

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Healthlink Awarded Three-Year Federal Grant to Increase Mental Health Literacy on College Campuses in Central Massachusetts

Worcester, MA—October 6, 2015 – Community Healthlink, the largest and most comprehensive provider of behavioral health and addiction services in central Massachusetts, announced today that it has been awarded a three-year, \$335,000 Project AWARE-Community grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to support the training of over 1,000 adults in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). This training will help faculty and staff on college and university campuses throughout central Massachusetts detect and respond to mental illness in youth 16-24 years old on campus.

MHFA is a public education program that trains participants to understand the risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems and builds an understanding of the importance of early intervention. Participants are introduced to local mental health resources, national organizations, support groups, and online tools for mental health and addictions treatment and support.

“People sometimes notice a person whose behavior is unusual or who seems to be in distress, and they don’t always know what they can do to help,” said Deborah Ekstrom, Community Healthlink’s President and CEO. “College-age youth are at a unique and vulnerable time in their lives. This is the time when it is common for a number of serious mental illnesses to first manifest. Nearly three-quarters of mental health disorders start by age 24. This project will increase the mental health literacy of adults in our community who interact with college-age youth, and provide them with the skills necessary to appropriately intervene and refer youth who are exhibiting signs of mental distress for professional help.”

In order to reach the thousands of potential program participants on campuses throughout Worcester County, Community Healthlink is partnering with **LUK, Inc.** and the **SHINE Initiative** to conduct the work under this grant and ensure its success.

“Helping our college students succeed starts with ensuring that they are healthy and ready for all the demands of school,” Congressman Jim McGovern (MA-02) said. “For many young people, college can be a stressful time. With this grant, faculty and staff on college and university campuses throughout central Massachusetts will get the training they need to quickly identify and respond to any mental health issues our students are facing. Community Healthlink is doing great work for our community and I know this grant will help college students throughout central Massachusetts.”

“LUK, Inc. is excited to participate in this project,” said Richard Hooks Wayman, CEO of LUK, Inc. “College-age youth have newly gained independence in all areas of their life, and as a result many are not monitored by other adults in their life as closely as younger adolescents. As young adults attempt to explore their identities apart from their parents and families, communication can become less frequent. This combination of increased independence, changes in communication and engagement between family members, and the risk of onset of mental illness can create circumstances where youth may not receive the help they need. Now, thanks to this project, we can reduce this risk in a comprehensive way.”

“Building coalitions of people and organizations who care about mental health is at the core of what the SHINE Initiative is all about,” said Edward Manzi, Chairman of the SHINE Initiative and Chairman and CEO at Fidelity Bank. “This project is a natural fit for us, and we are eager to use our awareness-raising experience to make this Mental Health First Aid project an unparalleled success.”

Community Healthlink, a member of UMass Memorial Health Care, is a multiservice, private, nonprofit organization. Through its 80 programs and nearly 1,200 employees, it is committed to promoting, maintaining, and restoring the dignity, well-being, and mental health of over 21,000 adults, children, and families in central Massachusetts every year.

LUK, Inc. is a not-for-profit social service agency located in central Massachusetts dedicated to improving the lives of youth and their families. LUK offers a full spectrum of programs addressing mental and behavioral health, trauma, addiction and substance abuse prevention, and homelessness.

The SHINE Initiative, a nonprofit foundation created by Fidelity Bank, is a leader in the effort to recognize mental illness in children and young adults as a mainstream health issue. In pursuit of this mission, the SHINE Initiative develops funding and strategic alliances to improve public awareness and understanding of mental health issues, research, and treatment.

For more information on Community Healthlink’s Project AWARE grant, programs, and services, contact Sarah Loy at (508) 860-1217 or sloy@communityhealthlink.org.

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