

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

Sponsor: Integris Health

Location: Oklahoma City, OK

Oklahoma City's Western Village is a tough neighborhood by any standard. In 1998, its crime rate was 33 percent higher than the rest of the city. More than 65 percent of local students came from single-parent households and many got little supervision, contributing to an escalating juvenile crime rate. The area had the highest rate of child abuse in the county.

In the middle of it all sat Western Village Elementary School and its 340 students. With the lowest test scores and highest truancy rate in the city, the school was slated for closure. That's when Guy Sconzo, Oklahoma City superintendent of public schools, came to Integris for help. With input from local and state school officials and juvenile authorities, Integris embarked on a campaign that in less than two years transformed the school into Western Village Academy, the first charter elementary school in the state.

Under the direction of Tobi Campbell, program administrator, Integris developed a hands-on curriculum using music, art, drama, dance and creative writing to teach subjects like math, science and language. In addition, it set up an after-school "academy," where students could safely study until dinner time, and created a forum for ex-gang members to concentrate their organizational skills and leadership ability on becoming entrepreneurs.

The hospital also introduced Positive Direction Mentoring, in which volunteers are recruited to work one-on-one with students for at least an hour a week to improve their reading, math and language, and even behavior.

Integris also kept tabs on the youngsters' health with comprehensive screenings throughout the year: 98 percent got proper immunizations and almost every student was screened for vision, dental, hearing and growth problems. Health care workers also focused on asthma, a chronic problem among youngsters in the community. The results: in one year, the number of students achieving passing reading scores climbed from 41 to 49 percent; in math, from 88 to 93 percent; and, most impressively, in writing, from 59 to 86 percent. While overall attendance improved slightly, suspensions were cut in half.

When the program began, Campbell says, "students would come in and say, 'Who are you doing this for?' They couldn't believe it was for them. Now they are taking pride."

The youngsters had seldom been treated as though they had the potential to succeed. "It's been great for their self-esteem knowing that people from the community are there for them for the long haul," Campbell says.

The Problem: Failing test scores and absenteeism put local elementary school in need of rescue.

The Players: Integris Health and Oklahoma City Public Schools.

The Plan: Develop a curriculum to engage students and improve their performances, set up after-school program, recruit mentors for one-on-one tutoring, screen students for health problems.

The Results: In one year, test scores increased, most dramatically in writing; suspensions decreased; attendance improved.

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