

# The Bradley *Bulletin*

News and notes for our friends and supporters.

Fall 2022

## HOWARD AND KIM SUTTON ARE PROUD TO SUPPORT BRADLEY

**P**rovidence Journal Publisher Emeritus Howard Sutton and his wife, Kim, have spent decades championing various nonprofits in Rhode Island. And while they currently divide their time between Bristol and Marco Island, Florida, supporting Bradley Hospital has remained a priority for the generous couple.

“Bradley serves such an important role in our community,” Howard says. “Studies say one in five children have mental disorders. It’s a staggering number.”

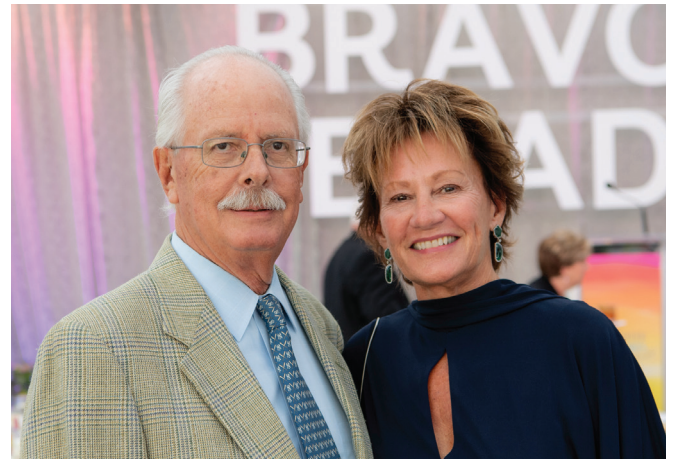
Kim adds that her son and grandson have struggled with anxiety, so she can empathize with Bradley patient families. “Mental health challenges are just rampant among kids,” she says, “so having a place like Bradley in Rhode Island is truly a gift.”

The Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund, which Howard oversees as senior advisor, recently made a \$50,000 donation to Bradley’s Splash Pad Fund. The forthcoming splash pad will offer patients a therapeutic and safe way to engage in outdoor water play.

“We wanted to help fund something that would allow the kids to have fun and feel more comfortable in their environment,” says Howard, who retired from *The Providence Journal* in 2014 after a 40-year career there.

The Providence Journal Charitable Legacy Fund—which was established at the Rhode Island Foundation in 2012 with the transfer of assets from the Providence Journal Charitable Foundation as part of the company’s sale to GateHouse Media—has awarded several other grants to Bradley, including one in 2019 to fund renovations to the hospital’s gym.

The fund donates approximately \$1 million a year to various causes. Most are located in Rhode Island and related to human services and health care, education and youth, arts and culture, and responsible and ethical journalism.



Howard and Kim Sutton

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—Howard Sutton

Over the years, the Suttons have also actively supported the housing nonprofit Crossroads Rhode Island. Stigma too often affects people without housing, as well as those struggling with their mental health, they point out.

Through their work as ambassadors for Bradley, the Suttons join many voices working to eliminate the stigma around psychiatric and behavioral health challenges. “That’s a main goal,” Kim says.

The Suttons joined Bradley Hospital’s Board of Governors at the end of 2020 at the urging of their friend Jeffrey Hirsh, who owns the Lobster Pot restaurant, in Bristol, and is on the Bradley Hospital Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

“We are very impressed with the leadership and the dedication of the staff at Bradley,” Howard says. “And we are extremely fortunate and proud to be involved, especially at a time when the need for services is so high.”

# RESEARCHING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND SUICIDE

**T**he suicide rate among children has increased dramatically over the last decade; but why?

To gain insight into this crucial question, Bradley Hospital researcher Jennifer Hellmuth, PhD, recently studied the influence of trauma—specifically Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—on children ages 8 to 12 receiving inpatient treatment at Bradley.

ACEs are potentially traumatic events and aspects of a child's environment, including witnessing domestic violence and being a victim of sexual abuse. They also have proven links to chronic health problems, including mental illness and substance use, later in life. But the shorter-term effects of ACEs in children haven't been as thoroughly studied, according to Dr. Hellmuth.

Her research, conducted through questionnaires, showed that eighty-four percent of patients surveyed had experienced four or more ACEs. Children with three or more ACEs had a much higher risk of depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts.

The most frequently voiced experiences were being bullied at school and feeling unsupported or unloved by caregivers.

"The high prevalence of ACEs in our population of patients at Bradley really stood out," Dr. Hellmuth says. "It highlights how adversity is directly related to hospitalization."

The study affirms the need for the type of trauma-informed care and aftercare that is practiced at Bradley, adds Dr. Hellmuth. It also supports a call for increased community screening efforts. Knowing more about specific risk factors for suicidal thoughts will help health care providers and educators identify vulnerable children sooner.

"If we can engage kids more in preventative services, it's going to unclog our emergency departments and, most importantly, get them help faster," she says.



## Program Spotlight: PEDIATRIC PARTIAL HOSPITAL PROGRAM

**B**radley's Pediatric Partial Hospital Program (PPHP) treats some of the hospital's most vulnerable patients: its youngest. The family-based day program provides comprehensive treatment for children from infancy through age seven, with an average age of five.

Children at PPHP receive treatment for various behavioral, emotional, or relationship-based issues, explains Clinical Director John Boekamp, PhD, who has been with the program since it began in 1998.

"Many of the children come to us with difficulties in being safe either at home or at school, and they may have significant anxiety that could include withdrawal, fear of leaving the home, or fear of interacting with peers or adults, and even sometimes panic-like symptoms," says Dr. Boekamp. "We also see children with significant mood issues. They will be tearful, withdrawn, easily frustrated, have temper loss episodes, and be really unhappy. They may say that they don't like or hate themselves."

In recent years, Dr. Boekamp has noticed an increase in the number of children with self-injury and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In fact, the PPHP has received a National Institutes of Health grant to study this alarming uptick.

The PPHP staff use a range of clinical tools to help patients with emotional regulation, social skills development, and problem solving, among other things. For instance, role playing and creating "social stories" with pictures can alleviate separation anxiety.

The program focuses on intervention as well as prevention. "We want our patients' skill sets to be developing in a more positive way," Dr. Boekamp explains, "which will protect them later, so the risk is lessened for problems that have onsets more typical during adolescence, like bipolar disorder, substance use, or attempted suicide."



**Bradley Hospital**

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