

Network Unites A Community

Sponsor: Trinity Regional Medical Center

Location: Fort Dodge, IA

Health care futurist Leland Kaiser planted the seed for Trinity Regional Medical Center's Community Action Network. After hearing Kaiser speak about hospital boards taking a leadership role in creating healthier communities, the TRMC board pledged 10 percent of the hospital's net operating income to projects that would strengthen Fort Dodge and surrounding Webster County.

Both the concept for the Community Action Network and eight goals for the Fort Dodge area emerged from a series of communitywide meetings and surveys. "At that time, if someone wanted to impact the quality of life here, there was no place to go. Community Action Network is a clearinghouse for cutting-edge ideas to improve the health and welfare of our community," says Randy Kuhlman, senior staff member at TRMC and administrative director of Community Action Network.

The 18-member Community Action Network steering committee has only one representative from TRMC. The others come from all walks of life and are united in a "desire to make the community better, and all have a big-picture perspective," Kuhlman says.

Since its inception in 1998, Community Action Network has sponsored an array of programs that have impacted thousands. HealthPartners provides health screening and education programs. Fort Dodge Free Clinic provides primary care in three locations; 94 percent of its patients are uninsured. The Parenting Task Force, a coalition of 22 agencies, offers parenting education programs, while Character Counts! of Fort Dodge focuses on youth leadership development and character education.

Positive health outcomes aside, Community Action Network has brought broader changes to Fort Dodge, including a can-do community spirit and collaborations that didn't exist before. "We used to operate in our own silos, but now there's collaborative planning, open communication and sharing of resources," Kuhlman says. Case in point: the Community Action Network grant writer worked with Fort Dodge Community Schools to secure \$650,000 in funding for an after-school program.

TRMC has provided the lion's share of financial support for Community Action Network: more than \$1.8 million over the last six years. Still, the success of the initiative rests squarely with the community, according to Tom Tibbitts, chief executive officer of TRMC. "We determined early on to stay out of the way and let the leadership and community do their own thing. People know we're participating, but it's not heavy-handed," he says. That has brought its own reward. "We've helped the community understand the hospital as a resource, and there's a greater sense of us belonging to the community," Tibbitts says. "It's improved the overall image of the organization and our physicians."

THE PROBLEM: Hospital board identified need to lead the community to better health.

THE PLAYERS: Trinity Regional Medical Center, Fort Dodge Community Schools, City of Fort Dodge, Iowa Central Community College, Fort Dodge Police Department, First Presbyterian Church and St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

THE PLAN: Contribute 10 percent of hospital's net operating income and collaborate with the community to address eight broad health, social and economic goals for the area.

THE RESULTS: Approximately 30,000 health screening procedures performed; more than \$2.8 million in grant funding secured; recognition as an All-America City for working together to identify and tackle community-wide challenges and achieve uncommon results.

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