

News – For Immediate Release

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MAB Community Services Awarded \$25,000 for Mejor Vista, Mejor Vida Project

Brookline -- January, 2010 -- In December 2009 the Sara Elizabeth O'Brien Trust awarded MAB Community Services a \$25,000 grant for the Mejor Vista, Mejor Vida (Better Sight, Better Life) project in Holyoke, MA. In its third year, the program is a collaboration of MAB and the Holyoke Health Center (HHC) that seeks to expand access to eye care and make HHC's nationally recognized diabetes self-management program accessible to low income Latino patients who are blind or visually impaired.

This is the second consecutive year the S. Elizabeth O'Brien Trust has granted MAB funding for the project, which is also supported by the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust and Covidien. MAB hopes to sustain the initiative, which has increased access to both primary eye care and diabetes education in Holyoke, offering such healthcare services to many people for the first time.

There is a pressing need for health services for the predominantly low income minority residents of the city of Holyoke, which the Mejor Vista, Mejor Vida project seeks to address. In Holyoke the third greatest cause of death is diabetes, after heart disease and lung cancer, while it is only the 6th leading cause in the state and country. Holyoke has the third highest diabetes mortality rate of Massachusetts cities. This is a serious health disparity, driven by ethnicity and poverty.

An increasing number of people with diabetes are also being affected by vision loss. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in the United States among adults aged 20-74, with 12,000 to 24,000 new cases of diabetes-related blindness each year. Yet only 30% of community health centers have on-site eye care and most diabetes self-management programs are not accessible to visually impaired patients. In 2008 MAB and HHC launched the Mejor Vista, Mejor Vida demonstration project to create a model for adaptive diabetes self-management that will improve health outcomes for visually impaired patients.

“One of the difficulties of having a chronic disease like diabetes is learning to manage it so that you, the patient, are in control of the disease,” said Lisa Levine, MPH, the new program manager. “That is why the program we are developing with Holyoke Health Center is so important. Patients who were unable to manage now have the tools to once again take control of their disease. It is a model that can work where ever there are

patients who want to remain in control of the functions of daily living despite vision loss.”

MAB welcomes Levine to the project. She is the former Chief Operating Officer of Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, a community health center with 120,000 patients and a diabetes self management initiative funded by the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation. MAB and HHC hope to expand the project beyond its third year and continue to help low income Latino patients with diabetes and vision loss to improve and maintain their health.

ABOUT MAB:

MAB Community Services is dedicated to working with individuals with disabilities to eliminate barriers and create opportunities. Founded in 1903 as the Massachusetts Association for the Blind, MAB Community Services is the oldest social service agency in the country dedicated to serving blind and visually impaired individuals.

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