



CSHC Spotlight On

## Kids Come First Community Clinic



Children who come to the Kids Come First Clinic in Ontario, California are greeted by name, handed a book to read and keep, and ushered into an exam room along with any family members they'd like to have accompany them. "Our clinic is a very family-oriented place," explains Beverly Speak, Executive Director of the clinic. "We're happy to see the kids and make them feel welcome and comfortable here." Housed in one wing of a decommissioned elementary school, the clinic provides pediatric medical care to kids in 37 elementary and middle schools in the district, in addition to any kids from local high schools or in the surrounding communities who wish to drop in.

Originally begun as a collaborative partnership between the school district and a nonprofit hospital in another county, the clinic is now an independent, nonprofit which depends on money from First 5 California and from private grants to stay in business. The school district provides a partial rent subsidy.

One of the clinic's most successful educational programs is the *Shapin' Up and Slimmin' Down* weight management course it offers to kids and their parents or guardians. The six-week class promotes healthy eating, and how to control portions, and read food labels. Students learn the basics of the food pyramid and how to balance their meals. Each class presents a healthy, affordable, and easily accessible snack as a model of what can be tried at home. Physical activity is an integral part of each session, and everyone is sent home with instructions to play "hard" every day. Instruction is given in English and Spanish, and classes are led by a Kids Come First

pediatrician and staff. The class was started because of the many obese children the clinic was seeing and the lack of nutrition and dietary resources available to their clients. Started a year and a half ago, the program has graduated more than 200 kids, plus their parents and siblings.

Although kids and their parents are weighed and measured during the obesity prevention classes, there's not an emphasis on weight loss. "The goal is not to 'fix' the overweight child in six weeks," says Speak. "Our goal is to provide new choices and techniques that will lead to healthier, more active lifestyles." However, many of the kids and parents who go through the program do lose weight and lower their BMI as well. One of the factors that makes the program special is the one-on-one follow up kids receive from the clinic's pediatrician. After a child has completed the course, the doctor follows up and stays connected with the child. Kids who complete all their assignments during the six weeks are also rewarded with a brand new pair of high-end athletic shoes thanks to *Shoes That Fit*, a local nonprofit that works with Nike and other shoe manufacturers.

The *Shapin' Up* program is offered at the city's community center in the evenings. Referrals for the program come through Kids Come First and other Healthy Families providers and schools, as well as by self-referrals of those who've heard about the program through word of mouth. The program has been extremely successful and made a big difference for many of the kids. "Brandon" was a shy 16-year old who came to class with his younger brother. Brandon started the class weighing 314 pounds with a BMI of 46. Over the next six weeks, he

started to walk 60 to 75 minutes per day, and dropped to 296 pounds. He reported that he was spending more time with his little brother throwing baseballs and working out. He was also eating less junk food in order to keep his brother from eating poorly. Brandon's care and example helped his brother drop a pound a week—an important achievement for a child who had never been able to slow down his weight gain.

Another success story is "Ethan," an 11-year old who started *Shapin' Up and Slimmin' Down* at 265 pounds and with a BMI of 42. During the six weeks he began to lose weight and brought his BMI down to 36. As a result of the class, Ethan and his mother started going to the gym regularly and reading food labels when they shop together. Ethan's mother reported her son is happier and more enthusiastic about going to school. Ethan says, "I stopped drinking soda! I learned that soda and chips are not too good for you."

Kids Come First is also starting an asthma program based on the same model as their obesity prevention program. "We have many kids with asthma in our community who are undiagnosed or who don't know how to control it," reports Speak. "Many times the kids and their parents won't seek help until the child can't breathe. We want to teach them what to do before the child becomes symptomatic." The program focuses on providing information on environmental irritants, how to reduce exposure to indoor allergens, how to use inhalers, and how to avoid stress- or exercise-induced episodes. Once again, both the kids and their parents or guardians will be instructed so they both know how to deal with asthma and its symptoms.

Kids Come First also promotes the well-being of children by participating in the *Reach Out and Read* and *First Book* programs. Every child who walks in the door receives a free book to keep. Local high school students and other volunteers come in regularly to read to children in the clinic's book corner and have also

organized book drives resulting in the donation of thousands of books to the clinic. In some families, a parent reading to a child is not a familiar activity. The children may not have books in their homes, so when they come to the clinic and get a free book they are thrilled. Encouraging children to read and parents to read to children is another way the clinic seeks to educate parents and show them fun, new ways to help their kids flourish.

"Our focus is really on education and helping people make good choices," says Speak. "There are some health providers I've met in the community who think our population just wants a doctor to tell them what to do and hand them a prescription. But for us, it's all about empowerment—giving people access to good information and helping them understand their choices."

**By: Aileen Olson**

- ✓ Started: 2002
- ✓ Facility: 2,600 SF; 3 exam rooms; 1 work-up room; offices
- ✓ Services: Pediatric medical care, education programs, case management, immunizations, insurance enrollment
- ✓ Case load: 4,000-5,000 visits/year
- ✓ Staff: 2 part-time pediatricians, 3 nurse practitioners, 4 part-time medical assistants, Patient Advocate, Community Outreach Director, Executive Director, Fiscal Manager, Data/Evaluation Manager
- ✓ Sponsors: First 5 San Bernardino, The California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, The California Wellness Foundation, United Way, Kiwanis Club