



County of Fresno

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

SUSAN L. HOLT

INTERIM DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: Brian Bishop
Communication Coordinator
Department of Behavioral Health
(559) 600-6843

MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP TO REDUCE IMPACT OF TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES FOR LOCAL STUDENTS

Fresno, CA - The Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS), The Fresno Police Chaplaincy's Resiliency Center (Resiliency Center), Fresno Unified School District (FUSD), UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities, and Brain Wise Solutions are launching a new program called Handle with Care Plus+ to help reduce the negative impact of life-changing and traumatic experiences in children.

Handle with Care Plus+ is a \$1,527,000 three-year pilot project funded under the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)'s Innovation Component by DBH. The pilot program activates timely responses to children and their families immediately after a trauma or stressful life event occurs. This project will provide early support, screenings, and assess children for early indications of mental health symptoms resulting from trauma. It seeks to empower the family with the tools they need to cope, recover, and connect them and their children to any additional resources.

DBH and its partners are seeking to adapt the national Handle with Care model (an evidence-based program for parents, caregivers, and educators of young children) by adding clinical support and a parent and family engagement component using a Parent Café to provide some education and support to families.

Four elementary schools (Lowell, Heaton, Del Mar, and Pyle) in the City of Fresno will serve as the pilot sites. The project seeks to measure how a rapid response may reduce trauma for the students, as well as how providing information to parents/caretakers may mitigate the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

The Chaplaincy can identify service calls in the neighborhoods around the four schools in real-time and review them to identify which calls may have been a life-impacting event. Rodney Lowery of the Chaplaincy and Resiliency Center said, "on an average month in the City of Fresno, there are 36,000 calls for services, of those, between 500-800 are ones that could be traumatic to a child or person."

FCSS, through an existing partnership with DBH called All4Youth, already provides school-based behavioral health services at those schools. The Handle with Care Plus+ team (FCSS) will receive information from the Resiliency Center, notify the appropriate school personnel,

provide any support to the student, and/or if needed, provide more intensive services. The Resiliency Center will engage families and facilitate the Parent Cafés, a safe, welcoming setting for parents to share experiences and learn how to develop the resilience of their child and family through a customized trauma-informed curriculum.

Fresno Police Chief Paco Balderrama stated, “I am familiar with the benefits of the Handle with Care model, and we are excited to see how this local pilot can enhance that model and at the same time provide greater support and resources to families who have experienced some type of life-changing event.”

PRESS EVENT

A press conference is scheduled for **Friday, January 28, 2022**, from **11am-12pm**. At the Health and Wellness Center, **1925 E. Dakota Ave., Fresno, CA 93726**.

*****This is a healthcare facility and masks are required for entry.***

Speakers will include:

- Interim Director of Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health, **Susan Holt**
- Fresno County Board Chairman from District 1, **Brian Pacheco**
- Resiliency Center’s Executive Director, **Rodney Lowery**
- Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, **Jim Yovino**
- Fresno Police Chief, **Paco Balderrama**

About the Mental Health Services Act

The Mental Health Services Act was a voter approved ballot initiative (then Prop 63) in 2004, to close the gap in the mental health system and transforming the system by funding community based mental health services that focused on local needs through a 1% tax on annual incomes over a million dollars. The Act addresses a broad continuum of prevention, early intervention, service needs and the necessary infrastructure, technology and training elements that will effectively transform and support the behavioral health system.