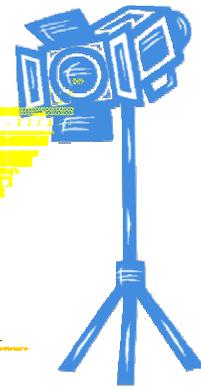




CSHC Spotlight on:

Health & Enrichment Center John F. Kennedy High School



Collaboration--that's the operative word when it comes to describing the Health & Enrichment Center at Kennedy High School in Richmond, California. The health center is unique in that it is sponsored by the YMCA of the East Bay and has brought together nearly a dozen other organizations to provide services and programs to the students of Kennedy High. "Our success is due to how effectively we've collaborated and coordinated services here," explains Bianca La Chau, Health & Enrichment Center Director. "Working with our consultant (funded by Kaiser), we meet monthly with all our partners to plan, share information, and coordinate services. We wanted to be sure we did it right from the very start." La Chau also credits the field coordinators at CSHC for providing much needed guidance in implementing a needs assessment survey, assisting with fundraising activities, and answering a myriad of questions during the start-up process.

The health center had its roots in the mental health services provided by the YMCA of the East Bay. When the school district put out an RFP for the health center, the YMCA responded. "We've always had a particular affinity for Kennedy High," explains Kate Gillyooly, Director of Mental Health Programs at the YMCA of the East Bay. "We'd been very successful providing mental health services there for years and we had long-term relationships with school personnel that made us comfortable responding to the RFP." The YMCA currently pays the salary of the health center's director and sponsors several programs at the school. The YMCA was also instrumental in getting a five-year grant for the health center from 21st Century Community

Partners

YMCA of the East Bay: director, mental health professionals, and Activate America program
Contra Costa Health Services: mobile medical van: nurse practitioner, health educator, Medi-Cal outreach/enrollment
West Contra Costa Unified School District: facilities, prevention and intervention programs, help fund director
Kaiser Permanente: funding facilitator and two part-time staff positions, physician (volunteer)
Youth Services Bureau: wrap-around services for students and families who are eligible for Medi-Cal
Planned Parenthood: reproductive health education, counseling, and testing
Community Health for Asian Americans: behavioral health care services for Asians/Pacific Islanders
The Mentoring Center of Oakland: group mentoring services for young men
Bay Area Community Resources: facilitator for drug and alcohol issues

With so many partners, programs and services, it would be easy for some things to get lost in the mix or to waste resources by duplicating efforts. "We avoided those pitfalls because we planned and coordinated extensively from the very beginning and every partner has had an equal voice in the process," says La Chau.

The programs offered through the Health & Enrichment Center not only focus on health, but academics and social issues as well. "We

call ourselves ‘health and enrichment’ because we really want to make sure we are providing programs that enrich and enhance the lives of our students here,” reports La Chaux. To that end, a variety of programs are offered at the health center and in other locations on campus. The mobile health van comes three times a week to provide medical exams, supplies, and testing services. Y Team mental health counselors are available at the health center four days a week. Academic tutoring provides one-on-one help with homework. There’s mentoring for young men and “charm school” for young women to learn life skills and improve self-esteem. There is a fit club for aerobics, yoga and strength training. There are hip hop and Latin dance classes, as well as an after school arts program. The focus of all the programs is to improve the lives of the students and to increase graduation rates.

Students at Kennedy High have embraced the programs and are enthusiastic about what they’re learning. The health center has become a popular destination for students and a place where they regularly hang out after school. Peer educators have been trained to get the word out and lead the way in the YMCA’s “Activate America” program focused on goal setting and making healthy choices. A health center youth board has also been recruited and received training and guidance from CSHC consultant, Jesus Verduzco. “Jesus has been instrumental in helping us with our youth board,” notes La Chaux. “He’s met with the youth numerous times and provided guidance and resources. We really feel we’ve been able to build a strong base for youth involvement which will be critical to our ongoing success.”

For many students, the health center has been a lifeline; a safe place to come where they know they’ll find someone they can talk to and trust. The health center was recently instrumental in helping an emancipated foster child who was about to graduate. She had no other support system and was feeling overwhelmed with the decisions she had to make. This student stopped by the health center daily and was assisted with everything from dealing with her

emotions to finding an apartment and a job. Another student was struggling to survive on \$5 a day and feeling suicidal because he was always hungry. Health center staff helped him learn how to stretch his funds further and make better food choices with what is available to him. The health center even has a refrigerator that is stocked with items from the local food bank so hungry students can take what they need.

La Chaux wants to be sure every student at Kennedy High School knows they can come to the health center for anything that’s bothering them. She sees the health center as part of a larger team that includes the school, the many partners providing services, or the community. “If there’s something going on in a student’s life that they need help with, I want them to come here so we can help them or make sure they get referred to the right resources,” says La Chaux. “Healthy students are happy and successful students.”

By Aileen Olson

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www.schoolhealthcenters.org

California School Health Centers Association

Started: 2007

Sponsor: YMCA of the East Bay

Facility: Staff offices, Reception area, Private counseling rooms, Student computer area, Mobile van.

Staff: Center Director, After School Coordinator, Mental Health Counselor, 4 Social Work Interns, After School Programs Staff (5), Volunteer Physician, Nurse Practitioner

Programs: Medical, Mental Health, Reproductive Health, Academic & Enrichment Programs

Student Body: 900-1,000