

Shane FLEWEE

Center offers medical coverage for the uninsured

Saybrook Community Health Center offers an insurance program for families who don't have or can't afford coverage for their children.

By Caroline Best
Staff Writer

OLD SAYBROOK - Having a sick or injured child is frightening for parents, but not being able to pay for that child's health care can be just as worrisome.

However, thanks to Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth, (HUSKY), parents don't have to skimp on their child's check-ups or worry about paying for a trip to the emergency room. In 1997 Gov. John Roland signed legislation that was supported by every member of the General Assembly to give children in the state who don't have access to or can't afford insurance, an opportunity to have a comprehensive health care package.

Although the HUSKY program was implemented over a year ago, not many people are aware of how it can help them. HUSKY Outreach Worker Ruth Doherty and Eligibility Coordinator Sue Greeno work at the Old Saybrook Community Health Center on Main Street informing parents about HUSKY as a viable option



Photo by Kristen Emanuelson
HUSKY Outreach Worker Ruth Doherty, left, new Community Health Center Dr. Mary Swaykus and eligibility coordinator Sue Greeno hold literature describing the program that helps uninsured children pay for their medical bills.

for their children's insurance. "What Connecticut has done is quite impressive. It went beyond what other states did to insure all children in this program... There are great rewards to this."

The HUSKY program, funded by a grant from the state Department of Social Services, is offered as a service at the Old Saybrook Community Health Center, which is a non-profit agency that serves all people, insured or uninsured. The Community Health Center started in Middletown and has offices in Meriden, New Britain, Groton and New London. The Old Saybrook branch recently hired Dr. Mary Swaykus as its full-time physician. The center offers primary care services, including medical and dental. It has

a sliding payment scale, and provides information about programs like HUSKY to help parents pay for medical care. As an eligibility worker, Greeno screens patients for any assistance that might be available to them. Doherty does outreach work by visiting businesses to bring them information on the HUSKY plan to share with their employees. "I've already been to 50 businesses. Some people are very surprised to know we exist," said Doherty.

HUSKY is a plan that can help all types of families regardless of their income. Parents who are self-employed, unemployed or not offered insurance with their job can use the HUSKY program for their children. It offers a variety of services including preventative care, mental health and substance abuse services, eye care and hearing exams and emergency care. One of the reasons why the HUSKY program is so important is that it allows children to get regular medical care, said Greeno.

"One of the problems when people don't have insurance is that they tend to hold back on some care that they should be receiving. They wait until there are problems, instead of going for regular check-ups," said Greeno.

In the most recent legislative session, it was approved to allow the parents of children in the HUSKY program to apply for coverage as well under the program starting in July of next year.

"It is extremely good news for Connecticut families... Each family is unique. We address each family individually. We strongly encourage people to apply or call us for information at the office," said Greeno.

"People hear about it and think there's a catch, but it's a great program," said Doherty.

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