



A community partnership
to Help, Empower and Lead



Latest news and updates



VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM WITH ROOTS IN THE COMMUNITY

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Project HEAL: Help, Empower, and Lead is a community-based program dedicated to providing assistance, resources, and tools for those affected by violence to change and improve their lives. Our program is based in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at Jersey Shore University Medical Center and works in coordination with a variety of other community and crisis groups.

The goal of Project HEAL is to break the cycle of violence by connecting with individuals after a violent experience, when they might be most willing to make a change. By doing so, the Project HEAL team can focus on the immediate needs of individuals and help change the circumstances that may have caused the violence they experienced. Utilizing impacted people from the community to operate as our Violence Intervention Specialists will help us break through barriers and link individuals with essential aftercare.

The Project HEAL team is passionate about getting to the root of community problems and seeing where the need is greatest. Our diverse team includes counselors, nurses, and case managers who are committed to helping those affected by violence.

PROJECT HEAL LAUNCHES W/ IT'S FIRST VIOLENCE INTERVENTION SPECIALIST.



Keisha Harbour attends a table event in Asbury Park

Keisha Harbour, a lifelong resident of Asbury Park and a survivor of domestic violence, has joined Project HEAL as a community-based partner and Violence Intervention Specialist.

Intervention Specialists are trained paraprofessionals, who often come from the community in which they are working, who provide brief crisis intervention, linkages to community-based services, mentoring, home visits, follow-up assistance, and long term case management.

Interviewer: What brought you to this work?

Keisha: I've had a lot of family members get caught up in this environment. I've seen what happens first hand, I've lived it. So if I can make a difference and help break that cycle, I'm gonna do it. I was the product of violence issues which led me to be on the other side for a certain period of time. Now that's part of my past, and this is my present, and it's about giving back, and being able to help somebody get the help that I couldn't get.

Interviewer: How have your experiences motivated you to make a difference?

Keisha: What a lot of these women are going through with domestic violence, I was that person on the flip side. So, if I can be here to help them get through it, that's why I'm here. There was nothing like Project HEAL when I was going through my trauma, no resources, no places to follow up, nothing. Back then, the police were there to show up and stabilize the situation, lock somebody up, and leave. There were no points of contact or resources to help me get out of my situation. If there was a program like this for me, chances are things would have turned out different.

Interviewer: What do you think Project HEAL can bring to the community?

Keisha: This program will bring balance to our community, we have no balance and no options. We have nothing to help scale these issues back. That's why I want this program to succeed. This cuttin, stabbin, shootin between these young men, ages 15-30, that's where the action is going on. I want this program to help with that, give these people options. From what I'm seeing, the partnerships that we are making with Project HEAL to help provide opportunities, resources, education, then this will work.

NATIONAL VICTIMS CRIME RIGHTS WEEK SEES PROJECT HEAL COME TO JSUMC TO RAISE AWARENESS.



Project HEAL clinical social worker Krista Peoples discusses the need for violence intervention programs with medical students.

Since 1981, National Crime Victims' Rights Week has been celebrated every year in April. This week is dedicated to learn about victimization, the effect victimization has on individuals, families, friends and the community, and to promote laws, policies, and programs to help victims of crime.

Project HEAL was set up within JSUMC to speak to staff and the public alike on the importance of victims rights, as well as the importance of their program. According to the most recent National Crime Victimization Survey from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1.2 million people were victims of violent crime excluding simple assault in 2019, a significant decrease from the year before. All the more reason for continued investment in this work.

GUN VIOLENCE AWARENESS DAY SEES JSUMC TRAUMA INJURY PREVENTION TEAM HOST ANNUAL EVENT

Gun Violence Prevention Awareness Day is a day that aims to raise awareness of the prevalence of gun violence. In 2017, after learning that 91 people a day die by gun violence, a social awareness art display titled "91 and us"© was created by Caileigh Nerney. The visual was created to represent the impact of people lost everyday. 57 red t-shirts represented suicide, 32 blue t-shirts homicide, and 2 yellow t-shirts unintentional shootings. According to national statistics, the number in 2019 rose to 108, which was represented by 17 empty chairs. While 2020 has not been officially tabulated, the number is expected to be even higher.



Social Art display set up within JSUMC courtyard that represents victims of gun violence.

While this day is recognized nationally, JSUMC Trauma Injury Prevention tailored this event internally to raise awareness for staff along with the help of volunteers from Project HEAL. Both departments hope that in talking with staff, they can improve the process of learning best practices for improved recognition, response, and referrals. Between January 2016 and August 2019, Jersey Shore University Medical Center's internal medical data shows that they treated 408 violent injuries in a variety of different capacities, 84 specifically by gun.

Learning how the hospital and Project HEAL can work together, as well as with local advocates to reduce these numbers include: Identifying individuals at risk of violence, how to respond when a person is suspected to be at risk, who to refer to in-house, community resources to assist those at risk, and programs that will give victims the support they need post discharge.

HMH, OTHER HEALTH SYSTEMS ADVOCATE FOR \$5 BILLION IN FOR FEDERAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUNDING



In July, Hackensack Meridian Health Chief Executive Officer, Robert C. Garrett joined with 17 other health system leaders throughout the country to urge congress to support the provision of \$5 billion in funding for HVIPs and other community violence intervention programs. Calling gun violence a public health crisis that requires the same vigor, and an equally health-centered approach as the COVID-19 pandemic, health system leaders called this investment a “critical component of the comprehensive public health approach necessary to curb this epidemic and mitigate the toll gun violence take[s] on our patients every day.”

The health leaders pointed specifically to the successful approach taken by hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs), which provides both bedside and long-term case management support and has shown significant reductions in recidivism. HMH is critically invested in ensuring the health and wellbeing of our communities; and Project HEAL is one such example of a community based violence reduction programs President Biden included \$5 billion in funding in his proposed jobs and infrastructure plan, which is currently being debated in Congress.

PROJECT HEAL WOULD LIKE TO GIVE THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO MAKE THIS WORK POSSIBLE.

By Aakash Shah & Lisa McDermott

After the first wave of the pandemic ebbed last year, we rolled up our sleeves and began building a hospital-based violence intervention program – known as Project HEAL (Help, Empower, and Lead) – here at Jersey Shore University Medical Center. We opened our doors this past March and the numbers from our first full quarter suggest that we are off to a running start. From our soft launch in March through the end of June, our team has served almost 50 clients, provided nearly 150 counseling sessions, and introduced 2 new group programming tracks tailored to the needs identified by our clients.



While we recognize that this is only the start of our journey, we could not be more grateful to the many colleagues and partners who helped us get off to this running start. We are particularly indebted to Dr. Grace Hickey, Dr. Joseph Miller, Dr. Kenneth Sable, Dr. Ramon Solhkhah, and Mr. Vito Buccellato for their leadership as well as the New Jersey Office of Attorney General, the Novartis Foundation, and the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention for their support.

Most importantly, we are grateful to our clients who teach us how to do the work and remind us of why we must each and every day. With ambitious plans to grow in scale and scope already in the making, we thank you all again and hope you will continue to serve with us in the years ahead.

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