

Cigna Foundation Gives Three-Year, \$450,000 Grant to Bright Star Community Outreach to Address Trauma among Victims of Violence in Chicago

BLOOMFIELD, Conn. & CHICAGO, 08 November, 2017 - The Cigna Foundation today announced a \$450,000 World of Difference grant to be provided over three years to help address trauma among victims of violence in the Bronzeville and neighboring sections of Chicago. The grant is to Bright Star Community Outreach (BSCO) led by lifelong Chicago resident, Pastor Chris Harris, Senior Pastor of the Bright Star Church of God In Christ and CEO of BSCO.

Through the grant, the Cigna Foundation joins Northwestern Medicine, University of Chicago Medicine, and the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, who all helped to develop The Urban Resilience Network (TURN) Model – a BSCO initiative that is designed to empower the community to lead healthy, safe, and self-sufficient lives through parenting, workforce development, advocacy, mentoring and counseling.

“BSCO is committed to being a national leader in trauma counseling and ending the stigma that surrounds mental health support. With the support of Cigna, BSCO and its partners believe the TURN Model can be an effective, scalable and replicable model to reduce the devastating effects of trauma in underserved communities. There is great potential to make a tremendous impact in Bronzeville and surrounding communities,” Pastor Harris said.

The first year of the grant will support trauma counseling through the BSCO’s TURN Trauma Helpline – providing trauma counseling and mental health support through faith and community leaders who are trained and certified professionals. The Chicago-based toll-free number is 833-TURN-123. Over time, the grant also will support care coordination, increased access to mental health support services, and best practices that can be replicated in other urban environments facing high levels of violence.

The helpline is currently staffed by trained faith and community leaders, with the capacity to provide trauma counseling from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. As demand and support increases for the helpline, BSCO will train more faith and community leaders in the trauma program. BSCO anticipates responding to 130 calls per week by the end of its first year of operation. Most of the trained faith and community leaders are serving as TURN Ambassadors. The ambassadors focus on increasing mental health awareness within the community and helping them to become more trauma-informed. They do this through partnerships with agencies and organizations in the health care, education, first responder, business, and faith community sectors. Additionally, they present material about the TURN Model and help to raise awareness in the community about the services offered at BSCO.

“Cigna is proud to partner with Bright Star, Northwestern Medicine, University of Chicago Medicine and the United Way as we wrap our arms around this community where we live and work, and which our customers call home,” said Michael Phillips, President, Cigna Midwest Markets.

To help develop the right approach for Chicago, BSCO engaged NATAL, an Israeli-based organization that is an expert in violence intervention and resiliency programs to treat psychological trauma resulting from living in areas with high rates of violence. Representatives from NATAL conducted an evaluation of Bronzeville and recommended the development of the community helpline to provide support and guidance to residents who have experienced trauma from violence.

“We believe the helpline will be a vital resource for the residents of Bronzeville and surrounding communities. All community members will have access to the helpline should they find themselves struggling with trauma, whether prolonged or triggered by a violent event,” said Mary Engvall, executive director of the Cigna Foundation. “We have found that faith communities can be very effective in improving lives in the neighborhoods they serve.”

In conjunction with the launch of the helpline, BSCO established a Care Coordination Subcommittee to develop a model for providing access to follow-up mental health services after initial contact with a community resident has been made through the Helpline. BSCO anticipates additional services will include in-person counseling sessions, group counseling, case management services, and treatment at a local health center or partner organization; along with other wrap around services needed. See more about BSCO at BrightStarCommunityOutreach.com.

About the Cigna Foundation

The Cigna Foundation, founded in 1962, is a private foundation funded by contributions from Cigna Corporation (NYSE: CI) and its subsidiaries. The Cigna Foundation supports organizations sharing its commitment to enhancing the health of individuals and families, and the well-being of their communities, with a special focus on those communities where Cigna employees live and work.

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