

# Getting It Done!!!



## Newsletter - Winter, 2010

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The Chicago Health Corps is an AmeriCorps program in its 15<sup>th</sup> year that provides meaningful opportunities for participants to assist their communities in reaching those who face barriers to needed health and social services.

### CHC Members

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Erie Family Health Center  
Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation  
QUAD Communities Development Corporation  
Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago  
The Resurrection Project  
Seven Generations Ahead  
Southwest Organizing Project  
UIC - Chicago Partnership for Health Promotion  
UIC - Robert Wood Johnson: Active Living by Design  
Uplift Community High School



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## Breathing Easier Together: The CHC and RHAMC



The Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago (RHAMC) has served as a host site for the CHC since 1998, an arrangement that has been beneficial both to the organizations and the people they serve. Maureen Damitz, RHAMC Senior Director of Programs explains:

“We as an agency find that being part of the Health Corps program has been a wonderful experience for us. It has helped us gain outreach to children who have great needs. School staff and parents who want to learn more in the area of lung health, Corps Members are compassionate and understanding. They’re open to feedback. They’re very talented.”

The mission of RHAMC is to promote healthy lungs and fight lung disease through research, advocacy and education. To that end and through community-based interventions, RHAMC serves an estimated 1 million Cook County residents living with asthma, lung cancer, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), emphysema and other lung diseases. (<http://www.lungchicago.org/about/>)

“Where asthma hits in Chicago, we go to the highest prevalence areas,” Maureen continues, “and they’re not always in the easiest communities to work in. We work with the largest school district in the nation. Where we focus our Health Corps efforts is in our asthma program and our outreach to children and the schools. I would have to say our outreach has increased by about 75% using the Corps Members.

“And it’s the little things, not the big things, that have the greater impact. The children knowing that someone cares enough to come back to see them everyday. And the Health Corps Members are changed... One came back and said ‘oh, a little girl wrote me a note and was so thrilled that I came back.’ She was so touched because these children are so used to being disappointed. And the Health Corps Members don’t do that. They do what they say they are going to do for the children.”

Maureen reports the learning curve on both sides of the equation is formidable.

“The communities in which we serve are hit with a lot of challenges. They often have high violence, high crime, low socio-economic status. Some of the Corps Members come here from very different backgrounds than the children they’re serving. And I think people sometimes feel that ‘oh, having interns, or having Health Corps Members means that you’re going to be spending a lot of time holding hands.’ Not true. Not if you put a little bit of training time up front.

“For us, sometimes it’s hard for us to look at our programs objectively. We think of course our

programs are best, they’re designed great, we know how to reach children. But the Corps Members will say, ‘Oh, can we try this, this year?’ And we try to never shut down that enthusiasm. Because we never know what’s going to come out from their ideas. And by not shutting down that enthusiasm, we all have something to gain. And they have knowledge and experience to gain from us.

“I’m still in contact with many Corps Members, years after their experience with us. Many of them are in medical careers. They say the experience here has really changed them because they see how much is needed for these children in education, and how much of a difference they know they can make.”



**As part of their Pre-Service Training, Corps Members undergo a variety of Team Building Exercises**

## Building on the Past, Preparing for the Future

### Jenny Delessio-Parson and QCDC

Quad Communities Development Corporation's (QCDC) mission is to convene residents, organizations, businesses, and institutions to plan, guide, support, and monitor human infrastructure and community development activities that will create a sustainable, healthy, mixed-income neighborhood. (<http://www.qcdc.org/home.aspx>).

That effort extends to activities at William Claude Reavis Elementary School, and CHC Member Jenny Delessio-Parson.

"My primary responsibility is running the Dental Van," says Jenny. "Coordinating daily operations at the health center, and coordinating sexual education. We're also involved with health challenges for the kids, so every other week we have a different challenge for them. They get health logs to document their progress, and they get rewards for doing the challenge, raffles and stuff. I actually worked at the school for three years before joining health Corps. It was a work study job. I worked as a classroom assistant."

"It's a small school, a real sense of community there," Jenny continues. "I feel appreciated. My boss pushes me to do stuff beyond my comfort zone, but she's supportive at the same time. I get to do a lot of different tasks so I don't get bored. It's great. In order for kids to succeed academically, they need to have all these other needs met, and so my interest in health comes from that standpoint, and having kids be healthy so they can become healthy citizens of the world."

Holding a bachelor's degree in Public Policy Studies from the University of Chicago, the CHC is a logical next step in Jenny's education. "I think it will serve me well into the future. I want a better understanding of how extra services like health centers and health initiatives can be integrated into a regular school, and the logistics of how all of that will work. So I want to take this experience and go on and say 'you know, this does work, and it's worth it, it's worth the money, and I've seen the effects first hand.'"



"We had a patient calling trying to get some information on food banks for a Thanksgiving turkey, and our Health Corps Member called around several places and was able to find a turkey for this person, but this patient worked two jobs and was unable to go pick it up. So our AmeriCorps member went and picked it up and delivered this Thanksgiving turkey! That was just really fantastic!" (Lauren Muskovitz, MPH, Erie Family Health Center)

## A Healthy Partnership: The CHC and Erie Family Health Center



Erie Family Health Center delivers culturally sensitive health care to nearly 30,000 low-income, under-insured and uninsured Chicagoans. Their community-based health centers are portals to high-quality care — and a higher quality of life — regardless of a patient's ability to pay (<http://www.eriefamilyhealth.org/>).

They have also served as a host site for the Chicago Health Corps since 1995. Lauren Muskovitz, MPH (Erie Health Promotions Manager), is proud of the partnership.

"I think the ability to expand on what we're able to do in the community and in the clinics has been phenomenal. We keep adding to our pool of Corps Members. We started off with one, and then we had two for a couple of years, then three, then four, now we've got six. We just keep adding more and more. It's really been a great experience."

Amy Valukas, MPH (Director of Erie School Health Programs), agrees.

“I’ve been working with the Chicago Health Corps for the past 8 or 9 years, and they’ve always been a huge benefit to us and have exponentially increased the services that we are able to provide. In a direct service agency, they’re able to augment our services with things that we would never be able to provide otherwise. We can’t really pay for health education if that takes away from vaccines or some other more primary care service. So it allows us to do a lot more comprehensive set of services.”

“Some of our programs are run entirely by Corps Members,” Lauren adds. “For example, our teen pregnancy prevention program that we run in the schools is entirely done by Corps Members with oversight and administrative support from me. Other programs, I think we get a 20 - 30% bump in what we’re able to do. Health fairs and providing new educational materials and newsletters to our patients, or supporting the group visits that we’ve got going on. Health Corps Members are really instrumental in that. It sort of varies among given projects, but there is a huge added benefit to having them.”

“They very much provide a set of services that we just wouldn’t be able to provide otherwise,” says Amy. “They definitely augment and facilitate our primary care services, but more than that, they provide a set of comprehensive health education services that we would not be offering without their presence. We had a patient here who had small children and were coming for malnourishment issues, and there was no food in their house. It was very complicated life story. Then all of a sudden I found out that the Corps Member had gotten groceries and taken them to the house of the family. Which is well beyond what anyone had ever asked them to do. It was such a striking moment of service. We have those all the time.”

Both Lauren and Amy are convinced that the Health Corps experience effects positive change in the population being served, the site where the service is performed, and in the Corps Members themselves. According to Lauren, “We are constantly getting really positive feedback from the agencies and the schools that they work with in terms of their roles and the impact they have on the students.”

Amy concludes, “I have two staff members - one of whom is now a manager for me - who were Corps Members who were assigned to me way back when. Community members who trained with the Chicago Health Corps and still work for me as employees. A health educator and a site manager. The Corps Members absolutely matter and we would be lost without them. They are one of my favorite parts of my job.”

## Change of Plan: CHC Member Anna McEvoy

It’s report card pick-up day at Roberto Clemente Community Academy, and CHC Members Sally Goodman and Anna McEvoy are handing out cookies. “We’re drawing them in with treats, and then getting them to fill out the survey,” Anna explains.

The survey was presented to students and parents at Clemente as part of a needs assessment phase for developing nutrition and physical activity intervention programs. “We did the student survey in the school health clinic,” says Anna. “The parents are being assessed for their knowledge of health behaviors and also what kind of program they think would be helpful for their children. We’ll use that information to design the intervention phase of the program, which will include staff providers, a behavior-health person, a health educator. Everyone on this team working together.”



**CHC Members Sally Goodman (left) and Anna McEvoy**



Assigned to Erie Family Health Center, Anna spends about two-thirds of her time at Clemente. “I’ve been working a lot on this, and the other third of the time I’m working at other Erie sites. Teaching classes... We run an after-school program at Henson Elementary where there’s another Erie Clinic. I like interacting with people and going into the classes and seeing new kids. Kind of changes it up a little bit. Going out, seeing different schools, different areas of the community. Working in

smaller clinics in the neighborhoods gives you a very different perspective on healthcare delivery systems than in large, impersonal facilities. Sometimes the kids surprise you with the questions they ask!”

Though Anna holds a Bachelor’s degree in Cell and Molecular Biology from the University of Michigan, a volunteer experience with the Muscular Dystrophy Association sparked a change of course, and she found herself also devoting time to The Girl Scouts and Mott Children’s Hospital. She credits these experiences with teaching her some valuable lessons: “The ability to live in the moment and not worry about the days and years to come, and the importance of believing in something, however seemingly unattainable... it has instilled in me the need to continue to work to make whatever positive difference I can in people’s lives.”

And the Chicago Health Corps experience? “Doing a year of service... Giving back... Definitely has been rewarding. This is a great group of people, and everyone’s supportive of each other.”



**Throughout the year, CHC Members participate in community service projects. Here, they work to rehab a classroom at Reavis Elementary School.**



## **Expanding Horizons** **Hanna Baker and** **The Uplift School Health Center**

“I’ve never had this much responsibility before. My site supervisor gives me a task and kind of lets me do what I need to do to get that done. I feel like I’m finding my own groove. Getting into the project was challenging, but I’ve found my ‘place’ in the clinic, fitting in nicely now that I’ve worked out all the kinks.”

Hanna Baker thrives on challenges. Holding a degree in Anthropology from State University of New York at Buffalo, Hanna decided to study abroad in Vietnam during her Junior year. “I chose a program that would allow me to not only expand my studies in a different culture, but also gave me the opportunity to integrate myself into the community by volunteering.”

Hanna’s current assignment is the School Health Center at Uplift Community High School. “I work in the clinic and teach reproductive health classes to the 9<sup>th</sup> graders as well as middle-schoolers. I’m also in charge of keeping track of students. Right now we’re doing immunizations for swine flu and seasonal flu. Making sure that everybody who wants a flu shot, gets their flu shot. Consent forms and everything.

“The kids can be quite a handful, but they’re also really awesome. The curriculum I’m using in the classroom, a lot of it I’ve developed, but I’ve also worked on building on what they’ve already had.

“I hope to take with me the continued desire to promote health. So hopefully I will continue in this field. It’s very challenging but I think I’ve already learned a lot from what I’ve been doing. I’m enjoying it. It’s very stressful, very challenging, but I like it.”



## A Day On January 18, 2010

In commemoration of MLK Day, the Chicago Health Corps took part in the third annual Project YES! literacy fair. Hosted locally by the Northwest University Settlement Association in the Noble Square neighborhood, hundreds of pre-K through high school students played literacy games, took part in story-based craft projects, a drama workshop, enjoyed a special visit from a children's author, and much more! CHC Members supported the fair by reading to children, distributing literacy kits and leading games and craft projects.

## The Chicago Health Corps Focus

The Chicago Health Corps (CHC) is part of a four-site National Direct AmeriCorps Program, funded since 1995 (with a hiatus during the 2003-2004 year). The CHC uses a **Primary Health Care (PHC)** perspective on health service delivery in designing its health and development initiatives. The PHC framework is consistent with national service as it is a model that emphasizes **partnership between community residents and health professionals** in achieving improved health for individuals, families and communities. PHC uses the strategies of **community participation**, implementation of **appropriate health technology**, **public education for health**, **decentralization** of resources and decision making, and **reducing disparities** in health services across geographic or social sectors. These strategies are supportive to the processes of **self-learning**, **self-determination**, **self-care**, and **self-reliance** on the part of community participants. Within PHC services, community or lay health workers are important in facilitating communication between community members, health professionals, and health agencies in their assigned CHC community host sites. The CHC success in providing Corps Members meaningful community service is evidenced by their exposure to a variety of educational, social, and cultural experiences in a supportive environment at their host sites.

## The Chicago Health Corps Outcomes

In its fourteen-year history, the CHC has improved access to primary health care services for low-income Chicago neighborhoods and has trained over 265 Members to reach out to ethnically diverse communities. Corps Members do not replace existing agency personnel, but rather expand the health and social service capacity of the community sites in which they serve. Corps Member activities enable the sites to provide vital services to more people, and implement innovative, high quality, culturally sensitive programs. Corps Members are transformed in significant ways: The program strengthens Members' commitment to an ethic of service by providing hands-on, front line experiences. The services provided by Members are distinct from typical volunteer programs. Given the mandatory term of service of 1,700 hours, and the mandate to provide direct health relevant services, Members design, develop, test, implement and evaluate creative health projects under the supervision of health care professionals at their host sites.

