

Local News

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Children's Clinic seeks grant to help adults too

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The Children's Clinic in Oak Park will seek a federal grant that would help expand its services to adults.

The clinic's board has agreed to move forward with an application to become a Federally Qualified Health Center. Assuming the grant goes through, the clinic at 320 Lake St. will end up changing its name, to the Child and Family Health Center, Executive Director Elizabeth Lippitt said.

The clinic's services would grow beyond medical, dental and social services provided exclusively to children, extending offerings to adults.

It also could move to a new location.

There have been big changes in the clinic's client base in the past five years, Lippitt said. It has become a regional clinic, serving children in 50 different communities. It hosts more than 9,000 health care visits with more than 2,600 children each year.

Twenty-two percent of The Children's Clinic's clients are from Oak Park, Lippitt said, but more than a quarter of the children it sees come from Cicero and Berwyn. More than half of its clients are Latino.

"When you treat a child, you inevitably have to work with the parents," Lippitt said. "To have a healthy child, you really ultimately have to have a healthy family."

Parents have often asked if they can get clinic services as well, but could not. The clinic's mission has been focused specifically on children.



Dani Barstad gives Emma Ojeda, 7, of Cicero, a fluoride treatment at The Children's Clinic in Oak Park on Aug. 5. The clinic is seeking a grant that will allow it to expand its offerings. (Rob Hart/Staff Photographer)

to \$600,000 from the federal government and a larger Medicaid reimbursement rate.

The clinic could have access to many other forms of income, such as equipment grants or pharmacy benefits for patients, Lippitt said. It could also get reimbursed for mental health services, something that the clinic provides but gets no reimbursement for now.

The clinic decided to seek the grant following a two-year planning process, Lippitt said. Members of the Infant Welfare Society, the 94-year-old organization that supports the clinic, were involved throughout the discussion about the grant, Clinic Board President Leah Beckwith said.

"We wanted to make sure people were on board with this," she said.

At first, people were skeptical, Beckwith said. There was concern about the clinic moving away from its mission of focusing specifically on health care for children.

But when the time came, more than 90 percent of Infant Welfare Circle members voted to go ahead with the grant application, Lippitt said. None of the Circles have dropped off because of the decision.

"We very much intend to keep the spotlight on the care of children, but as a member of a family," Beckwith said.

The expanded focus will mean a new location. If the grant goes through, the clinic would need about 10,000 square feet of space to provide services, Beckwith said.

The clinic's working with a Realtor to find a new location anyway, Beckwith

said, wanting to expand from its current 5,000 to 7,000 square feet.

"All arrows point to us trying to buy a building," Beckwith said.

The grant also might mean satellite locations for the clinic. Many Federally Qualified Health Centers the clinic has looked at have several centers, Beckwith said.

Since it's looking at expansion regardless of the grant award, local support from the Infant Welfare Society Circles and from local donors remains important. Even if the federal grant comes through, Beckwith and Lippitt stressed, local financial support will still be necessary for the clinic to operate.

Indeed, support from the Infant Welfare Circles is what makes the clinic unique in the federal government's eyes, Lippitt said.

"The federal government, if it's going to give you some funding, they want to make sure you're going to be an entity that's going to be around the block for a couple years, so the funding is going to be put to good use," she said.

Thus far, the clinic hasn't submitted a grant application. It's waiting for the federal government to open the application process, and was told that would happen in May, then June, and now mid-August, Lippitt said.

It will take three months to write the grant application. Another six months will pass before word comes back on a possible award, Lippitt said. If a grant is awarded, the clinic would need another four months to get up and running.

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Two events to raise funds for clinic

Come this December, the Oak Park River Forest Infant Welfare Society is again presenting two fundraising events for The Children's Clinic in Oak Park.

The 12th Annual Holiday Housewalk is Dec. 3 and 4. The housewalk tour begins at Concordia University Chicago in River Forest and will feature five private homes in River Forest.

Returning also this year

"Where we were in terms of programmatically, it made sense, financially it made sense, to open up to other financial resources," Lippitt said.

The clinic remains sounds financially, Lippitt said, but over the long term, access to new income was impor-

tant. According to figures from the clinic, the cost for an average medical visit to the clinic was \$156.75 in 2009. The clinic received medical reimbursements on an average of \$66.80 a visit.

Dental costs were \$107.22, with a reimbursement rate of \$85.39 a visit.

is the Infant Welfare Society Holiday Market, held at Concordia this year. More than 50 artisan vendors are expected to take part. There will be "Celebration Tables" for viewing, a raffle and live music. New this year is a market preview party Dec. 2.

Housewalk tickets are \$40 in advance and \$45 at the door. For those wanting to attend only the market, tickets are \$5. All pro-

ceeds benefit The Children's Clinic, 320 Lake St.

The clinic provides medical, dental and social services to Chicago and Cook County suburban children whose families could not otherwise afford it.

The Infant Welfare Society raises more than 20 percent of the clinic's annual budget through events such as the housewalk.

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The clinic's been able to cover costs through a lot of fund-raising and donations, Lippitt said. "After a while, it's not going to be very tenable," she said.

If selected to become a Federally Qualified Health Center, the clinic would receive an annual grant of up