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Grant helps University health clinic treat another condition: poverty

The nurses still talk about the day they ate so well at lunch, a feast that took who-knows-how-long to prepare. The meal was a gift from the mother of one of their patients at the Children's Wellness Center, a low-income pediatric clinic in Del Valle, where money is scarcer than gratitude.



His own exam finished, 4-year-old DeVante Miranda turns the tables on certified nurse practitioner Pat Budd at the Children's Wellness Center in Del Valle.

For the past decade the Children's Wellness Center, operated through the School of Nursing at The University of Texas at Austin in partnership with the Del Valle Independent School District and funded jointly by the University, private grants, Medicaid/CHIP reimbursements, and whatever patients can afford to pay, has been the only health-care provider for children in this poor, mostly Hispanic community near the Austin airport. Now, with a grant from Impact Austin, some Del Valle youth will get the chance to become health-care providers themselves.

The center will use its June 12 grant from Impact Austin to take a dozen young people from Del Valle and give them the training, practical experience, mentoring, and personal support to become clinical nursing assistants. They'll be paid during their on-the-job training, which in turn will help the center care for more of their neighbors. Three students at a time will train in the six-month program until all 12 are done at the end of two years. At the end they'll have marketable skills to lift themselves out of poverty.

"A lot of these kids have no idea they can even get out of the cycle of poverty, or that education is the way out," says center director Pat Budd, a certified pediatric nurse practitioner and instructor in the School of Nursing. Budd invites Del Valle teens graduating from high school or receiving their GEDs to think about applying for the program, slated to begin soon.

Impact Austin, a charity made up of women who pool their money and donate it to worthy causes, chose the Children's Wellness Center out of 400 health-and-welfare inquiries it received this year. Anna Clepper, director of grants for Impact Austin, says the charity was impressed that the center's plan would help both the young people directly involved as well as the larger community.

"The Children's Wellness Center staff is so



Rebecca Powers knew she had seen her brother alive for the last time. She, her parents, her siblings, and her brother's children had gathered to visit him one last time in Sacramento before the cancer took him away. Now she was flying home to Austin, thumbing through a magazine when she saw an article about a woman in Cincinnati who started a community charity.

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committed to the success of this program and has such a compelling desire to give young people in Del Valle the opportunity for a career and a future that can sustain them financially and break the cycle of poverty," says Rebecca Powers, president and founder of Impact Austin.

That cycle has a stranglehold on Del Valle: More than 74 percent of children in the school district live in economically disadvantaged families. Del Valle has the highest birthrate for girls younger than 14 in the state. The high school graduation rate is the lowest in Travis County and among the lowest in the state. Families move about so much that half of the children who begin the academic year in Del Valle schools don't finish it there.

"It's a constant reality check," says Linda Murphy, who teaches community health nursing at the University, is the CWC community health nurse, and serves as school nurse at the Opportunity Center, the alternative high school that shares its campus with the Children's Wellness Center.

But there are bright spots, and one of them has just walked into the Children's Wellness Center. His name is DeVante Miranda, and he's 4 years old. Budd has known DeVante since he was a baby. Budd and DeVante tease each other, and DeVante brags about helping his mother with his baby sister, 4-month-old Raina. Budd looks into his mouth and ears; he looks into hers. Budd listens to Raina's heart; DeVante climbs on the examining table to help with the stethoscope. All along Budd keeps up a running chat with the children's mother, Dalia. Communicating with parents keeps children healthy, catches small problems before they become big ones.

Prevention is an important part of the clinic's mission. Of the 50 patients it sees daily, about half are for immunizations. The result is one statistic that does Del Valle proud. Statewide, 71 percent of children are current on their immunizations. In Del Valle that number jumps to 98 percent.

The Children's Wellness Center began in 1995 in a single classroom. Since then it has grown into two mobile units on the Opportunity Center campus. One unit serves as a clinic and one houses administrative functions. Besides providing health care to the children of Del Valle, the center is a place for almost 200 UT students to learn and gain hands-on experience in nursing, social work, educational psychology, and human development.

Budd knows that her nursing students can expect to watch their patients struggle against poverty and circumstance while they themselves train for a profession so grueling that the country never has enough of them. And she knows why they're doing it.

"You get to make an impact every single day of your life," Budd says. "There's nothing in this world that will get you out of bed faster than knowing that."

— Angela Curtis

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