

CONTINUED EXCELLENCE

Three Past CHA Achievement Citation Recipients Share Success Stories

This summer, the Catholic Health Association will bestow its Achievement Citation, the organization's most prestigious honor for exceptional programs operated by Catholic health systems or facilities that deliver measurable results in communities.

This year's honoree will join the more than 80 programs that have received the award since 1975. The recipient will be announced during the 2008 Catholic Health Assembly, June 22-24, in San Diego.

Nominations for this prestigious award are reviewed by a committee of senior leaders from various sectors of the U.S. Catholic health care ministry. The committee's selections are recommended to the CHA Board of Trustees for approval. Any CHA-member organization that

has developed an innovative program, project or service is eligible for this award.

This article will highlight three past Achievement Citation recipients. Representatives of each organization will share their stories of success, and explain how their outstanding programs continue to evolve today.

La Casa de Maria Inmaculada Lawrence, Mass.

Achievement Citation, 2003

When La Casa de Maria Inmaculada in Lawrence, Mass., received the Achievement Citation in 2003, program officials had just relocated to a larger, 4,000-square-foot facility.

"Now, we're busting at the seams. We are



BY GABRIEL KILEY

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La Casa de Maria Inmaculada in Lawrence, Mass., serves the needs of elderly Latino residents through various programs at its facility.



La Casa de Maria Immaculada offers a place for elderly Latino residents to gather.

thinking about a new site,” said Barbara Grant, president and CEO of Mary Immaculate Health/Care Services, which owns and operates the facility that houses an adult day health program for the city’s elderly Latino population.

Started in 1999, the bilingual/bicultural center serves older Spanish-speaking residents in various capacities from the administration of medication and nursing services and exercise programs to offering meals, social work assistance and transportation to medical and therapy appointments. The facility is located in a storefront building in downtown Lawrence.

The growth of the program during the past nine years is reflective of the needs of the once-vibrant mill town. The northeastern community has been home to immigrants dating back to the early 20th century. Today, the newer wave of immigrants includes primarily Latinos, Vietnamese, Koreans and Cambodians. The affordability of housing makes this town attractive to newcomers from foreign lands.

Challenges exist, namely due to the fact that Lawrence is the poorest city in the state, according to an April 2008 article in *The Boston Globe*. The per-capita income is \$13,360 with 21 percent of the population living below the poverty line, according to the newspaper. Latinos make up 75 percent of the city’s population of 80,000, according to La Casa officials. So, when it comes to serving older Latinos, challenges exist for this health care provider.

“With this particular culture, you have to learn to do it their way,” said Jean Seero, director of La

Casa. “You can’t go in gangbusters and try to run the show. You have to try to figure out the needs of the community, and try to educate the participants and families about the importance of compliance of medical treatment. We have to educate and re-educate.”

In order to educate the Latino population, community outreach is a must for the La Casa staff. On a given day, employees serve about 50 residents, and overflow clients go to the main hospital campus where Spanish-speaking members are available to assist.

“We have increased numbers because of referrals,” Grant said. “The community has gotten to know us. Hospitals in the area know us. We have caregiver support groups. We started education programs for clients and their families. We’ve increased our involvement with colleges, who send us students for internships. A large number of students are Spanish-speaking or have Latino heritage. We now have closer community ties.”

Building trust with older Latinos and their families is mandatory, Seero said.

“There are a lot of family caregiver issues,” she added. “Social work is very important here. The Latino culture prefers to keep loved ones at home. Often, the ones needing attention here have to go home and babysit grandchildren.”

By working closely with the Latino community, hospital officials are able to stress the importance of health prevention to all age groups.

“The Latino population is very underserved,” Seero said. “Mental health clients are not getting their needs met. There are very few medical practitioners who are bilingual in the field.”

With a desire to expand into a larger facility, officials say they want to keep finding ways to better serve the community.

“We’ve had some incredibly successful stories of people from the program,” Seero said.

Saint John’s Health Center Santa Monica, Calif.

Achievement Citation, 1985

A program designed to address the mental health needs of deaf and hard of hearing persons at Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica, Calif., continues its successful evolution today since its inception 32 years ago.

Today, the outpatient program now includes the following services:

- therapy
- medication
- crisis intervention



Susan Hajani is coordinator of the mental health program for the deaf and hard of hearing persons at Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, Calif.

- case management
- psychological/psychiatric evaluation
- probation certified domestic violence treatment
- community outreach

"We serve 120 to 125 clients per year, and about 75 percent are deaf adults and 25 percent are deaf children with families," said Susan Hajani, program coordinator. "All of our clients have an emotional disability that requires therapy of some sort. The goal is to help them become more integrated in the community."

The program at this suburban hospital in western Los Angeles was honored with the Achievement Citation in 1985. The facility, which opened its doors in 1942, is now a 225-bed hospital owned by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth Health Services Corporation. The hospital is undergoing an extensive reconstruction plan including new life sciences and diagnostic and treatment centers.

This program is one of 13 within the hospital's Child and Family Development Center, which provides a range of services including mental health, outreach, developmental and educational services for children, teenagers and their families. Employees are capable of speaking English, Spanish and sign language.

The center employs a multidisciplinary approach with case-specific teams, which can

include clinical social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, case managers, teachers, and occupational and speech therapists. Thirty people work in the center, including four full-time therapists for the deaf and hard of hearing program.

Program employees serve the diverse population of Los Angeles County, which includes Caucasians, Hispanics, Asians and African-Americans. "It's not uncommon that we'll have two interpreters in the room — one for sign language; the other Spanish, Chinese, etc.," Hajiani said.

The program's outreach extends beyond Santa Monica. "What really impresses me is some of our clients take bus transfers to get to us," said LaTisha Starbuck, vice president of mission and ethics. "Mental health services are severely underfunded and there are not enough programs out there. Our clients will travel long distances as far as Pasadena to get to us and from all over Los Angeles County."

Since receiving the award 23 years ago, officials say advances in mental health wellness and recovery have been helpful. However, they said the specialty of treating the mental issues of deaf people remains underserved.

In the meantime, the center in Santa Monica offers a stable place for patients and families to work through a myriad of issues.

"It's a joy for me, as a vice president, to see the work done by this service," Starbuck said. "In the context of Catholic health care and what we're about, it's amazing to see how the clients are better able to participate in society. I witness hope every time I come over to the facility."

Coalition for Healthy Families Jonesboro, Ark. Achievement Citation, 1998

A coalition of 20 organizations led by a Catholic hospital is making a difference in the lives of children in Jonesboro, Ark.

The Coalition for Healthy Families, led by St. Bernards Medical Center and local schools, the Jonesboro health department, Blue



About 25 percent of the clients in the Saint John's program are children.



Middle school students receive CPR instruction through a program sponsored by St. Bernard's Medical Center in Jonesboro, Ark.

Cross Blue Shield, Arkansas State University and other groups, offers various programs designed to promote the health and wellness of children and families.

"The neat thing is the community has been involved and comes together and has a great passion for the children in our community," said Brenda Million, vice president and chief nursing officer of St. Bernards.

The coalition started in 1993 as the Kids Programs, and changed its name to Our Kids Count Coalition at the time it was honored by CHA in 1998. Later, it transitioned into The Healthy Children's Coalition before changing to its current name.

Today, the program has expanded to better serve the city of 60,000 residents in northeastern Arkansas. "Every year, we keep rolling out new things for children and families," Million said. "We get involved in the community and enhance the programs year after year. We've had a major effect on the health of our children."

The coalition's specific goal is helping local schools implement Arkansas Act 1220, a state law establishing a child health advisory committee to coordinate statewide efforts to combat childhood obesity and related illnesses and improve the health of the next generation. In 2007, the coalition worked to:

- develop on-site wellness programs for teachers.

- develop a program by which teachers can teach health and wellness to students.
- focus on families as a way to improve health and wellness.
- focus on after-school wellness programs for students.
- develop a speakers' bureau to educate the community.
- secure funding for programs at schools.

Some of the coalition projects include teacher wellness programs in two local school districts. Teachers took pre-program health screenings, participated in a "fitness boot camp" and went through post-screenings so they could experience the benefits of more active lifestyles. The program also included several "lunch and learn" sessions at each school.

For several years, the coalition has served as a springboard for a summer camp where children learn the importance of exercise and good nutrition as lifelong health factors. For the first two years, the coalition secured grants to serve about 50 students in the special two-week programs. This year, the camp will be expanded from one, two-week session to three, two-week sessions. A total of 165 students will take part in the camp this summer.

Also, the coalition has sponsored several after-school programs at the schools, including Happy Feet, a program that includes dancing, boot camp exercises and obstacle courses; a self-

esteem, social and etiquette program; and a conflict resolution program.

Another group associated with St. Bernards is the Women's Advisory Council of the St. Bernards Development Foundation. Its goal is to increase awareness of health and wellness issues relating specifically to women and children. In the past three years, the group of 120 community women has developed two programs specifically with children in mind.

Also, St. Bernards physician Dr. Carl Abraham is an infectious disease specialist who has made numerous presentations in the area. He started doing this following an incident in 2007 when a local school district closed for two days to disinfect facilities after an outbreak of staph infection. Nurse educators and Abraham talked with teachers, parents, students and others about the prevalence of community acquired MRSA and ways to avoid its spread. They also visited schools and talked with media to increase the awareness of staph infections.

In addition, Community Educator Beth

Faught, RN, offers a weekly program that covers topics ranging from hygiene to deep vein thrombosis to audiences in public schools.

Even further, St. Bernards provides certified athletic trainers free of charge to the four largest school districts in Jonesboro. Trainers are present for all practices and games and work with coaches to get athletes ready for games and tending to any injuries. As an adjunct to that program, St. Bernards partners with area physicians to perform free physicals for all student-athletes in the four school districts.

The Coalition for Healthy Families led by St. Bernards officials plan to add more activities in the future. "Some of things we're targeting are focusing on health screening and identifying the needs of the community and putting these programs in the schools," Million said. ■



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"Stories in the Forest" is a monthly program sponsored by St. Bernards Medical Center as part of the hospital's Healthy Families.