

For Immediate Release

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Crittenton Children's Center expands innovative Head Start program supported by \$1.2 million in grants

New therapy services for children and families exposed to violence and traumatic events

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (August 11, 2010) — Exposure to traumatic or violent experiences negatively affects the health, education and development of pre-school aged children in Kansas City's urban communities. Without intervention, these children often experience lifelong emotional disturbance, social developmental lags and learning problems. Now, thanks to national and local recognition and support, more children and their caregivers will have a chance to benefit from proven trauma therapies provided by Crittenton Children's Center.

Head Start-Trauma Smart is an innovative program created by therapists at Crittenton to address the remarkably high incidence of complex trauma that negatively impacts the lives of 3- to 5-year-old children residing in the Kansas City metropolitan urban core. For many of these children, there is real daily danger.

"They and their families have experienced one trauma after another with no time in between to recover," said Avis Smith, LCSW, director of Crittenton Prevention Services. "They often encounter community violence, the arrest of family members, homelessness or separation from their parents. Children respond by becoming physically and emotionally on "red alert" – their hearts race, they cannot sleep and fear is pervasive. But with appropriate mental health treatment, these children can concentrate in school and develop social and emotional strengths that carry forward into adulthood."

Crittenton Children's Center is one of only 10 awardees selected from a national field of 161 applicants to the 2010 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnerships (LFP) matching grants program. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) awarded an LFP grant of \$500,000 over three years, which is being matched by \$700,000 from local funding partners for a total of \$1.2 million to support *Head Start—Trauma Smart*. Funding partners include the REACH Healthcare Foundation, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, the Hall Family Foundation and the John W. and Effie E. Speas Memorial Trust, Bank of America, trustee.

"We were impressed with the way Crittenton's staff combined the strengths of the Head Start program with best practices in trauma therapy," said Pauline M. Seitz, director,

Local Funding Partnerships. “We are pleased to partner with the local funders who have shown such strong support for this new approach. From the safety and comfort of the Head Start classrooms, this project offers children, parents, teachers and school staff a common language and approach to address the impact of violent behaviors in the family, the schools and the community.”

Within the context of the children’s natural environment – Head Start classrooms – Crittenton *Head Start-Trauma Smart* staff educate classroom personnel about ways to understand the sources and symptoms of trauma, identify its impact on children, and access tools to therapeutically intervene when appropriate.

“Crittenton has been our partner providing therapy services at Economic Opportunity Foundation (EOF) sites for 17 years, but this new *Head Start-Trauma Smart* program is cutting edge,” said EOF Head Start Director Dorothy Harvey. “The scope of the project goes beyond classroom personnel and includes custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and parents all working together to decrease the stress of chronic trauma. We learn practical activities that can be used with all children. Avis Smith and her team have everyone on board.”

The new grants will enable Crittenton to more fully provide for the needs of the nearly 900 children who participate in 13 EOF Head Start sites in Wyandotte County, Kan. It also extends geographic reach further into Jackson County, Mo., by extending services to the approximately 320 children enrolled annually in preschool programs at Operation Breakthrough and St. Mark’s Child and Family Development Center. The grant dollars from the local funding partners and RWJF have the potential to directly impact approximately 1,200 children each year.

“REACH has supported Crittenton and *Head Start-Trauma Smart* from its inception in 2008,” stated REACH Healthcare Foundation President and CEO Brenda Sharpe. “Because services occur on site, the project reduces barriers to access and there is real-time opportunity to practice and reinforce developing skills. Early evidence is strong that the interventions are building strength and capacity in the neighborhoods around Head Start centers, and Crittenton is committed to engaging multiple community partners. It’s an impressive program with the potential for replication well beyond our community.”

Crittenton CEO Janine Hron expressed excitement about the opportunity to further develop the *Head Start-Trauma Smart* model. “Every day, at Crittenton, we provide intensive care and treatment for children whose lives are on hold while they grapple with serious emotional disturbance. With *Head Start-Trauma Smart* we can reach children and families early, preventing negative impact on brain development. Children and their caregivers retain physical and emotional capacity, and learn the skills that put them on a road for lifelong success. Really, in the face of some long odds, there’s never been a more hopeful time.”

Crittenton Children's Center is a 114-year-old Kansas City-based children's service agency providing a wide array of behavioral and mental health services ranging from school and community-based care to intensive residential treatment and acute psychiatric hospitalization.

Crittenton Children's Center is a member of Saint Luke's Health System, which consists of 11 area hospitals and several primary and specialty care practices, and provides a range of inpatient, outpatient, and home care services. Founded as a faith-based, not-for-profit organization, our mission includes a commitment to the highest levels of excellence in health care and the advancement of medical research and education. The health system is an aligned organization in which the physicians and hospitals assume responsibility for enhancing the physical, mental, and spiritual health of people in the metropolitan Kansas City area and the surrounding region.

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