

Multi-Agency Grant Awarded to Aid in Correlating Delinquent Behavior and Brain Injury

The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services has awarded Texas a \$1 million four-year grant to help identify children in the juvenile justice system who have undiagnosed brain injuries and arrange services for those children.

“With this grant, multiple agencies will be able to work together to identify brain injuries a child might have suffered early in life, then, arrange for focused services that can help that child be a more responsible, productive member of the community,” said Bettie Peebles Beckworth, Director of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission’s (HHSC) Office of Acquired Brain Injury (OABI). Beckworth’s office will be administering the grant and leading the effort to coordinate screenings and services. The awarded grant is to fund an initiative led by OABI at the HHSC with the assistance of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) and the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) over a four-year period which will begin on September 1, 2009. Official notification is expected by the end of this week.

The initiative, called *The Texas Juvenile Justice TBI Partnership Project* will allow the multi-agency and multi-system collaboration to identify and assist youth in our juvenile justice system who may have undiagnosed traumatic brain injuries (TBI) that contributed to delinquent behavior. The agencies will collaborate with Dr. Wayne A. Gordon, Professor of Neuropsychology at New York City's Mt. Sinai Hospital School of Medicine, and the Robert L. Moody Prize winner for Distinguished Initiatives in Brain Injury Research and Rehabilitation to use a web-based application of the Brain Injury Screening Questionnaire (BISQ) to conduct up to 3000 screenings for youth at various locations in the juvenile justice system.

TJPC will be collaborating with local juvenile probation departments to implement the juvenile probation portion of the screening process. TJPC may solicit participation in this innovative initiative from secure juvenile detention facilities in urban areas that contain assessment units or counties with established Special Needs Diversionary Programs. Data will be collected to determine the presence of TBI in delinquent youth and the impact of screening, assessment, and treatment on outcomes.

The Department of Rehabilitative Services (DARS) currently offers services to help those who have suffered traumatic brain or spinal injuries live more independently. The BISQ screening will also assist in identifying those persons who could potentially benefit from these services.

While preparing the grant request narrative, Erin Espinosa, a program specialist at TJPC, read dozens of journals and reports in search of more understanding of the correlation between TBI and a variety of psychological and behavioral problems, including delinquent behavior and concluded “There has never been a study like this”.

Beckworth said, the screenings will be administered to children and youth entering the Texas juvenile justice system in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, Austin and El Paso. Plans call for as many as 12,000 children to be screened during the four years of the grant. If the

screening identifies a child with a previously undiagnosed brain injury, government agencies will work together to coordinate treatment and services to help the child overcome the injury.

“This award has the potential to change children’s lives and benefit society as a whole,” Beckworth said. “We want to shed light on this problem and make case and social workers, educators, counselors, law enforcement and employers more aware of the nature of brain injuries and the effects those injuries have on a child’s behavior.”

Screening of children entering the Texas juvenile justice system are projected to begin in 2010.

To learn more about traumatic brain injury, visit <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/tbi.htm>. And to learn more about the BISQ screening instrument, visit http://www.mssm.edu/tbinet/resources/technical_screening.shtml.

For more information on the *The Texas Juvenile Justice TBI Partnership Project*, contact Bettie Peebles Beckworth at (512) 487-3415 or Bettie.Beckworth@hhsc.state.tx.us or Erin M. Espinosa at (512) 424-6728 or Erin.Espinosa@tjpc.state.tx.us.