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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation Awards Grants to Improve Access to Behavioral Health Care Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

BOSTON (May 13, 2020) – The [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) has awarded grants to three organizations to support new programs that address gaps in the behavioral health care system as it faces greater pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to its major grantmaking programs, the Foundation regularly awards Special Initiatives grants to support promising pilots and demonstration projects in Massachusetts that expand access to health care for low-income residents. The Board of Directors recently approved one-year, \$50,000 grants to each of the following organizations and their projects:

Bridge Over Troubled Waters, a Boston-based nonprofit that provides innovative services to runaway, homeless and high-risk youth, many of whom have experienced trauma in the past and now face greater challenges in the current public health crisis. The grant will fund training for four counselors in dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and virtual or residential program-based support group therapy sessions for homeless youth. DBT teaches young adults skills to manage their behavioral health so they have a better chance to be able to focus on achieving long-term goals such as education, housing and employment.

United Teen Equality Center (UTEC), a nonprofit whose mission is to ignite and nurture the ambition of youth from Lowell and Lawrence. The grant will support UTEC’s “Circling Home” pilot for incarcerated or probation/parole-involved young adults. The project will create a behavioral health continuum of services for youth who are reentering their communities in this new pandemic environment. The collaboration between behavioral health services and the criminal justice system aims to improve health outcomes and reduce recidivism. UTEC is partnering with the Sheriff’s Offices in Middlesex and Essex counties, the Massachusetts Probation Service and Lowell Community Health Center.

William James College, an independent, nonprofit institution in Newton and a leader in psychology education that prepares students for careers in behavioral health. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing challenges in the behavioral health workforce. The



grant will support the Behavioral Health Service Corps, a pilot program that will engage 20 to 25 recent college graduates interested in behavioral health careers to spend a year learning about and working in inpatient units, home-based services, residential treatment and recovery centers. A key goal is to diversify and grow the behavioral health workforce. Initial employer partners include JRI, Riverside Community Care, Lahey Health Behavioral Services and the Home for Little Wanderers.

“Behavioral health is a key priority for the Foundation and the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened an already critical need to address systemic inequities in access to care,” said Audrey Shelto, president of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “We are supporting these creative, innovative projects and programs so that they have the opportunity to grow and, ultimately, serve many more people.”

About the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

The mission of the [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) is to expand access to health care for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was founded in 2001 with an initial endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors.

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