

For the benefit of the community

Sponsor: John C. Lincoln Health Network

Location: Phoenix, AZ

When Dan Coleman was being considered in 1987 for the top job at Phoenix's John C. Lincoln Health Network, his interviewers never even mentioned Desert Mission, the network's community service arm. After he was hired as president and CEO, Coleman had his hands full improving operations at the financially struggling hospital. Still, in his first year he made time for community service after a visit from a local school principal, who told him kids weren't learning because they were sick or hurt.

In response, John C. Lincoln dispatched a nurse practitioner to the schools. It was the beginning of a beefed-up outreach program that last year amounted to \$11 million and involves a constellation of services, including real estate development, a food bank, family support programs, a children's dental clinic and a 326-child day care center. John C. Lincoln concentrates its efforts on Sunnyslope, an 8-square-mile area that is home to Lincoln's main campus and 50,000 residents. The neighborhood suffers from crime, urban blight and poverty. For its wide-ranging community service effort, the network won this year's \$100,000 Foster G. McGaw prize for community service. The award is sponsored by the American Hospital Association; Baxter International Foundation, Deerfield, Ill.; and Cardinal Health Foundation, Dublin, Ohio.

After sending the nurse practitioner to treat children's health issues, the network tackled an equally troubling problem: many kids were going to school hungry. In response, the network's food pantry provides daily snacks to four elementary schools.

At least one board member still wasn't satisfied. "We are really just treating the symptoms," she told Coleman. "We ought to get at the root of the problem." Coleman agreed, and set about building a program that makes the best use of scarce resources. "We can't keep going as we are," he says. "We don't have all the money we need to provide all the health care we need in our current way of doing things."

Beyond improving the physical health of its neighbors, John C. Lincoln's programs seek to enrich their lives by keeping families together and improving their housing and neighborhoods.

Coleman gives the go-ahead for such initiatives only if their long-term existence is guaranteed. A four-year federal grant helped launch the Marley House Family Support Center in 1996. Coleman knew the network couldn't fully fund it after the grant ran out, so the network raised \$2.8 million to create a Marley House endowment. The network's food bank and child care center also had capital campaigns to keep them serving Sunnyslope residents. "The people need these services whether or not the hospital is having a good year financially," Coleman says. "We don't have discussions about whether we can continue to do community service, just like we don't have discussions about whether we can continue to operate an emergency room. It's part of who we are-- it's part of what we do."

Nourishing the spirit

Before the Desert Mission Food Bank opens at 9 a.m., neighborhood residents are already lined up for free groceries. Through a statewide "gleaning" program, the food

bank gets produce that farmers can't sell to stores. Today, the bumper crop is roma tomatoes. A life-size fiberglass smiling chef offers visitors plastic bags to carry their produce. "This stretches their food dollars," explains Jerry Ketelhut, food bank director.

Sunnyslope's residents need the help; 72 percent of the neighborhood's elementary schoolchildren qualified for free or reduced-price lunches in the 2001-2002 school year, compared with 40 percent countywide. The food bank's 7,000-square-foot warehouse, complete with a refrigeration room, holds food that will go into emergency food boxes, and to discount food boxes, in which residents can purchase \$40 worth of food for \$15 in cash or food stamps. The facility gives out 17,000 emergency food boxes a year. Twenty-nine percent go to adults who are able to work; 83 percent of them are working or in job training and still cannot afford enough food.

A hospital-run food bank is unusual, but Ketelhut points out that it makes for some interesting synergies. For instance, the hospital's dietary staff makes sure the food boxes are nutritionally balanced. More importantly, the food bank often serves as a first point of contact for residents needing other services. Last October, a man named Mike came in with a referral for emergency food. Ketelhut saw in the man's face that something was wrong, and learned that Mike's automotive repair tools were stolen from his truck. A single parent of two school-age girls, Mike was feeling desperate. "His life was taken away from him," Ketelhut says.

Ketelhut took Mike to Marley House to receive services referrals. A case worker found the family temporary housing after Mike and his daughters were evicted; his daughters were able to attend the after-school program at the network's day care center, and Mike currently works in John C. Lincoln's transportation department. "It's a network that works," Ketelhut says.

Facilitating solutions

To get a better picture of Sunnyslope, Coleman hired an outside vendor to conduct a community needs assessment. One discovery: many organizations in the area were ready to help, but didn't know about each other and were unknown to their target audiences.

To make the connections, the Sunnyslope Youth and Family Partnership was started in 1994. It had humble beginnings, with representatives from several organizations meeting in a garage, but the group quickly found a focus, recalls Sheila Gerry, a Lincoln senior vice president who oversees many of its service programs. "We all agreed we wanted to help kids," Gerry says. She was spurred to action by a photograph of a local toddler sleeping outdoors under a broken window, with a basketball for a pillow. "Some children were living in awful conditions, and their parents needed the resources to make their lives better."

The partnership now has 44 members, including schools, churches, the police, neighborhood watch groups, and youth outreach programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters. They meet monthly to learn about community needs, work on solutions, prevent duplication and even resolve disputes.

In one case, neighborhood groups were reporting problems with schoolchildren who were "at-home suspension" cases, troublemakers considered too disruptive to serve detention at school. However, while their parents were at work, these kids often were

outside, causing problems. Partnership members decided the "at home" suspended students should perform community service. "Then these at-risk kids got positive reinforcement for helping out, and that made them less likely to misbehave," Gerry says.

Still, community agencies often don't work together. "No one wants to be the facilitator," Coleman says. So, Lincoln connects members via a newsletter and serves as a repository of information about Sunnyslope and funding opportunities. Sometimes the network lends staff--such as a grant writer--to partners, to help them with tasks they couldn't do on their own.

Sunnyslope has reaped benefits. Drug crimes are down, turnover has slowed at the elementary and middle schools, the high school dropout rate fell and domestic violence reports decreased 17 percent between 1997 and 2001. "We haven't transformed the community," Gerry says. "The people have. We just helped them find their voice."

Part of that transformation occurred through Marley House, designed to be a one-stop family resource center. Eight agencies from the Sunnyslope Youth and Family Partnership collaborate to provide case management and support services to 1,500 families. The main goal: to prevent child abuse and neglect. Through Marley House, families can receive counseling, employment assistance, parenting classes and recreational activities for children.

Child abuse and neglect reports for Sunnyslope rose in the early 1990s, but declined by 62 percent from 1999 to 2001. Ninety-nine percent of families who participated in Marley House services had no substantiated reports of child abuse six months after leaving the program. "We want to help these families before there's abuse," Coleman says. "And, we want families to be in secure environments so they'll stay together."

Vigorous volunteers

Lincoln managers give credit to others, particularly to volunteers who make many of their community service efforts possible. Some 70 food bank volunteers spend 21,000 hours each year at the pantry, the equivalent of 10 full-time staffers.

In the children's dental clinic, 43 dentists donate services valued at \$376,000 a year, says Eric Santiago, director of the children's health program. Most of the children have no dental insurance and don't qualify for public support. On a recent Tuesday morning, the waiting room is packed with families; all four dental chairs are filled. Some children are in for routine visits. Thanks to public and private donations, the cost is a maximum of \$15 per child, regardless of the work performed.

Children also come from a screening program in the schools--if urgent care is necessary, an appointment is scheduled at the clinic. In 2002, more than 6,300 children were screened and 472 children received urgent care. At the clinic, thank-you notes in children's scrawl line the walls. "Some of these kids have never had their own toothbrush," says Kathy Fitzgerald, dental clinic supervisor. In one note to the clinic, a 13-year-old who tried to super glue a broken tooth expressed the gratitude felt by many. "Thank you. The pain is gone," he wrote. It's a good experience for the dentists, too; some have volunteered at the clinic for more than 25 years.

Senior managers at John C. Lincoln share the volunteer verve. Last year, 100 new, unassembled bicycles were donated to the food pantry's holiday "adopt a family"

program on a Friday afternoon. The gifts were to be distributed at 10 a.m. the next day. While Marley House went to work identifying kids to receive the bikes, a dozen Lincoln staffers, including vice presidents and CEO Coleman, were out in the parking lot bolting them together. "Probably more than a few executives get tired of being so far from the action," Coleman says. Then, more seriously: "Helping people is very enriching and rewarding. It's what I signed up for when I went into health care. Our staff is very proud of what we do in the community; they know we've been a part of something very good for children and families."

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