

St. Mary's Community Partners Awarded Grant to Address Childhood Trauma

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LEONARDTOWN, Md. – The St. Mary's County Equity Task Force in partnership with the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services was selected for grant funding through the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the county. The \$450,000 grant coordinated through the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) will assist with community efforts to prevent and mitigate the harms of ACEs and related risks for substance misuse.

The "Comprehensive Community Approaches that Address Childhood Trauma to Prevent Substance Misuse" grant from NACCHO was awarded to only seven grantees nationwide. Funding will support several initiatives over two years, including training of health care providers to assess and respond to adverse childhood experiences in their patients; expanding school-based social-emotional supports for students; and new programs by the involved partners for identifying childhood trauma and connecting children to multidisciplinary community support.

"Adverse childhood experiences, such as household dysfunction, violence and parental substance use may cause trauma and toxic stress in children," said Dr. Meena Brewster, St. Mary's County Health Officer. "The impact of these experiences on children may in turn increase their risk for violence, injury, behavioral health conditions and poor long-term health."

"The St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office continues to support its partners and our efforts in the St. Mary's County Equity Task Force as we all work to provide better foundations for our young people in the community," said St. Mary's County Sheriff Tim Cameron.

"Students learn best when their social and emotional needs are met. Now, more than ever, our students need support - and this is especially true for our students who have been affected by trauma. This grant will provide critical support for our students that will benefit their mental and academic health." said Dr. Scott Smith, Superintendent of St. Mary's County Public Schools.

Alexis Zoss, LCSW-C, Director of the St. Mary's County Department of Social Services, described many of the families with whom her department interacts as having layers of stress with financial, health, legal and relationship issues - which can contribute to abuse and neglect. Zoss says these multifaceted problems require coordinated, multi-disciplinary interventions to best help families and children stabilize and address the trauma in their lives.

To learn more about ACEs, please visit the SMCHD website at www.smchd.org/aces

Joint Press Release:

St. Mary's County Health Department

St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office

St. Mary's County Public Schools

St. Mary's County Department of Social Services

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