

Project II: Chandler Care Center

The Chandler CARE Center (CCC) is a school-based, community-linked program of the Chandler Unified School District. Established 16 years ago, the Chandler CARE Center opened a new, 8,800-square-foot free-standing facility this March after outgrowing its three-classroom space in an elementary school. Through a true community alliance, dozens of local donors including the City of Chandler have provided funds and services necessary for success.

Each year, the Children's Clinic provides free acute-care medical treatment to more than 1,300 uninsured poverty-level babies and youth in Chandler, many who are treated repeatedly each year. With the new facility, administrators expect that number to at least double. In addition, 2,600 immunizations are also given annually. The new CCC facility also has four dental operatories with the capacity to treat an average of 150 patients weekly.

Annually, more than 7,000 needy Chandler residents receive food, clothing, and/or household items at the Chandler CARE Center. In the past 15 years, the CCC has provided medical assistance and immunizations to more than 51,000 uninsured youth in need.

Many medical, dental, counseling, and service organizations donate their professional services at the Chandler CARE Center on a scheduled, rotating basis, so there is no charge to any child, family, or the school district for services.

The CCC promotes school readiness, attendance and academic success by providing medical treatment, dental treatment, immunizations, counseling, social services, parent education programs, and referrals for youth birth-to-18 years old. The intended population of the CCC is uninsured children from families with little or no income who live anywhere in the City of Chandler, regardless of the school district in which they reside. Historically 88 percent of patients and clients have been poverty-level Hispanic families, with a majority residing in the City's redevelopment area.

The Chandler CARE Center is a program of the Chandler Unified School District (CUSD), providing the fiscal infrastructure and administrative oversight needed to direct this comprehensive community-based program. The CUSD also provides maintenance, insurance and utilities for the Chandler CARE Center. The Chandler CARE Center incurs little actual operating expense because of its long-standing community partnerships with many local entities. In fact, the out-of-pocket expenses for the CCC are 22 percent of its actual operating budget as virtually all professional services are donated.

The goals of the Chandler CARE Center have varied little over time and include improved medical and dental health of uninsured youth birth-to-18 years old; more children birth-to-18 years old who are up-to-date on immunizations; access

to free mental health services by licensed clinicians; improved school attendance rates; and an overall influence on the academic achievement of students from no-income, low-income and non-English-speaking families. It is a holistic family approach that also includes increasing the number of parents who communicate effectively in English as well as the number of parents who provide effective parenting skills.

Community collaboration has been key to the success of the CCC and the Children's Clinic is a keystone service to that end. It provides free acute-care medical treatment, well-child check ups, TB skin tests, and sports physicals for uninsured Chandler youth from families with little or no income. The medical staff of the Children's Clinic is comprised of volunteers who donate their professional services on a scheduled, rotating basis. Volunteer organizations include private practitioners as well as staff from larger entities like CIGNA and Banner Health.

Children also receive free eye examinations and glasses from the Lions Club, Wal-Mart and a local eye doctor. Additionally, free vouchers for needed medications, medical lab tests and medical imaging are available. This funding is provided in part by the City of Chandler Social Services Commission and donations from Chandler Unified School District employees. To help the Children's Clinic leverage this funding, several local businesses provide services at 25-70 percent off their customary prices.

The CCC also provides a weekly immunization clinic at no charge in partnership with Catholic HealthCare West and the Chandler Fire Department. The Chandler Public Library staff distributes free books in English or Spanish to children in the clinic while taking the opportunity to register parents for library cards at the same time.

Dental services are yet another service component of the CCC. Catholic HealthCare West provides free fluoride varnish treatments, dental cleanings, and X-rays. Volunteer dentists provide restorative services.

A prime factor contributing to the success of the Chandler CARE Center is its historically stable source of income from the City of Chandler, including a \$500,000 grant toward the new building. Other funding is directed toward CCC's operations and three employees from the City and private donors. The CCC also has a solid cadre of local, volunteer doctors that has been providing free medical treatment for many years.

The Chandler CARE Center has been recognized numerous times for its unique ability to provide medical services, education opportunities, and social services for no-income and low-income children and families in such a collaborative, cost-

effective manner. Those honors include the 2008 Making a Difference for Women Award from Soroptimists International; the 2007 AZ LeaderForce Blue Ribbon Model Program for Healthcare from The Collaboration for a New Century; the 2002 Leadership for Learning Award from the American Association of School Administrators; and the 2001 MAGNA Award from the National School Boards Association.

The Center's administrator, Dr. Susan Horan could fill volumes with her stories of the help local families have received. Students diagnosed with life-threatening ailments who would have otherwise never visited a doctor due to costs or the keen eye of a teacher have been healed – more often than not often at no charge to the family. There are tales of kids showing no fear in sometimes dire or even bizarre circumstances because of the friendly surroundings of the Center and its dedicated and caring staff. And a community that can embrace these stories because of the generous contributions of so many.

In summary, the Chandler CARE Center has a long history of successfully providing the healthcare and social services that uninsured poverty-level children need to enter and succeed in school. In the last five years, the CCC has come along way. With its new center built firmly upon a foundation of community support, the CCC will continue as a recognized model for improving the health, well-being and educational achievement of needy youth and parents.