

Christina Cuevas, Mary Lou Goeke, Kathleen King: Healthy Kids is a local brand of health care reform

Kudos to the Sentinel for its series on Healthy Kids of Santa Cruz County Jan. 22-24, illuminating how this model program has successfully covered thousands of local children. As representatives of charitable giving organizations, and co-founders of the program, we wanted to underscore that Healthy Kids isn't going anywhere in the short term, thanks to the generous support of local individuals and businesses.

Today, there are 1,905 children covered by Healthy Kids and we continue to aggressively raise the funds needed to keep them covered, with an eye toward expanding the program if at all possible in order to cover those 6-18 year olds currently on a waiting list. But that will take additional community support.

Local individuals have given generously because they understand that access to essential preventive care is key to a child's healthy development. Annual utilization reports show that Healthy Kids members are accessing well-child visits and other primary care services at rates that are in the 90th percentile when compared to national standards.

Donors give because the program contributes to a more cost-effective system of care. A USC study showed that in nine counties operating a Healthy Kids program, including Santa Cruz, there was a 25 percent reduction in avoidable hospitalizations, saving the state over \$7 million in one year.

Supporters tell us they want all children to have access to timely immunizations to prevent the spread of communicable diseases and thereby protect the public's health.

We'd like to acknowledge the generosity of each of our organizations' boards of directors, for prioritizing the health of children by investing in Healthy Kids. Nearly 10 years ago, the Community Foundation helped convene community leaders to tackle the issue of the uninsured. Five years later they seeded a Healthy Kids Fund at the Foundation with grants of nearly \$50,000, and they have been working with donors and other collaborators to sustain Healthy Kids ever since.

The United Way, which awards grants to the program, commends the generosity of hundreds of local residents who earmark Healthy Kids in their United Way payroll deductions each year.

The Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust also contributes annually, and cites its donors for investing in the health of Pajaro Valley children who comprise the largest percentage of our county's low-income, uninsured children.

Solutions out of Sacramento or Washington may be a long time coming. But that doesn't mean that local kids need to forgo health care or that their parents need to choose between a dental appointment and a meal. Healthy Kids demonstrates that our community can achieve a local brand of health care reform when we all pull together.

Our commitment to sustaining Healthy Kids is as strong as ever. Please join us by making a donation at www.schealthykids.org. You can help us sustain Healthy Kids so we can ensure that every child in Santa Cruz County enjoys the healthiest possible start in life.

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