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New Program to Improve Mental Health and Awareness for People with Disabilities in Rural Texas

The grant-funded program will address the shortage of mental health professionals in communities like Lubbock and Amarillo

LUBBOCK---January 11th--- Community Options, Inc will soon be able to provide mental health support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in rural Texas, thanks to a grant from the Hearst Foundation.

The national nonprofit, which provides housing and employment to more than 4,000 people with disabilities, was awarded a \$75,000 grant from the Hearst Foundation to improve mental health outcomes for rural Texas residents with I/DD. This innovative program will address the shortage of mental and behavioral health professionals in rural Texas.

The grant will fund a psychologist with significant experience treating people with disabilities, trauma, and behavioral health challenges who will be based out of Community Options' Lubbock and Amarillo offices. Lubbock is a federally designated mental health professional shortage area.

“Telehealth will be crucial to service delivery under this grant. In rural Texas, it is a challenge to find mental health professionals who understand the population we support,” said Jamie Reynolds, Community Options' Texas State Director. “Many of our residents lived in institutions before finding a community-based home with us. Telehealth will give us access to professionals who can treat the trauma of years of abuse and neglect.”

According to a survey by the Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council, 70% of Texans with I/DD identified “access to mental/behavioral health supports” as a gap in services. In Texas, there are 185 rural counties without a single psychiatrist and 149 without a licensed psychologist.

“Access to high-quality healthcare is a challenge for rural populations and a priority for the Hearst Foundation,” said George Irish, Hearst Foundations' Eastern Director. “We are excited to partner with Community Options to ensure this vulnerable population has access to the services and supports they need.”

The grant-funded project will also provide new trainings for Community Options' direct support professionals. Direct support professionals (DSPs) will gain better understanding and awareness of the behavioral health of the people they provide care for.

The psychologist will give DSPs tools to reduce behaviors, increase empathy, and practice attitudes, strategies and responses that will improve overall environment in residences, host homes and day habilitation programs.