



CSHC Spotlight On

San Fernando High School Teen Health Center



San Fernando High School Teen Health Center is the Winner of our 2008 Outstanding Reproductive Health Advocacy Award

Opened in 1987, the Teen Health Center at San Fernando High School is celebrating 21 years of comprehensive medical, mental health, case management, and health education services to teens. Despite initial resistance and fears in the community during its early years, the Center has offered consistent, useful services to students—everything from treating severe acne and fevers, to providing sports physicals and health education. These days, attitudes have changed and the students, parents and community have come to appreciate, and even advocate for, the Health Center.

The Health Center is the recipient of CSHC's *Outstanding Reproductive Health Advocacy* award. It provides family planning and pregnancy prevention services including education, contraceptives, pregnancy and STI testing, pelvic exams, and HIV testing. The Health Center emphasizes prevention, education, and follow-up. During the first visit, a student is given a comprehensive psycho-social assessment to help identify high risk behaviors which the Center and its staff will then address. The Center has also successfully spearheaded a Chlamydia screening project which included increased access to screening, testing, and treatment among high risk individuals. Outreach events included on-campus posters, flyers,

school newspaper articles, information tables, display boards, and classroom presentations.

Success stories abound at the Health Center and there are many examples of students' lives being changed for the better through the many services they've received at the clinic. In one recent incident the mental health staff person and case manager worked together with a student whose sibling was involved with a gang. The student was emotionally distraught, suffering from anxiety attacks, as well as dealing with a pre-diabetic condition and high blood pressure. This student was a prime candidate to drop out due to all the distractions and pressures she was facing. Thankfully, that did not happen. Relying on the Health Center, the student got help for the physical and emotional issues that were causing so much stress, and stayed in school. In another example, a student came in for a sports physical during which a testicular mass was detected. "The student was referred to a specialist who determined the student had cancer," explains Rocio Cisneros, clinic director. "Our staff followed up with the student and his parents to make sure he received the care and treatments he needed." Of course, the less dramatic success stories are the more frequent cases when a student is treated at the Health Center and doesn't have to miss school, or when self-esteem improves due to feeling and looking healthier, or when a student learns about the consequences of risky behavior and

develops the skills needed to make healthier choices.

How has the Center dealt with parental concerns around reproductive health services? “If a parent comes in or calls us with concerns, we explain California’s minor consent and confidentiality laws to them so they are reassured we are not overstepping our bounds,” explains Lily Garcia, business manager for the Health Center. “We also encourage them to communicate directly with their son or daughter. If needed, we can facilitate open communication between parent and child so misunderstandings and concerns can be addressed.” The parents also see that their child is receiving immunizations, sports physicals, treatments for chronic conditions, and dental referrals. These are highly valued services that are convenient and free, so parents have come to appreciate the Health Center despite initial concerns.

The challenges facing the Health Center are common among school health centers in general—funding, equipment, space, and staffing needs. Funded by the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Center has had to deal with continuing budget cuts. Unfortunately, they’ve had to cut the hours of key personnel, making it harder for students to get the services they need and increasing wait times. Limited space has been a challenge as well. With only two exam rooms and one mental health services room, the Health Center and its offices are spread around campus in three separate locations. Despite the difficulties, the staff is committed to providing excellent services. “Considering the limits on the space and personnel we have,” explains Garcia, “the Health Center does an amazing job of handling all the students we see daily.”

The Health Center makes a concerted effort to reach out to school administrators,

teachers, and students—although outreach is never finished. “It’s always an ongoing process,” says Garcia. “With turnover in the administration and among teachers, as well as new freshmen entering every year, we have to continually work to let people know what we do here.” Students hear about the Health Center through the school registration process, daily PA announcements, Back-to-School nights, as well as bulletin boards and display cases in the hallways. The health education program manager and case manager also provide presentations to students in health education classes and home room periods for incoming ninth graders, and continuously to other grade levels.

Acceptance of the Health Center is very high among students who have learned they will feel welcome and safe at the Health Center. Perhaps a student’s comment sums it up best: “They are always there to help us when we need it the most,” says Juana (age 18). “I am one of the many students who didn’t have health insurance and the only way I can get my health checked is through my school. Everyone is friendly and makes me feel at home. I will miss the clinic after I graduate and I appreciate everything they have done for me.”

By: Aileen Olson

- ✓ Services: Comprehensive medical, mental health, case management, health education services
- ✓ Staff: Medical doctor, LVN, nurse practitioner, health educator, case manager, and mental health providers (2), business manager, clinic director
- ✓ Budget: \$520,000 per year
- ✓ Students served per year: 4,580
- ✓ Visits per year: 6,000 to 10,000
- ✓ Hours: 40 per week, year round