

Florida KidCare *Innovations*

Highlighting Innovative Outreach Strategies

Expanding Florida KidCare Outreach through City Councils

Florida has approximately 800,000 children with no health insurance, the second highest number of uninsured children in the United States. Research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows most uninsured children may qualify for programs like Florida KidCare, and that their families would apply if they only knew about it.

There are many ways to increase Florida KidCare enrollment: targeting underserved and hard-to-reach communities; working with community-based organizations, emergency departments, businesses, faith communities, and schools; advertising and earning media; attending health and enrollment fairs; and providing application and premium assistance, to name a few.

Advocacy and lobbying of elected officials are also ways of promoting Florida KidCare. But what about *enlisting elected officials themselves to conduct outreach?* This report describes one organization's approach to do that very thing.



Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition

Florida's Healthy Start program offers universal risk screening of pregnant women and newborn infants to identify those at risk of poor birth, health, and developmental outcomes. Healthy Start was created in 1991 by Governor Lawton Chiles with bipartisan support from the Florida Legislature. Their goal was to reduce Florida's high infant mortality rate by funding services and building local coalitions around the state dedicated to this task.

In addition to risk screening, Healthy Start Coalitions also provide services that complement prenatal and other health care provided by doctors and clinics, such as: information and referral, comprehensive assessment of service needs, ongoing care coordination, psychosocial, nutritional and smoking cessation counseling, childbirth, breastfeeding, and

parenting support and education, and home visiting.

Florida has thirty Healthy Start Coalitions. Each consists of local community leaders and residents working to achieve the best possible health outcomes for pregnant women and infants.

The Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition (NFHSC) is one of these coalitions. NFHSC serves Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns counties. This area has a population of 1.3 million, covers over 3,000 square miles, and has an estimated uninsured rate of 13.3%.

NFHSC is headquartered in Jacksonville, the largest city in the continental United States in terms of area (885 sq. miles). Among its many other services, NFHSC provides an organizational home for Florida KidCare Outreach and has for

many years initiated and implemented strategies to maintain partnerships, engage other organizations, and reach families through traditional and non-traditional means.

Snapshot: **Northeast Florida** **Healthy Start Coalition**

- Coverage area: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns counties
- Population: 1.3 million
- Population under 18: 23.66%
- African-Americans: 13.66% (Duval: 29.9%)
- Hispanics: 4.4%
- Median household income: \$54,776
- Population below poverty level: 11.86%
- Uninsured children eligible for Florida KidCare: 63,490

Scarce Resources, Serendipity & the Mother of Invention

As with so many good ideas, scarce resources often necessitate creativity, while serendipity frequently plays a role as well. Such was the case with NFHSC's City Council outreach project.

In 2008, NFHSC had a total of six Florida KidCare outreach workers. Their grant funding was slated to end in June of that year, which forced them to reduce their staff by two-thirds. This created a dilemma: How could NFHSC compensate for this loss and cover such a large geographic area?



To meet this challenge, NFHSC shifted their focus from conducting direct outreach to families, and instead concentrated their efforts on *providing incentives and training for others to perform outreach and application assistance*. One might refer to this as the "Johnny Appleseed" approach.

A chance meeting helped plant a seed for NFHSC's new direction. One day while eating lunch, Jack Johnson, NFHSC's Program Director for Responsible Fatherhood and Florida KidCare programs, recognized a City Council aide.

During their conversation, Johnson mentioned his work to promote Florida KidCare. The aide expressed surprise that Florida had such a program. Johnson himself was also surprised: Two years earlier, in 2006, the Jacksonville City Council unanimously passed a resolution in support of funding for the Florida KidCare program.

Johnson related this story to NFHSC's Florida KidCare Steering Council. After some discussion, they decided to request each Council Member inform their constituents about the program. This strategy would serve a dual purpose: educate Council Members about Florida KidCare and extend NFHSC's outreach throughout the entire city.

Since Duval County and the City of Jacksonville have a consolidated government, the Jacksonville City Council covers all of Duval County. It consists of 19 Council Members elected to four-year terms. The city is divided into 14 districts of nearly equal population. Each district elects a single Council Member, while five Council Members represent the area "at large."



Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition's Jack Johnson and Erin Petrie, developed the innovative approach to enlist City Council Members to conduct Florida KidCare outreach.

Advantages of City Council Outreach:

- Educates officials and staff about Florida KidCare
- Can cover an entire city
- Officials have name recognition, networks of associations, sit on boards of directors, and are often local business owners
- Familiarity increases credibility, overcomes distrust
- Benefits all involved

As outreach workers know, numerous obstacles stand in the way of getting to those who would qualify for Florida KidCare. According to NFHSC's Erin Petrie, Special Community Projects Liaison, "Besides covering a large area with few resources, there's sometimes a level of distrust from the people we're trying to reach. It takes time and effort to overcome this resistance."

Therein lies one advantage to approaching City Council Members to get the word out about Florida KidCare. Residents recognize City Council Members as local leaders who live in their community, compared to outreach workers, who may not.

In addition, such officials interact with their constituents on a daily basis. They are usually very active in their communities, often own businesses, sit on boards of directors, and lead various community organizations, including chambers of commerce. This makes them excellent candidates for impacting a large and diverse population.

Reaching out to Council Members

In May 2008, NFHSC sent a letter to all Jacksonville City Council Members. (At the time, there were only eighteen seated Council Members.) In early June, Erin Petrie attempted to get in touch with Council Members' executive aides to follow-up. Initially, eight of the aides responded and set up meeting times. In July, Petrie contacted the remaining aides who had not responded or set a date, and scheduled meetings with six more. At the end of the project, four aides still had not replied to NFHSC's request for a meeting.

At each meeting with the Council Members or their Executive Aides, Petrie provided flyers, brochures, posters and applications, emphasized that a large number of uninsured children could potentially qualify, and described how council members could help families get into the program. Other topics covered during the meeting included:

- The importance of health insurance
- Who qualifies
- Cost
- Coverage
- How to apply
- What to do if a constituent needs health insurance
- Where to get application assistance
- Where to display posters and brochures

According to Petrie, Council Members' and Executive Aides' responses were varied. About half were enthusiastic and vowed to hang posters and distribute brochures at their

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—Jacksonville City Council Member Don Redman

churches. The other half, Petrie said, were apathetic. Meetings ranged from five minutes to an hour and a half.

One aide who chose to assist with outreach had previously advocated for Florida KidCare as part of her job at Nemours Children's Clinic. "She was adamant about making sure her councilman's constituents became aware of the program," Petrie recounted.

Another Council Member who participated in this project is Don Redman, who represents Jacksonville's 4th District. District 4 is located in the southeast portion of Jacksonville, includes part of downtown, and is home to a diverse constituency. District 4's office interacts with approximately 200 people per week.

Mr. Redman understands the importance of good health and an active lifestyle. A race director in his spare time, he helps produce local triathlons, and is active in Little League and other youth athletic events.

"Exercise is so important," said Council Member Redman. "It's a shame families keep their sons and daughters from participating in athletics because they have no health insurance and are afraid

that if their children get injured, they won't be able to afford treatment. If they only knew about Florida KidCare, they could get their kids involved in athletics without worrying so much about their health and safety. That is why our office is happy to do what we can to promote Florida KidCare in our community. The more children who have health insurance, the better off we all are."

Mr. Redman's office has kept Florida KidCare information on hand and has distributed it at venues such as Community Planning Advisory Committee meetings and his own local business, a barbershop—an excellent place for Florida KidCare outreach. Additionally, Mr. Redman works closely with Jacksonville's school system, where he has also distributed applications.

Plans are underway to distribute materials at neighborhood association meetings, schools, community events, and sporting events, according to Mr. Redman's Executive Council Assistant, Scott Wilson.



Jacksonville City Council Member Don Redman was one of fourteen Council Members to participate in NFHSC's outreach project.

Lessons Learned

To enroll more families in Florida KidCare, outreach efforts should not rely on any single method, but rather employ a variety of methods and innovative ideas. While no correlation can be established between any one outreach method and enrollment growth, Duval County's Florida KidCare enrollment increased over 7% between May and December of 2008 (the months preceding and following NFHSC's City Council outreach project).

While it was not feasible for NFHSC to perform an adequate evaluation of their effort given their staff shortage, valuable lessons may be drawn from their City Council outreach project:

- Be persistent with follow-up calls after your initial contact. Petrie observed that none of the council aides remembered receiving their letter, and it took several calls to get an appointment with staff.
- Obtain uninsurance rates for each council district so you can inform that specific Council Member of their community's insurance status.
- Approach Council Members just prior to re-election campaign kickoffs because they will (if running) be campaigning in their respective communities. Being seen providing valuable information to their constituents could potentially garner additional votes. Use this as a selling point.
- Attempt, if at all possible, to arrange meetings with aides who have young children, versus those who do not. Petrie observed that younger aides appeared to care much less about the subject (and did not appreciate the value of children's health insurance), while those with school-age children immediately saw the value and were more eager to help.
- Provide an easy-to-use tracking tool council aides can send your outreach organization so you can



follow up with application assistance. Request they stay in regular contact so you can provide timely assistance, and keep them stocked with Florida KidCare supplies.

Community outreach is critical in locating families who may qualify for Florida KidCare. With minimal resources to fully staff outreach teams, it is necessary to be creative in inventing new and innovative ways to reach families.

Sometimes necessity and chance come together to create a great new idea. Northeast Florida Healthy Start's City Council outreach project is one example. Using innovative approaches like this allows elected officials and their staffs to reach people who might otherwise be unaware of Florida KidCare.

Local elected officials (like City Council Members) who participate in such efforts may not only enhance their current position, they might benefit even further if they choose to seek higher office. In fact, one Jacksonville City Council Member was elected to the Florida House in November 2008.

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For more information on Florida KidCare, call 1-888-540-5437 or visit www.floridakidcare.org.

Florida Covering Kids and Families is a statewide program working to ensure that all eligible children and families are enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Its statewide coalition is a broad representation of Florida's agencies, organizations, and key leaders—representatives from child advocacy groups, child care organizations, provider groups, private health plans, private coverage programs for low-income children, the business community, minority organizations, in addition to numerous state agencies charged with Medicaid and federal program implementation. The Coalition also works with community coalitions in targeted regions around the state.

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