

# Spotlight on: Lennox Health Clinic



*Lennox HS student receives health services from Cynthia Francis, Physician's Assistant at Lennox Clinic*

The 1.1-square mile community of Lennox, California lies directly under an LAX flight path and is bounded on all sides by freeways. It is one area of the LA basin that was ripe for a school-based health center. Consider that:

- With a population of 25,000, 92% of the children qualify for free or reduced priced lunches.
- The Lennox School District operates six elementary schools, one middle school, one charter high school.
- Until recently, the district had one small health clinic that had originally been established as a Healthy Start clinic.
- Due to funding cuts, the hours of operation had been cut repeatedly, and the clinic was only open one day a week.

## **The Opportunity**

Jenny Krusoe, a program and fund development consultant, saw an opportunity at Lennox. She was working with the school district, as well as with To Help Everyone (T.H.E.) Clinic and the Los Angeles County Education Foundation (LACEF), and saw a chance to bring partners together to rescue the Lennox Clinic. “The minute I presented the idea to Risë Phillips at T.H.E. Clinic and JoAnn Isken at Lennox School District, the project took off,” says Krusoe. “I’m just amazed at the speed with which this got done. We had a memo of understanding in place in two months. That step alone can take two years in other communities!”

Last spring, CSHC met with Madeline Hall, LACEF’s Executive Director and Jenny to advise in the planning of the newly expanded SBHC and shared sample job descriptions, information sharing practices, and SBHC policies and procedures.

## **The School District**

“Education is not just what happens in the classroom. We need to think about serving and supporting the whole child,” says JoAnn Isken, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction at Lennox School District. Having a health clinic to serve students was a high priority for the district, so when budget pressures made it seem they’d have to close it, everyone was devastated. But then the connection with T.H.E. Clinic was made and the district sat down with them and with LACEF. “We really tapped into Madeline’s expertise to help us build this marriage between a school district and a federally qualified health clinic,” says Isken. Fortunately for Lennox, the district had already been working with LACEF on their school readiness program for children up to age 3. “We’d had this extraordinarily successful readiness program with LACEF’s help, but as a district we knew little about health clinics, MOUs, and partnerships with FQHCs. That’s where Madeline stepped in and helped guide us,” says Isken. “She was such a great supporter of the whole enterprise.”

## **The Health Services Provider**

“When we found out Lennox was looking for a partner we just saw it as an automatic good fit for our overall strategic plan,” explains Risë Phillips CEO of T.H.E. Clinic. T.H.E. is an experienced provider of high quality health services and currently operates four community clinics, with two other SBHCs in the works. T.H.E. took over the Lennox Clinic in November 2010 and has been running it at 20 hours a week during this transitional period. This has allowed time to hire and train new staff, begin outreach to the community, and figure out what works and what doesn’t. The grand opening for the Lennox Clinic will be held this October after which clinic hours will be expanded to 40 hours a week.

When asked about hurdles encountered as they took over the clinic from the school district, Phillips explains that it was a really smooth transition. “It was an amazing experience to work with such

willing partners and to have LACEF participate,” say Phillips. “I can’t believe how quickly it happened.” Phillips points out that at other school districts it can take years to work things out. “At Lennox, they were just so happy and willing to have us come on board. They really had a dream of doing something more for the community,” says Phillips. “This has been a joyous experience; one of the best of my career.”

### **The Impact**

Two recent examples show the impact the clinic is already having on families in the community. Cynthia Francis, Family Physician Assistant at the Lennox Clinic, tells of a recent encounter with a mother of several children, two of whom were anemic. Francis did a work up on the children and discovered that one of them had sickle cell anemia. The child was referred to a pediatric hematologist, and the clinic will continue to see her for routine exams and communicate with the specialist. They are also working with the family to educate them on the disease and to teach them how they can help their daughter moving forward. Another family came in with seven children. Although everyone was healthy, the whole family was being stressed out by the youngest child who was extremely hyperactive. After observing and testing the child, a preliminary diagnosis of attention deficit disorder and autism was made. The child will complete a full assessment before starting school and will now receive appropriate care.

### **The Funders**

In early September, the Lennox Clinic became the first school-based health center in LA County to receive a \$175,000 grant from LACEF’s “Stay Well. Learn Well.” initiative. “Being well and staying well equals learning well,” says Madeline Hall, Executive Director of LACEF. “This initiative will allow us to partner with schools, school districts, teachers, parents and students to encourage and promote health at schools.” The goal is to see that children have regular medical and dental checkups, eat healthy and stay active and fit so they perform their best in school. LACEF has committed \$3 million to this initiative focused on improving student health, academic performance and graduation rates.

Lennox school district received more good news this summer. T.H.E. Clinic was one of only 35 California recipients who received a federal grant for SBHC construction and equipment. The majority of the \$415,000 award will go toward expanding the Lennox health clinic and adding more services, such as dental, mental health and health education.

### **The Community**

As the only governmental agency in this unincorporated area, the Lennox school district is a well-known and trusted entity. Through its schools and district-employed health specialists who work on school campuses, information about T.H.E. and the new clinic is being disseminated. The health specialists have been busy during the summer educating and enrolling families in health insurance programs. Families already know and trust these health specialists who have been serving their children in school, so doors open more quickly.

“Sometimes families here won’t go for health care because they don’t know or trust the provider,” says Isken. “But now with a relationship with the school district, we’ll have children and adults that will receive health care that ordinarily wouldn’t.” T.H.E. knows that good word of mouth is key to gaining the trust of the community. Therefore, community leaders are being targeted and invited to attend meetings and learn about the clinic and its services. T.H.E. is also advertising with bench ads, billboards, media spots and doing other marketing outreach. “We really want the community to understand that we are going to be a partner in health care for many years to come,” says Phillips.

### **A Happy Ending (or Beginning!)**

Because the school district was committed to serving the whole child plus the community, because T.H.E. was willing to take that risk, and because LACEF said it was possible and provided additional funding, the new Lennox Health Clinic has a very bright future.

“This is the fulfillment of an even greater dream than we ever thought possible – to be able to offer health services to not just the children but to the entire family! How wonderful is that?” says Isken.

*By Aileen Olson, California School Health Centers Association, September 2011*