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Agency gets \$2M to ease kids' trauma

By Jeffrey B. Remz
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WALTHAM – Jewish Family & Children's Service received a \$2 million grant over five years from the federal government to combat traumatic stress in children.

The agency plans to use the grant mainly to work with the Latino population in its home base of Waltham with a variety of programs to help children up to five years old and their families.

"It is a huge deal because of the opportunity and the amount," said Karen Garber, project director for the grant. "It confirms that the work we've been doing has significant value."

"It's really expanding upon existing expertise that we have in this area helping families, specifically moms who are dealing with postpartum depression," said agency spokeswoman Mali Reimer. She

See TRAUMA on Page 4 added the program also was "really targeting kids who are at risk for trauma."

The agency received the grant to support its Early Connections/Conexiones Tempranas project from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program tries to reduce disparities in mental health ac-

cess among marginalized populations, especially Latino immigrant families living in Waltham and nearby communities.

Studies have demonstrated that "there is a significant disparity, a huge gap in access to treatment as opposed to Caucasian families in Waltham and in the U.S," Garber, a social worker, said.

"Those families have potentially been exposed to trauma," she said. "We can address childhood trauma."

"It was clear to us that not only Latino families, but immigrants," Garber added. "It came in line with our principles and our experience."

"We've certainly served people in the community through many of our programs," Reimer said. "This will be a more targeted effort."

Garber emphasized the importance of helping the community in the agency's neighborhood. While Boston Medical Center offers similar services, Garber noted, it could be difficult for those in Waltham to get there for help.

"We understood that offering services in their own community was going to be a really big benefit," she said.

Garber, a native of Venezuela, said among the problems in reaching the population in need was limited funding for agencies, along with a "very limited" number of trained bilingual clinicians.

Among the types of trauma that the program deals with for pregnant women and families with young children are parental substance abuse or mental illness; domestic abuse; community violence; homelessness; separation from a primary caregiver; and immigration.

"We made a determination to try to provide services, extra support to Latin immigrants that in

the past did not have access to treatment," Garber said.

Garber hoped to serve at least 160 families over the five-year period, with such programs as family therapy on a weekly basis; a group education model to learn about parenting styles; and working with state, local and non-profit social service agencies to establish more of a local network and education about childhood trauma.

"All of us will get educated," Garber said, citing the need to create a community among agencies.

The agency received the grant Oct. 1, and expects to start getting client referrals in January 2017.

Boston University School of Social Work researchers will evaluate the effectiveness of the program with clients and the community.

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Jewish Family & Children's Service



Karen Garber