

Building Blocks for a Healthier Community

I was enjoying dinner with my family the other night, when Michael, our youngest son sneezed. "Bless you," I responded empathetically, worrying that he was coming down with something. Bless you is truly what I meant. I began thinking about how blessed my child was to have a family, a meal, a bed, clothing, and a doctor who truly cares about his well-being. When my children are sick, I call our family physician. Doesn't everyone?

The next morning I call my physician at Rocking Horse Center to schedule an appointment for my son. I love taking my children to their physician, because immediately upon walking through the door, they feel right at home. In the waiting area, the sun streams into the many windows of the brightly colored room. There are books and toys around for them to play with before their appointment. A warm receptionist smiles, and a caregiver roams the room asking parents how their children are doing. It is truly a medical home; a home where bonds are strengthened.

Michael begins playing with another boy his age as we wait our turn to be seen. The other boy is very pale and thin, yet is still playful in this environment. I watch them as they run out the door to the enclosed playground.

The young woman sitting next to me introduces herself as Sam's mom, Michael's new friend. She doesn't look old enough to be a mom, and appears very tired. She begins to tell me how wonderful it is to finally take her children to a doctor who cares. At first, I didn't understand what she was trying to say. And then she elaborated. She told me that she was a 22 year-old, single mom, raising three children on her own, because her husband was recently incarcerated. She had not been able to finish high school, and the third shift job that she worked didn't pay much and she didn't have medical benefits. Recently her electricity had been shut off, and she didn't have enough money to buy diapers and groceries. She said her children had a medical card, but most doctors didn't accept it. She was thankful that Rocking Horse Center accepted all children regardless of their family financial situation. She proceeded to tell me about her other children and the services they received at Rocking Horse Center. There is a family advocate who has been working with her to get her electricity turned back on, food on the table and diapers for her new baby. The family advocate also referred her to GED remediation classes at another agency. The developmental specialist is teaching her positive parenting skills, while the child and family therapist is working with Sam on his temper tantrums.

As I listened to her story, I couldn't imagine being a mom who couldn't take her child to the doctor when he was sick. I asked her what she did before Rocking Horse Center and she said she utilized the emergency room at the local hospital or did nothing at all. As she rose to get Sam for his appointment, I thanked her for sharing her story with me, and I thanked Rocking Horse Center for being there for her.

With 7,200 Clark County children living below the poverty level, the Rocking Horse Center is seeking to fill a vitally important need in the community.

Opening its doors in the summer of 1999, The Rocking Horse Center has expanded from 1,500 patients to nearly 5,000 patients. Those numbers are rapidly growing.

Serving as a “medical home” to low and middle-income children who may be left behind, Dr. James Duffee, founder, pediatrician, psychiatrist and medical director of Rocking Horse Center, is seeking to expand facilities to meet the increasing demand of pediatric healthcare.

More than just a health care facility, The Rocking Horse Center strives to provide low-income families with educational assistance, crisis intervention services, and links to other assisting agencies. They also provide opportunities such as the Parent Leadership Training Institute in order to educate individuals about becoming leaders both for their children and in the community.

But with all the good The Rocking Horse Center accomplishes, there is still a great need. Rapid growth necessitates expansion of the center, and funds are desperately needed to provide critical services to a growing number of underserved children. As the center strives to extend its services, the community is being asked to help The Rocking Horse Center join in the belief that every child has the right to obtain high quality health care, regardless of their family income.

At The Rocking Horse Center, the caregivers are addressing issues far more important than simply the health of children. They are addressing the success of each child’s future.

If you would like more information or would like to help The Rocking Horse Center please contact: Jennifer Sheehan at jsheehan@rockinghorsecenter.org.