

## Spotlight on: Salud Para La Gente

Surrounded by fields of strawberries, acres of lettuce and fragrant apple orchards, Watsonville is a small coastal community in central California with a focus on farming. Serving the students in this rural area is the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) which includes 32 schools and some 19,000 students. In 2009, PVUSD signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Salud Para La Gente, a federally qualified health center (FQHC) based in Watsonville with a long history of providing medical and dental services to the people of Pajaro Valley. Salud opened its doors in 1978 as a free clinic and started providing health services from an old apple shed primarily to migrant farm workers. Today, Salud has a budget of \$19.2 million, 12 clinic sites, and serves over 23,000 patients a year. Among Salud's 12 clinics are seven school-based health centers on two middle school and five elementary school campuses.

Salud's successful collaboration with PVUSD began when the district asked Salud to handle the dental, vision and BMI screenings and follow-up care for the district's Migrant Education Program. The director of that program, Faris Sabbah, saw an opportunity to expand Salud's impact to the schools and was instrumental in getting health services and school health centers on seven campuses in the district. "We were very fortunate when it came to working with the school district," explains Sara Clarenbach, Director of Advocacy and Community Relations for Salud. "Mr. Sabbah worked directly with the superintendent of schools and had the connections we needed within the district and the schools." Once the MOU was signed with the school district, it was up to Salud to get the school clinics up and running. That daunting task has been ably handled by Rachel Sandobal, Clinic Business Manager at Salud. "The school district was very welcoming to Salud. Most

of the hurdles we faced in getting our most recent school health centers opened came up after we signed the MOU with the district and involved communicating with all the players involved and working together on the construction of the sites," explains Sandobal. Salud worked with administrators, principals, school nurses, and site administrators to create the five new school health centers which opened simultaneously in the Fall of 2009.

By all measures, the new and existing school health clinics have had an outstanding year. The seven clinics combined handled: nearly 3,000 dental visits; over 1,400 medical visits; provided almost 2,000 H1N1 vaccinations and nearly 1,200 seasonal flu vaccinations; in addition to immunizing over 500 school children. In addition, the clinics provided BMI and dental screenings for over 1,100 four-year olds prior to their entering Kindergarten. While the numbers are impressive, it's the personal stories that make Salud staff the proudest. Salud recently worked with a family who'd been displaced due to job loss. The mother first heard about the health services at the school clinics through a flier her daughter brought home and came in with a sick child along with her other children. The school clinic was able to treat the sick child, establish a primary care relationship, provide dental services, and help the family obtain health insurance. Salud was also able to refer the mother to many other services provided by other community organizations. The family is now doing well and feeling established and comfortable in their new community.

That kind of one-stop shopping is what Dr. Hugo Ferlito, Associate Dental Director at Salud, feels passionate about. "A lot of school health centers do screenings and referrals which are all good," says Dr. Ferlito. "But personally, my philosophy is

don't screen if you can't treat. We have to provide our high-risk kids with the services they need and not just hope the parent will follow through on a referral." Transportation issues and financial worries might prevent parents from getting the medical or dental services their child needs unless the services are provided conveniently on school campuses. Without treatment, sick kids frequently stay home. "One of our guiding principles is keeping kids in school. We want to do everything possible to alleviate health problems that would cause kids to miss school," says Dr. Ferlito.

For the schools, the onsite clinics have helped save time and resources. "Before we had a health clinic on campus we could identify the students with health issues, but we couldn't always get them treatment," explains Sabbah. "Now school clinic personnel can see to it that student health needs are met. We see kids in the classroom with fewer distractions from the pain of their unresolved health issues." One example is a kindergartner who had chronic bad breath, which turned out to be a symptom of tooth decay. Once he received dental treatment, his breath improved as did his school attendance. "We also see a lot of similar health issues in families," says Sabbah. "So if one child is treated for tooth decay, it's likely the siblings have the same problem. Through the clinic we can educate the parents and teach them preventive measures."

Salud has made a financial commitment to school health clinics to the tune of \$1 million. It funded the construction of the five new health centers on school campuses last year and provides much of the staffing at the sites, including pediatricians, family practice MDs, medical assistants, dental providers, dental assistants, and receptionists. Salud collaborates with the Healthy Start program for the district. Healthy Start staff work with Salud staff helping with referrals and insurance enrollment. Funding for Salud comes from a mix of sources including the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), foundation

grants, and Medi-Cal reimbursements. As an FQHC, Salud is also qualified to receive new federal funding made available through health care reform. Collaboration and partnerships are also an integral part of Salud's approach to health services. Salud works closely with not only the PVUSD and its Migrant Education program, but also with Healthy Start, Go for Health!, Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance, Promise Neighborhood Initiative, and the Diabetes Health Center.

Salud is currently working to open its first health center on a high school campus. Plans are in the works to bring health services to Pajaro Valley High School by early 2011. And that's just the beginning. "Our new CEO, Dr. Zettie Page, has expressed his desire to have a Salud-sponsored health center in every school in the district," says Dr. Ferlito. "There are 32 schools in this district so that's pretty significant coverage, but based on what we've accomplished to date, I have high hopes we will make that goal a reality in the future."

*By Aileen Olson*

Services: Medical; Dental; Vision Screenings; Nutrition, Obesity & Disease Prevention, Oral Health Hygiene Education

Hours: Elementary schools, 2-6 pm (1 day/wk for medical and 1 different day/wk for dental); Middle schools, 9 am to 1 pm (5 days/wk both medical & dental)

Locations: 5 elementary schools; 2 middle schools; in planning stage for 1 high school site

\*Patients: 40% students; 25% siblings or children who live near school; 35% Salud referrals to Salud's SBHCs

\*Patient Encounters: 2,953 dental visits; 1,435 medical visits; 1,963 H1N1 vaccinations; 1,198 flu vaccinations; 501 immunizations; 1,120 BMI, dental and insurance screenings on Kindergarteners; 484 TB tests on school staff

\*Reported data covers 10/15/09 to 5/31/10