

Boston creates trauma teams to help residents exposed to violence - The Boston Globe

By Jan Ransom Globe Staff December 07, 2015

It's an image Dijanira DeAndrade will never forget, no matter how hard she tries: her then-7-year-old son bleeding on a sidewalk after being hit by a stray bullet while riding his bike in Dorchester in May.

"I don't stop thinking about it," DeAndrade said recently. "I keep picturing that moment . . . me running down and finding him on the floor."

It wasn't DeAndrade's first close encounter with violence.

As a teenager, DeAndrade, who is now 28, was caught in the middle of a gunfight as she walked with her mother down Bowdoin Street. She recalled the way her mother trembled with fear, tears streaming down her cheeks, as they waited in a store for the gunfire to stop. Another time, someone started shooting outside of her mother's home. She didn't know whether anyone was injured, but several neighboring houses were hit, DeAndrade said.

As the lifelong effects of trauma are becoming more widely recognized, the city has created a program to help residents who are repeatedly exposed to violence.

"The chronic exposure to violence does affect individuals and families in ways they are not even aware of" and can cause feelings of helplessness and anxiety, said Dr. Huy Nguyen, interim executive director of the Boston Public Health Commission. When combined with other issues such as poverty, the effects of trauma can also lead to health complications including obesity and heart disease, Nguyen said.

To help combat those effects, the city launched an initiative with community health centers in the neighborhoods most affected by violent crime.

In the spring, the city stationed Trauma Recovery Teams — trauma-trained clinicians and a community worker — in each of eight community centers in Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, and Mattapan. The clinician and community worker provide counseling, organize peer support groups, and offer assistance with shelter, food, and health care.

"These health centers have a broader definition of their role working in the community, promoting resilience and healing," said Catherine Fine, the director of violence prevention at the Public Health Commission.

The teams began taking clients in March.

Team members are deployed within up to 72 hours of an incident, Nguyen said. The trauma teams are tapped into a system that alerts them whenever there is a shooting, homicide, suicide, accident, or any other traumatic incident.

grants and \$730,000 of city funds.

Jan Ransom can be reached at jan.ransom@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@Jan_Ransom](https://twitter.com/Jan_Ransom).

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