

Youth Leaders Raise Resources and Awareness for School-Based Health Centers

A group of dedicated Eugene, Oregon youth raised \$18,000 for their community's four school-based health centers within two years. They created a regular source of revenue for their centers and increased year-round visibility of school-based health care among local community members and key policy and decision makers in the state.

These young leaders, known as the Teen Advocacy Council, have helped ensure the sustainability of their own centers, been instrumental in advancing the vision of school-based health care, and developed valuable leadership and other marketable skills. The Teen Council meets every two weeks to discuss how it can “support the right for all kids to get health care, regardless of whether they have insurance,” explains 18-year old member Dillon Blanks.

The students are from four high schools in the 4J School District in Eugene. All the student members use and value their school-based health centers. In a community where many families are uninsured, the centers—branded as *My School's Health Centers*—provide quality health care at a free or reduced cost to youth ages birth to 19.

Taking a strategic approach

The Teen Advocacy Council's goal is to sustain the work of their school-based health centers, which as these savvy students know, takes more than just money. The teens have created a year-long program to build community, legislative and financial support for their school-based health centers. A key element of the program, now in its third year, is creating awareness about the centers among peers, educators, local businesses, community members and policy makers.

Each activity the students undertake builds upon the other to continually highlight the services



Teen leaders Dillon Blanks and Jordan Eddy planned and implemented a fundraising and advocacy project for their local school-based health centers

that the school-based health centers provide and to demonstrate the need for funding. The youth then leverage their awareness building work to develop financial resources for long-term support, including advocating for policies to expand the number of school-based health centers and hosting an annual fundraising event.

Senior Jacque Kenyon is passionate about the work: “School-based health centers help create a better quality of life for all. Everyone deserves a healthy and high quality life, and I want to strive to help people get there.”

To facilitate the success of the Council and to build skills of its newer members, the teens develop and co-lead a three-day intensive training each year. They learn core advocacy skills, including message development, public speaking and storytelling.

Following the training, the Council kicks off its year-long program. One of their activities is hosting *My School's Health Center Awareness Week*. Throughout the week, the teens offer a series of fun interactive activities during the school day designed to educate students and the school community about their school-based health center.

Teens tap creativity for impact

The teens bring tremendous creativity to their advocacy efforts on behalf of their centers. One of their most original outreach activities is the *Honorary Chair* project.

The project involves decorating four chairs and taking these brightly painted and vibrantly ornamented chairs to visits with community leaders, including state legislators and other elected officials. During these visits the students ask individuals to take a seat in the colorful chairs and name them “honorary chairpersons” of school-based health care. A photograph is taken for posterity and a certificate awarded.



Students decorate a chair as part of the *Honorary Chair* project (L-R) , Caitlin Goodman, Dillon Blanks, Jordan Eddy

In 2007, the teens visited over 100 community leaders and legislators. Oregon’s governor, state representatives and state senators, the state schools superintendent, the Eugene mayor, and local community and business leaders were all ‘chaired’ by the youth. The students also made Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton honorary chair of school-based health care when she was campaigning in Oregon. Student Jordan Eddy filmed the visits and posted the video on YouTube. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=LadhApPENwE&NR=1)

The youth use this successful activity as an opportunity to generate financial resources for the school-based health centers by inviting community members engaged in the *Honorary Chair* project to attend the Council’s annual fundraiser.

Securing financial support



At each fundraising event the teens ensure there is an opportunity to create awareness for school-based health centers and the services they provide

The youth host a fundraising event at the end of each year, called *Hands for Health*. Showcasing the value of school-based health services is center stage at the event: an auction sells services from the school-based health centers, including immunizations, physicals, prescriptions and mental health visits, to the highest bidder; decorative tiles painted with healthy images and wellness messages are for sale; and fact

cards about school-based health care decorate the auction tables and walls. By making these connections to the work of their centers, the teens are able to maximize the event so that they are not just raising funds. They create awareness of the centers and the vital services they provide while building support to sustain the centers.

The relationships the students develop during their outreach and awareness building activities are also leveraged to support the *Hands for Health* fundraising event. A variety of community members turned out to support the school-based health centers financially or donated goods and services. For example, the teens secured a series of donated goods from local businesses which they packaged into baskets for the auction. Student photography, created in an art class thanks to a teacher whose support the students won during *Awareness Week*, was also auctioned alongside the now-famous chairs used in the *Honorary Chair* project. Demonstrating his personal support for school-based health centers, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski phoned in a winning bid of \$1,000 during the event to secure the chair he had been 'chaired' in.

Hands for Health raised \$4,000 for Eugene's four school-based health centers in its first year, and in the second year the students more than tripled their efforts, raising \$14,000. Jordan Eddy said "We were shocked because our goal was only \$8,000 and our stretch goal was \$10,000. The community really came out to support us."

Gaining legislative support

In addition to their work at the local level, the Eugene youth have advocated for state funding alongside the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network. During the 2007 legislative session, students met with the Oregon governor to discuss the impact school-based health centers have had on their community and to call on the legislature to include school-based health centers in the 2007–09 budget.



The youth make Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski honorary chair of school-based health care.

"It is more impactful for kids to say we need this and demonstrate it's a good cause, than for adults to say this is what kids need," explains Teen Advocacy Council member, 17 year-old Caitlin Goodman, describing the importance of youth participating in this type of work. The result: an additional two million dollars was included in the state budget to expand school-based health centers.

The teens have also been active at the federal level, securing Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) as a co-sponsor of the House bill for the School-Based Health Clinic Establishment Act and meeting with Oregon's candidates for the United States senate, incumbent Gordon Smith and Jeff Merkley, the Democratic nominee who ultimately won the seat.

Elected officials have been impressed with the level of passion and involvement displayed by the teens. Long-time supporter Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) who included school-based health centers in his bill for health care reform, declared in a letter to the students that: "The Teen Advocacy Council's *My School's Health Centers* program is an example of what a community can accomplish to expand comprehensive healthcare services."

Authentic youth engagement

Like many high school students, members of the Teen Council lead busy lives. They are active in sports and extracurricular activities. They are occupied with school-work and applying to college. However, what drives them, explains Dillon is “knowing that you’re building this community and making a strong foundation for something that matters.”

To continue being effective, the teens annually recruit peers that demonstrate commitment and passion for membership on the Council. “We look for someone who knows the school-based health center, someone that cares about the program and is not just getting involved because it looks good on their college resume” says Caitlin.

By authentically engaging the youth in the mission of school-based health care, and recognizing them as a major asset to their program, Eugene’s school-based health centers have reaped great results.

Debbie Goodman, Clinical Manager at North Eugene School-Health Center, staffs the Teen Advocacy Council. She has seen the impact that this work has on the school-based health centers and the broader community, and also how it has benefited the youth involved. “They now have the skills, tools and confidence to organize for causes they value,” she says. “We have developed skills that we will use for rest of our lives,” adds Caitlin. For Dillon, now a freshman in college but still volunteering with the center when he is able, the process “matured” him. He reflects, “I learned how to interact with people and take on life’s challenges in a more positive way.”

Membership in the Teen Advocacy Council for 2008–09 grew to 30 members—teens who have no doubt been inspired by the efforts, accomplishments and impacts achieved by the young leaders that came before them.

About

There are currently 45 state certified school-based health centers in 19 counties operating in elementary, middle and high schools in Oregon.

My School’s Health Centers in Eugene, Oregon is a community partner of the Oregon School-Based Health Care Network, the state’s leading advocacy organization dedicated to advancing access to quality health care for youth through school-based health care. The Network is committed to improving the health of Oregon’s children by advocating for available, accessible and stable school-based health care.

The Oregon School-Based Health Care Network is one of nine recipients of multiyear funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation for its national School-Based Health Care Policy Program. Launched in 2004, the School-Based Health Care Policy Program aims to make quality care more accessible and sustainable for children and youth. A fundamental principle of the program is the promotion of a consumer-centered model of quality care—one in which local people, including youth, shape the content, quality, delivery, and financing of health care in their communities.

For more information, visit:

School-Based Health Care Policy Program
www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org

Oregon School-Based Health Care Network
www.osbhcn.org



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