

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 13, 2020**

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**Legacy Health Endowment, First Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center, and A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness Launch the *COVID-19 Family Counseling Program* to provide virtual mental health services to Merced and Stanislaus County’s age 4 to 25-year-olds during the Pandemic**

**TURLOCK, Calif. –** Legacy Health Endowment, First Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center, and A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness have launched the **COVID-19 Family Counseling Program** to provide virtual mental health services to Merced and Stanislaus County residents up to 25 years old during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

In March, Governor Gavin Newsom instituted a statewide “Stay At Home” order followed by a declaration by the California Department of Education that schools would remain closed through the remainder of the school year, with education continuing through distance learning.

It is expected that some students will experience childhood trauma during this time of sheltering. In addition, the increased anxiety and depression of students for which school was a “safe place” is a concern. This time of change and unknown impacts may be a challenging time for students and can begin to take a toll on their mental health. Some students may be forced to discontinue counseling or group services provided through school district resources. Others will have no way to establish new services while remaining safe at home.

The ***COVID-19 Family Counseling Program*** was established to provide mental health resources to students and their families during this pandemic while eliminating all barriers that may exist.

The program serves children and young adults up to 25 years old who live in Merced and Stanislaus counties. All services are provided using a HIPAA compliant telehealth platform and all private insurance, Medi-Cal, and Medicare plans are accepted.

Jeffrey Lewis, President of Legacy Health Endowment, shared: “This program was created to help increase access and remove barriers to mental health services for the local community. For those without insurance, full payments will be waived using charitable dollars. These waivers will be available until June 2020 or until the Shelter in Place is lifted. Additionally, all copays will be waived using charitable dollars. At times like this, it is critical that people, and particularly children, have access to behavioral health services.”

“Our goal is to help community members in need. At times like this, everyone’s goal should be to help in whatever way they can,” said Manuel Jimenez, Director of **A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness.**

Applicants must live in one of the following areas (proof of residency in an eligible zip code is required) in Merced or Stanislaus Counties. Eligible zip codes include 95301, 95303, 95307, 95313, 95315, 95316, 95322, 95324, 95326, 95328, 95334, 95360, 95363, 95374, 95380, 95381, 95382, 95358, and 95388.

Anyone interested in accessing these services can contact A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness by email at astepforwardapathtowellness@outlook.com or by phone at (209)548-2356.

**About Legacy Health Endowment**

Legacy Health Endowment is a nonprofit healthcare grantmaking foundation that works solely

within Merced and Stanislaus Counties in the California Central Valley. LHE is not a hospital or healthcare services provider.

**About A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness**

A Step Forward, A Path to Wellness was established in January 2020 to meet the urgent behavioral health needs in Merced and Stanislaus County public schools. The highly qualified team of Marriage and Family Therapists led by Manuel J. Jimenez, LMFT currently provide high quality, culturally competent, on-site school counseling services to students and their families in the Denair School District, Patterson School District and at the Atwater Valley Community School. The leadership team has over thirty years’ experience providing culturally competent counseling services. A Step Forward, continues to provide innovative new approaches to mental health services for youth in Merced and Stanislaus County.

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