

## Investing in Families, Transforming a Community

Sponsor: California Hospital Medical Center

Location: Los Angeles, CA

What became the Hope Street Family Center in Los Angeles began a decade ago with a federally funded Early Head Start program. At that time, M. Lynn Yonekura, a perinatologist just recruited to California Hospital Medical Center, was given "carte blanche to develop any program that would help our families," she says. That initiative blossomed into an array of family service programs that have strengthened the community, trained parents to be advocates and leaders, and helped would-be drop-outs stay in school, even excel.

"It's a good example of a hospital going outside its traditional bounds to address the needs of its neighborhood, and it's part of our core philosophy that to address health care, you have to address the whole human," says Mark Meyers, president of California Hospital Medical Center.

The hospital sits in the heart of central LA, an impoverished area with the highest crime and lowest literacy rates in Los Angeles County.

An Early Head Start parental advisory group is essential in identifying needed services. One of the first was an after-school program. "We thought it would just be an enrichment program because the kids were getting Bs and Cs," Yonekura says. "But after giving them reading tests, we found they were reading two to three levels below grade. It wasn't surprising that they were dropping out."

From there, successes mounted and programs abounded. Licensed child care facilities and a network of in-home child care providers help families juggle multiple jobs and offers employment opportunities for local residents. A family literacy program integrates parenting education with reading and language instruction and other adult education courses. A continuation high school for dropouts and problem students relocated to the Hope Street campus. The Esperanza Project improves the health and social functioning of low-income first-time young mothers and their children.

The initiatives have reshaped the community: immunization rates climbed to 96 percent from 8 percent, the percentage of parents employed doubled to 90 percent, and one-third now participate in adult education. An unheard-of 95 percent of continuation high school students have earned diplomas, and after one year, the reading skills of students in the after-school program went up an average of 2.1 grade levels. Perhaps the most notable change is the neighborhood itself. "When I came here, I was told this community was very transient, and that people would move away as soon as they could," Yonekura says. "But now our families recognize the importance of what we're doing and they don't leave."

**THE PROBLEM:** Neighborhood surrounding California Hospital Medical Center rife with health, social and economic challenges.

**THE PLAYERS:** California Hospital Medical Center; University of California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County schools and health department.

**THE PLAN:** Develop programs and services to meet the needs of the community.

**THE RESULTS:** Children's reading skills rose more than two grade levels, immunization rates jumped to 96 percent from 8 percent, and 95 percent of continuation high school students graduated.

**Caption**

The Hope Street Family Center was born when M. Lynn Yonekura, M.D., a perinatologist, was given the charge to develop a program that would help families with child development, family literacy and support.

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