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# Local partners kick off youth violence prevention program

Intervention specialists work at trauma center bedsides, follow up  
**SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL - BY [Kathy Robertson](#) STAFF WRITER**

More than half the patients treated for gunshots or stabbings at [Kaiser Permanente](#)'s new trauma center in south Sacramento during its first year in business were under the age of 24.

This includes 49 of the 66 gunshot victims, and 16 of the 55 stabbing victims rushed to the hospital between Aug. 1, 2009, and the end of July.

For those who survive, there is hope. It comes in the form of a new program that seeks to use the experience to change the lives of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 caught in a cycle of violence.

Kaiser's South Sacramento Medical Center partnered with the city of Sacramento and [The Effort](#), a local family services agency and network of health centers, to launch the Sacramento Violence Intervention Program in June.

The program pairs an intervention specialist from The Effort with a young patient who has experienced a violent injury, including those caused by a physical assault, shooting or stabbing.

They work closely with Dr. Maya Leggett, a Kaiser trauma surgeon, and registered nurse and trauma outreach coordinator Wendie Skala to meet patients at the bedside.

Modeled after an Alameda County program created at Oakland-based Youth Alive, the local pilot includes crisis intervention, case management and follow-up assistance.

Kaiser has committed \$200,000 to start the program and fund the first year. The Effort responded to a request for proposals for a community partner and received \$75,000 to pay a project coordinator and intervention specialist.

Studies have shown that acute injury offers "a teachable moment," Leggett said. "People are vulnerable and open to a change in life."

Intervention comes at the bedside in the first 24 to 48 hours at the hospital, but any commitments made by youth in the program are voluntary. Reaction has been positive.

"I see kids come once — and then again and again" to the hospital, Leggett said. "It's heartbreaking to see."

Now, intervention specialists offer services Kaiser wouldn't otherwise be able to provide outside the hospital.

They connect patients to services that run the gamut from filling out paperwork for victims of crime to taking them to doctor's appointments and making referrals to social services. Support services also are provided to the patient's family.

"(We) follow them and put together whatever it takes to support them," said Jonathan Porteus, deputy director at The Effort.

"We try to engender social activity and reduce violence in their lives."

In some cases, gang-related violence is shocking to the family; in others, the family itself is affiliated with a gang, Porteus said.

"A stone thrown in a pond can generate ripples. This is really powerful for the people who provide services and at the hospital," he said. "People who inflict the injury don't see them or bear witness to the extent of the injury. Staff is bearing witness, seeing something most people don't — or would run from. A lot of bonding goes on around there."

Denise Curl was tapped by Sacramento County to oversee the program after the Office of Youth Development was folded into the city's Parks and Recreation Department last week to save money in tough budget times. She says the program seeks to reduce the number of young people who go into the criminal justice system.

"It's a tool we are using to prevent retaliatory violence among youth who are victims of violent crime," Curl said.

The program is a switch for Kaiser.

"A lot of people coming into their system (through the trauma center) are not members of Kaiser, so the nature of the program is different," Porteus said. "These people are not connected to services."

The surprise for Skala, the trauma outreach coordinator at the medical center, was how many services these kids need. Some have said, 'This is the first time I felt somebody really cared about me.' "

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