

Health Center Spotlight

Health Center Innovation: Building Workforce Pipelines with Youth Engagement

Semillas de Salud Program by El Centro Family Health



Website:

<https://ecfh.org/>



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El Centro Family Health Center's Semillas de Salud Program in rural New Mexico began when Matthew Probst, a PA at the clinic at the time, would see kids waiting for the bus 20 miles out of town with nothing to do. The area was struggling to thrive, but Matthew was an optimist and thought of an innovative way to engage kids and give them hope. He started an afterschool Health Career Club for interested kids.

With almost no funds to start, Matthew decided to staff the program through peer-education. He knew local community college students in EMT and other health care training programs, like the PA program he went through, who would enjoy teaching high school and middle school students about health topics the students cared about, like "what to do if you get bitten by a rattlesnake?"

With students teaching students, he knew the program would naturally become human-centered and motivational. He found it easy to partner with the community college to engage students in this initiative.

"I love youth mentoring, but I don't have time. On the other hand, I can teach someone to teach, so the multiplier effect becomes dramatic. It's more impactful for behavior change when students teach students; more than even trained staff can provide. In a way, our program is like a pyramid scheme!"

Mathew Probst, PA-C & Chief Quality Officer

Matthew designed the Semillas de Salud program so older students in the club become mentors to help younger students get curious about health and health care careers. The high school students teach other high schoolers plus middle schoolers, and the middle schoolers teach other middle schoolers and elementary school students. They discuss topics that matter to them, such as the role of the country doctor, pathways and opportunities at rural health clinics, positive relationships, self-care, and fighting the stigma of addiction. Students are empowered to serve as young leaders, and they gain hands-on experience through clinical rotations at the health center.

At this point, El Centro has offered clinical rotations to almost 600 students who also pay-it-forward to the area youth with community projects and mentorship in health center professions.



Trained peer health educators who began in Health Career Clubs have become part of El Centro's workforce. To date, the impact is 44 licensed health professional hires that keep this FQHC well-staffed, and their rural communities well cared for.

Data also suggests that community-driven recruitment – like that at El Centro, leads to better retention for health professionals, improved health equity, and better care for patients.

Providing opportunity and hope to rural and underserved middle and high school students has its own health care impact. As students learn about health and prevention, the impact links back to better health outcomes for their School-Based Health Center services, run by El Centro.

This program has gained so much interest, that El Centro is now working with the New Mexico Department of Education, the public education division, the New Mexico Primary Care Association, and the New Mexico Hospital Association to expand the program across all seven counties in New Mexico.

To learn more, please watch the highly acclaimed documentary "The Providers", a film and discussion tool to inspire the next generation of rural health care providers and review the High School Guide and Lesson Plans.