

Gulf Aid Grant Focuses on Mental Health

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Thanks to a \$35,000 grant from Gulf Aid, the Plaquemines Community C.A.R.E. Centers Foundation will provide mental health support for residents of the Louisiana parish that reaches into the Gulf, with help from the Tulane School of Social Work.



School of Social Work team members working on a mental health project for Plaquemines Parish residents are, from left, students Libby Farvot and Karmella Minor, with guidance from Jane Parker and Parker Sternbergh. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

While much of the Gulf oil spill response has focused on plugging the leak or cleaning up crude, the long-term mental health effects is expected to be extensive. After the Valdez oil spill in Alaska, studies documented that a lack of a well-organized community intervention to deal with the stress on families hampered and slowed down community healing.

Parker Sternbergh, assistant director of the [Porter-Cason Institute](#) for Advancement of Family Therapy at the [School of Social Work](#), says, “Higher rates of generalized anxiety, domestic violence and addiction were some of the consequences of the Valdez spill in Alaska, and we can expect similar issues in Louisiana.”

Two social work students, Karmella Minor and Libby Farvot, will help with the first portion of the grant ? a needs assessment of Plaquemines Parish residents. The assessment will be conducted at community-determined spots including grocery stores, pharmacies and schools. Next, the School of Social Work will contract with the Plaquemines foundation to provide support for mental health activities. The Porter-Cason Institute will facilitate best-practices training from national experts in areas critical to the community's mental health needs.

The grant will fund a half-time social worker to provide some case management and to coordinate services needed by families as well as supervise Tulane social work interns.

“The tragic explosion, loss of life and ongoing spill constitute a protracted community trauma,” says Jane Parker, clinical associate professor and director of the [Institute for Psychosocial Health](#). “Proper assessment and subsequent mental health services will help mitigate effects [of the trauma] and promote resilience.”

Gulf Aid, a nonprofit corporation established after the oil disaster, has held benefit concerts to raise funds for Gulf Coast communities.

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