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**CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH GRANTS HELP COMMUNITIES
WEAVE TOGETHER FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS OF CARE
\$1.5 Million Awarded for Two Years**

BOSTON – The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) Foundation, in partnership with an anonymous private funder, made \$1.5 million in grant awards this month to help shape the landscape of community-based mental health care for low-income and uninsured children across Massachusetts. These grants represent fulfillment of a three-year pledge to support 15 community-based partnerships to address fragmentation in service delivery.

The BCBSMA Foundation announced the original *Building Bridges in Children's Mental Health* grant program a year ago. Grantees were awarded \$25,000 in the first year to develop plans to integrate the delivery of mental health services in their communities. Having just concluded the planning year, grantees submitted proposals describing their strategies for program implementation and evaluation. All 15 collaborations were awarded \$50,000 each year for the next two years to launch the next phase of their programs.

“The planning year was a constructive approach to strengthening collaborations among community partners that are not always used to working together to address children’s mental health needs,” said BCBSMA Foundation president Andrew Dreyfus. “We were very impressed with the program models that developed as a result of this planning time, and are more confident than ever that the collaboratives will implement effective, community-based solutions.”

The Foundation’s goal is to support collaborative demonstration programs throughout Massachusetts to improve mental health services for children where they live and go to school. The grants will help reduce fragmentation of services for children; improve support for their families; and train non-traditional mental health providers (e.g. pediatricians, teachers, nurses, etc.) in early identification, assessment, and referral of children with emotional problems. All collaboratives include representation from at least three sectors:

- **Education** – public schools, Head Start programs or childcare centers;
- **Mental health** – community mental health clinics or social service organizations; and
- **Primary care** – pediatric practices or other community health care providers.

The range of innovative programs supported by these grants include:

- Outreach and coordination of culturally competent care for Vietnamese families in Worcester;
- A suicide prevention program that will help identify adolescents at high risk in South Boston;
- A community-wide intake/referral system and case management for preschoolers in Holyoke; and
- Training of caregivers and teachers to identify and treat children with emotional problems in Waltham’s Latino community.

The BCBSMA Foundation provided technical assistance support to the grantees to help them strengthen their partnerships. The National Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health at Georgetown University gave workshops and consulted on such issues as creating systems of care, promoting substantive family involvement in the programs, and developing culturally competent initiatives.

The Foundation is also working with the Schneider Institute for Health Policy at the Heller Graduate School to evaluate the grant program. Findings will be used to identify opportunities for replication and to constructively influence children’s mental health policy in Massachusetts.

A panel of experts advised the Foundation on the problems facing low-income children with mental health issues and their families in the development of the ***Building Bridges in Children's Mental Health*** grant program. The BCBSMA Foundation is now funding 12 community-based collaborations, and the anonymous funder will support three additional sites for the entire grant cycle.

Since its inception in 2001, the BCBSMA Foundation (www.bcbsmafoundation.org) has awarded \$6 million to spark innovation and strengthen services for uninsured and low-income individuals and families in Massachusetts. The BCBSMA Foundation is governed by its own 17-member Board of Directors, and operates separately from the company. BCBSMA committed an initial \$55 million endowment over four years. The Foundation is one of the largest health philanthropies in Massachusetts.

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