

Kaiser Permanente Fresno Helps Mass Shooting Community Heal

An \$80,000 grant will provide mental health resources and counseling to the Hmong community. The Fresno Center team, pictured left to right: Porchoua Her, program manager; Sokserey Choup, community outreach coordinator; Rachel Ochoa, social worker; Pamee Vang, community outreach coordinator; Pa Houa Lor, attorney.

When gunfire erupted on unsuspecting partygoers watching a football game at a home in southeast Fresno recently, it left 4 people dead, 6 wounded, and a community reeling in shock.

The victims — all well-known members of Fresno’s tight-knit Hmong community — were described as “good young men.” One was a beloved Hmong celebrity with thousands of fans. Another a young father of 2, with a third on the way. The other was a son who provided for his family, and the fourth a sushi chef at a popular Japanese restaurant.

The tragedy shook the Hmong community as many questioned why this happened. Two months later, there are no answers. No arrests have been made.

Now Kaiser Permanente is providing support to those affected by this tragic mass shooting. An \$80,000 regional Community Health grant has been given to The Fresno Center’s Mass Shooting Victims Support Program, which will provide a holistic approach to healing for the Hmong community, including the victims’ families.

“I am very appreciative of the support from Kaiser Permanente,” said Pao Yang, CEO of The Fresno Center. “We want to ensure that the needs of the families of each victim of the mass shooting that happened on November 17 in Fresno are supported. This grant will help us to become a one-stop support center during crises.”

The grant will provide wellness classes, meditation, yoga, and other resources to those affected by the tragedy, as well as additional hours for mental health services and counseling to the victims’ families.

“We are committed to helping the community heal from this tragedy and want to provide mental health support to those in need,” Kaiser Permanente Fresno Senior Vice President and Area Manager Wade Nogy said. “We hope this grant along with others we’ve provided in the past will help to break down the stigma associated with mental health issues in the southeast Asian community.”

An Ongoing Commitment to Fresno’s Southeast Asian Community

For the past 2 years, Kaiser Permanente has provided a \$150,000 grant to the Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM) to help reduce barriers to treatment and increase the capacity to serve the needs of southeast Asians. FIRM works in conjunction with Stone Soup Fresno and The Fresno Center to support Fresno County's Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian communities.

The Fresno Center has been a hub for the southeast Asian community in Fresno since it was established in 1991 to assist refugees acclimating to life in the United States. Fresno is home to one of the nation's largest Hmong communities — only Minneapolis' is larger.

The center offers more than 20 different support services that includes mental health and wellness, immigration assistance, and education advocacy. It serves roughly 3,500 clients a month. After the mass shooting, the Fresno Center was at the forefront of media coverage, often speaking on behalf of family members who were too distraught to talk.

The November shooting remained on the forefront of the community as it kicked off a 7-day Hmong New Year celebration on Dec. 26 at the Fresno fairgrounds, where organizers estimated attendance by more than 100,000 people from all over the U.S. and other countries.

Organizers prayed for a better 2020, saying they are ready to leave behind the "evil" of last November's attack that shattered their community.