

## Broad Approach For Lasting Impact

Sponsor: ST. Mary Medical Center

Location: Langhorne, PA

Bucolic Bucks County is the second most affluent county in Pennsylvania, but the Bristol-Bensalem area is one of the poorest and most underserved. Following a needs assessment of area residents, St. Mary Medical Center embarked on an ambitious initiative to raise the level of health and improve the lives of the neediest county citizens. Now an umbrella for several programs, Bensalem Ministries was started in 1991 with Mother Bachmann Maternity Center, the only one of its kind in the area that accepts women regardless of their ability to pay. In addition to prenatal care and delivery, patients receive childbirth, smoking cessation and parenting education.

Two years later, St. Mary Children's Health Center opened to meet the needs of children either covered by Medicaid or lacking health insurance. Each year, the center serves more than 800 children and works with parents to find resources and access the health care system.

In 1998, Bensalem Ministries established the Family Resource Center, a collection of programs and services designed to empower families to make sustainable changes in their lives. Services include job readiness, parenting classes, counseling and case management, life skills classes, literacy and English as a Second Language courses, and drug and alcohol counseling. "We found that if we kept families connected to resources and not just Band-Aid their immediate problems, they would get the tools they needed to stay out of poverty," explains Terri Rivera, administrative director for Community Health Services at St. Mary.

The center is home to numerous community organizations, making it easy for them to cross-refer families as needed. A special interest of the center is in preparing clients for careers in health care. St. Mary supports the initiative by hiring job-ready participants and providing ongoing mentoring to ensure their success. As part of the center, St. Mary rents three emergency apartments where homeless families can be housed for four to six months, during which time they receive intensive case management, parenting classes and other comprehensive services.

The latest Bensalem Ministries program is an adult primary care center, opened in 2002. Like other initiatives, the primary care center operates with community partners. "A hallmark of St. Mary is that we bring all these organizations together toward a common goal. The only way to grow our mission is through collaboration," says Gregory Wozniak, president and chief executive officer.

The consortium of partners and programs has had a lasting impact on the people it serves, Rivera says. "We've provided a diverse community the ability not only to get the health care and resources they need, but also to sustain changes that will improve the health of families."

**THE PROBLEM:** Impoverished Bristol-Bensalem residents lacked access to care and faced challenges in breaking the cycle of poverty.

**THE PLAYERS:** St. Mary Medical Center, Catholic Social Services, Volunteers in Teaching Alternatives, Bucks County YWCA, Bensalem School District, Family Service Association of Bucks County, Bucks County Housing Group, A Women's Place, Children and Youth Services, Bucks County Health Improvement Project.

**THE PLAN:** Implement services that meet residents' health care needs and help them make sustainable, life-improving changes.

**THE RESULTS:** During 2002, 115 individuals completed job preparedness training and found employment, 118 clients took Graduate Equivalency Diploma and English as a Second Language courses, and 30 families received case management with more than 75 percent meeting all their treatment goals.

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