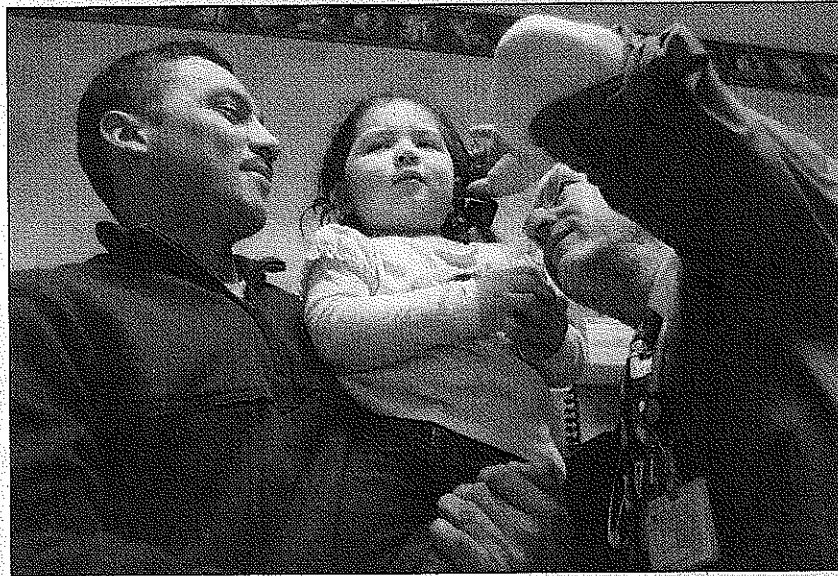


Norwalk Health Center awarded \$1.3M grant



Hour photo / ERIK TRAUTMANN
Pediatrician David Savarese examines Angie Rodas, 2, with the help of her father Wilmer Rodas in the pediatric unit of the Norwalk Community Health Center.

NORWALK
 By JILL BODACH
 Hour Staff Writer

During a time when most non-profits are struggling to make ends meet the Norwalk Community Health Center has received a huge shot in the arm from the federal gov-

ernment. The health center, recently approved for Section 330 status, which made it eligible for the grants, will receive \$1.3 million — \$650,000 this year and \$650,000 next year — as part of the economic stimulus pack-

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age, and, more specifically, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The funds will be used to relocate the Norwalk Community Health Center from its current Water Street location to a larger facility, according to Lawrence Cross, executive director for the Norwalk Community Health Center.

The current facility is 10,000-square feet. The center needs to have at least 18,000-square feet at its disposal, Cross said.

"There are a few facilities we have in mind that could

accommodate the space requirements, but no decisions have made yet," Cross said. "We will remain in South Norwalk."

Cross said it could be as soon as six months from now that the health center is able to relocate to a newer, larger facility.

"This is huge," Cross said. "We wouldn't be able to do any of this without these funds."

A new facility and increased funds will also allow the health center to extend its hours, serve more patients, provide more community outreach and enhance services to help

patients with insurance eligibility and provide case worker and social worker services, Cross said.

"Over the next five years, we will be able to increase the number of unique patients we serve from 9,000 to as many as 15,000," Cross said. "And we'll be able to increase our office visits from 33,000 to more than 50,000."

The health center will begin to see the money 120 days from Monday, the day the funds were announced. It is likely that the grant will be renewed after the two years, Cross said.

"Once (HRSA) Health

Resources and Services Administration approves funding like this, it is rare that it will be taken away," Cross said. "It would be peculiar of them to fund an expansion of this magnitude and then pull the plug, leaving us to pay the increased rent."

The Norwalk Community Health Center will celebrate its 10th anniversary in April, and Cross said he can't think of a better way to celebrate than to improve its services in a bigger facility.

"We're definitely going to celebrate," Cross said. "And it's going to be something big."