

ATHLETE ASSISTANCE FUND SELECTS THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN TO PROVIDE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION TRAINING TO NATIONAL GYMNASTICS PROGRAMS

The AAF has selected The NYSPCC to support U.S. gymnasts, their coaches, and parents and to prevent further child sexual abuse

New York, NY — March 19, 2019 — The Athlete Assistance Fund (The AAF) today announced a partnership with The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (The NYSPCC) in which The NYSPCC will perform a full program needs assessment and provide sexual abuse prevention training workshops to athletes, coaches, and parents to ensure that teen and child athletes are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to keep themselves safe.

The AAF was established to provide the financial means and guidance for athletes that have suffered sexual abuse in gymnastics to obtain counseling services and, following a rigorous partner and program evaluation, The AAF selected The NYSPCC to develop a multi-pronged approach to combating child sexual abuse in gymnastics. The agency will conduct background research, site visits, information gathering sessions, and focus groups with key stakeholders, athletes, parents, coaches, and club owners to assess areas of need and identify gaps in child safety practices. Based on their findings, they will facilitate a series of prevention workshops that teach athletes by age group, coaches and club owners, and parents and caregivers the skills they need to identify, report and prevent abuse.

“This collaboration with The NYSPCC will enable The AAF to evaluate and implement the type of support needed to protect and assist our athletes,” said Tina Ferriola, AAF Board Chair, CEO of NYC Elite Gymnastics and former competitive gymnast. “We are taking definitive action to identify the issues and environment that have allowed sexual abuse in the past and to prevent it in the future. The AAF is committed to making gymnastics safe and requiring our gyms to meet the high standards these children deserve.”

This child protection and safety partnership further demonstrates The AAF’s mission to make gymnastics a safe sport in which children can thrive and succeed.

“The NYSPCC is happy to have been called upon by the Athlete Assistance Fund to help eradicate child sexual abuse in gymnastics,” said Dr. Mary L. Pulido, Executive Director of The NYSPCC. “The NYSPCC is the world’s oldest child protection agency, and, as part of our mission, we are always available to step in when there is a need to reduce the likelihood of child sexual abuse. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide effective services to gymnasts.”

In addition to providing training, The NYSPCC will develop gymnastics accreditation standards to support The AAF in its efforts to ensure all affiliated gymnastics clubs and coaches nationwide adhere to the same best practice standards for child protection. These accreditation standards will outline required steps gymnastics clubs will need to take in order to be recognized and accredited for their adoption of child safety protocol. Gymnastics clubs will have the opportunity to achieve status at a bronze, silver, or gold level depending on practices implemented.

“I cannot begin to express how needed and how important this partnership is to the future of the sport,” said Alicia Sacramone Quinn, an AAF board member who is a former silver medal-winning Olympic gymnast and the second most decorated American gymnast in World Championship history. “As a gymnast who grew up in this sport, it is a privilege to be part of a change that will make our country’s gymnastics programs something to be proud of.”

The program needs assessment and implementation will begin in early 2019.

The AAF is seeking current or former gymnasts, coaches, parents or club owners/operators interested in participating in confidential focus groups to help The NYSPCC understand the challenges and vulnerabilities unique to gymnastics. The focus groups will inform customized abuse prevention trainings for the gymnastics community. To learn more or to participate in a focus group, please contact athleteassistancefund@gmail.com.

About The Athlete Assistance Fund

The [Athlete Assistance Fund](http://www.athleteassistancefund.org) (AAF) is an independent, 501(c)3 not-for-profit that makes counseling services available to any current or former USA Gymnastics member gymnast who suffered sexual abuse within the sport of gymnastics. It confidentially connects athletes to skilled healthcare providers for appropriate treatment through an independent third-party organization. The AAF is not affiliated with USA Gymnastics. Read more about The AAF at <http://www.athleteassistancefund.org>.

About The NYSPCC

The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ([NYSPCC](http://www.nyspcc.org)) is one of the most highly respected child protective agencies in the world. Founded in 1875, the NYSPCC helps the most vulnerable children of our community recover from trauma. And, more importantly, it helps prevent child abuse through its work with parents, teachers, children and foster care agencies. The NYSPCC’s amazing work is used as a model for child welfare agencies across the nation. The NYSPCC has investigated more than 650,000 cases on behalf of over two million children and has educated over 53,000 professionals working with children on child abuse and neglect issues. Read more about The NYSPCC at <http://www.nyspcc.org>

Media Contacts:

Amy Hanna, Borshoff on behalf of The Athlete Assistance Fund
Amy.hanna@borshoff.biz

Shaunna Murphy, High10 Media on behalf of The NYSPCC
Shaunna@high10media.com