

School Based Health Centers Add Support To Children's Lives

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Correspondent

MIDDLETOWN — For nurse Debi McGrath, it was just another typical day at the School Based Health Center at Macdonough School, as she began her afternoon shift on a recent day.

As she bustled through the door into the center's small waiting room, there was already a flock of young charges awaiting care.

A fourth-grader lay prone on a bench complaining of a stomachache, a first-grader said her chest hurt, and a third-grader had her hand to her head, a victim of a playground collision with another youngster.

McGrath, an advanced practiced registered nurse, originated the school's center in 1993.

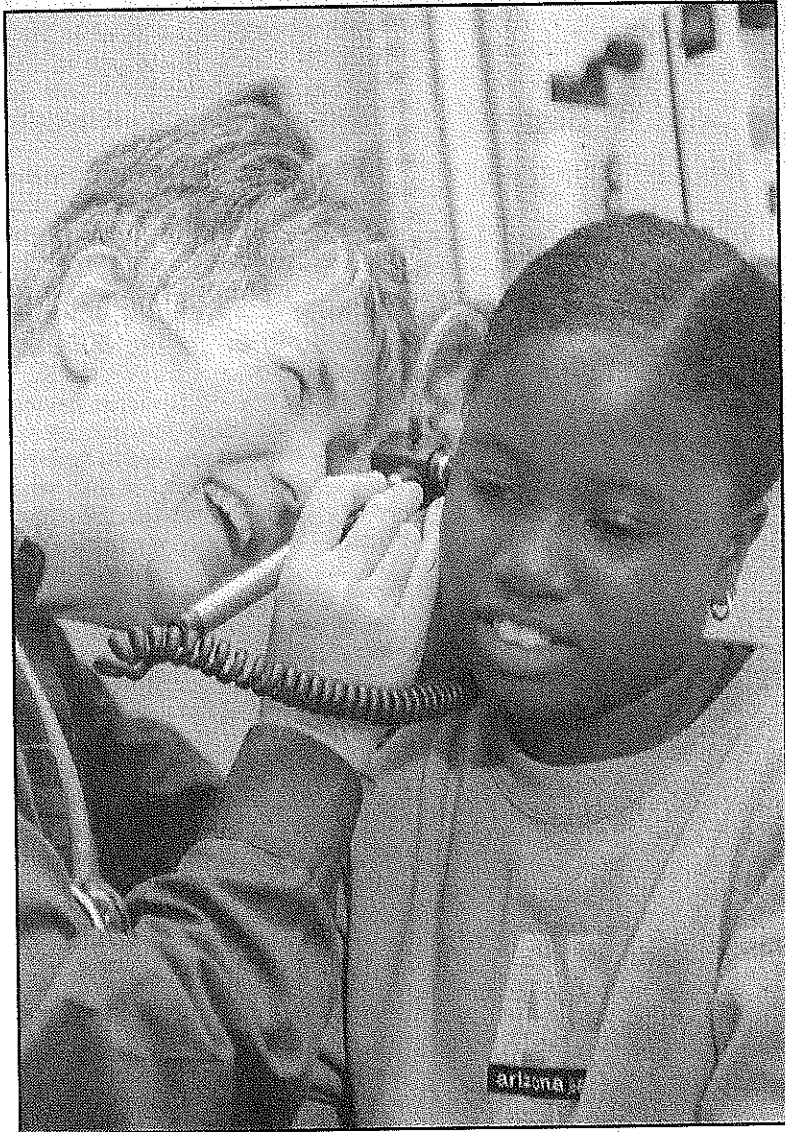
As she threw down her bags in the adjoining exam room, she jovially yelled out greetings to each child, addressing them by name — an impressive feat considering 97 percent of the school's 249 kids are enrolled in the center, roughly 190 youngsters.

Emerging from the exam room, McGrath stood before the cluster of kids, arms crossed, assessing the various ailments.

It was quickly apparent that none on the maladies were particularly threatening, so McGrath adopted her signature approach — encouraging the kids to help themselves feel better.

Two youngsters got ice packs out of the nearby freezer and applied them, and another was counseled about diet and exercising too quickly after eating.

"In this age group, what is significant is learning self care," McGrath said. "I really work on health education and what the



ELIZABETH L.B. TAYLOR/SPECIAL TO THE EXTRA

A NURSE THAT KNOWS YOUR NAME is Debi McGrath of the school based health center. Here, McGrath checks the ears of 5th grader Monica Aiken at the Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown.

kids can do for themselves when they have colds, sore throats, etc."

And her approach seems to work.

Parents report that they are

very happy with the center, fully trusting the on-site care. The children say the center helps them feel better so that they can return to

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