strategy that also works to address challenges that children and their families may face at home. In addition to early childhood services, we provide parenting programs, children’s mental health services, after-school programs, and other youth services including an emergency shelter for teens and youth in crisis. [www.starfishonline.org](http://www.starfishonline.org).

**About Trauma Smart:**

Developed by experts at Crittenton Children’s Center, in Kansas City, Mo., Trauma Smart is founded on evidence-based interventions recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network to be effective in helping children and the adults who care for them effectively address the negative impact of violence and trauma. [www.TraumaSmart.org](http://www.TraumaSmart.org)