



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 19, 2015

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACTS:

Rae Pardini
Marjaree Mason Center
(559) 351-9958
rae@mmcenter.org

Sherry Spears
Fresno Superior Court
(559) 457-1605
sspears@fresno.courts.ca.gov

Kathleen Mancebo
Comprehensive Youth Services
(559) 229-3561
kmancebo@cysfresno.org

FEDERAL GRANT TO IMPROVE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OUTCOMES IN FRESNO COUNTY

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women has funded a collaborative grant proposal from the Marjaree Mason Center, Comprehensive Youth Services, Inc. and the Fresno County Superior Court to improve responses to domestic violence (DV) in Fresno County. Through a \$485,573 grant, the new Fresno County Justice for Families program will begin providing services on December 1, 2015 to DV victims and abusers as well as professional education to those who work with them. The project partners will launch videoconferencing services in the spring to allow rural DV victims to connect to services remotely. Throughout the three-year grant period, the Justice for Families program is targeted to assist a total of 900 persons seeking protective orders, provide supervised visits to 310 families, and deliver 186 hours of professional education.

The program will enable the Marjaree Mason Center to have trained advocates onsite at the B.F. Sisk Courthouse in Fresno for the first time. Marjaree Mason Center Executive Director Genelle Taylor Kumpe announced that the advocates will provide free step-by-step assistance to county residents seeking restraining orders. Advocates will help with obtaining and completing court documents, explaining the criminal and civil court processes, and supporting petitioners in hearings. The advocates' court office will be an all-encompassing resource to connect with additional community resources such as safe housing, counseling, and legal services. "We are also very excited that soon we will be able to reduce distance barriers to DV services by offering videoconferencing from the advocates' office at the courthouse into two rural areas of the county," she said.

The new grant program will also provide 16 hours of professionally supervised family visits at no cost to low-income noncustodial parents who are court-ordered to participate in abusive behavior modification programs. Frequently, these individuals cannot simultaneously pay the costs of the programs and professionally monitored visits with their children. Comprehensive Youth Services Executive Director Becky Kramer explained that this creates a catch-22 that ultimately hurts the children. "If noncustodial parents opt to pay for supervised visits with their children, they cannot afford to participate in programs that help them become better parents. But if they pay for the behavior modification programs, they can't afford supervised visits with their children to begin repairing their families. The Justice for Families program will help them do both," Kramer noted.

Family Law Supervising Judge D. Tyler Tharpe, who will lead the Justice for Families program, knows well that DV is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive approach. He noted that the

(more)

professional education component of the program will increase local understanding of DV issues, evidence-based practices, and emerging research to improve the effectiveness of local programs for victims and abusers. Tharpe also noted that in areas with severely limited resources such as Fresno County, collaboration increases the tools for addressing pressing community problems. “The court looks forward to working closely with such well-respected organizations as the Marjaree Mason Center and Comprehensive Youth Services, as well as many others, in order to improve services for Fresno County families affected by domestic violence,” he said.

ABOUT MARJAREE MASON CENTER

For over 35 years, the Marjaree Mason Center has offered shelter and support services to victims of domestic violence in Fresno County. Currently, the Center operates the County’s only dedicated provider of domestic violence shelter and support services, including education for victims and youth, and is one of the largest domestic violence agencies in the state of California. The Center was founded in 1979 after the murder of Marjaree Mason, a native of Easton. A graduate of Washington High School and Reedley College, Marjaree lived in Fresno for 31 years and was well known in the community. The Marjaree Mason Center supports and empowers adults and children affected by domestic violence, while striving to prevent and end the cycle of abuse through education and advocacy. To contact MMC, call the business center at (559) 237-4706, 24-hour confidential emergency hotline at (559) 233-HELP (4357) or visit online at mmcenter.org, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest or Twitter.

ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH SERVICES

For 42 years, Comprehensive Youth Services (CYS) has offered mental health and family support services to underserved, at-risk and violence-exposed children, youth and families in Fresno and its surrounding communities. Last year, CYS served 15,717 children and adults in Fresno and Madera counties – on local school campuses, in the homes of families, at the CYS clinical offices and visitation centers in Fresno, and in a variety of community locations. CYS is dedicated to helping heal traumatized and hurting children, empowering and strengthening vulnerable individuals and families, preventing child abuse, and providing hope for those battling social and emotional challenges. Comprehensive Youth Services tailors services to meet the unique needs of those served, helping to equip them with the knowledge, skills and resilience needed to build healthier relationships and live happier, more successful lives. To contact Comprehensive Youth Services, call (559) 229-3561 or visit us online at cysfresno.org and Facebook.

###

This project is supported by Grant No. 2015-FJ-AX-0010 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. The opinions expressed in this media release are those of the local organizations and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.