

After six years of planning and community organizing, the Graton Day Labor Center opened its doors to the public early in September 2007. The Labor Center facilitates hiring for approximately 150 workers who previously waited on the street for potential employers to hire them. The Labor Center also provides many services that benefit these workers including English language classes, job training, safety training, and a sense of community. The Center reports that there has been more work secured since they moved into the new permanent site.

West County Health Centers was approached by The Labor Center organizers last year to begin work with day laborers regarding health issues. Since February 2007, Wendy Wiley, Physician Assistant, has been working with day laborers a few mornings per week. Wendy has been giving health talks on the street corner, providing access to workers for direct clinical services, coordinating with other local clinics and providers to offer both primary medical care, as well as dental and mental health services, and providing informal health screenings and visits. Until now, offering these services on the street corner was difficult. With the opening of the Labor Center, there is a permanent location where Wendy and others can outreach to these workers.

Most day laborers have no access to primary care because they do not have knowledge of the medical system in this country. These workers are accustomed to seeking medical care only when very ill or injured. Many are also fearful of institutions due to fears of INS raids or feeling they will not be understood by monolingual English speakers. One of the most productive aspects of having WCHC staff on site at the Day Labor Center is the ability to provide correct information and assessments during the ongoing weekly health sessions. Topics such as nutrition, prevention, vaccination, chronic medical diseases, musculoskeletal injuries, stress and depression are common and workers are invited to bring their own expertise and experiences to these discussions.

As time has passed we have seen many of the workers participating in a variety of health discussions as well as establishing ongoing care at local community clinics. In the very near future, we look forward to providing knowledge regarding health topics to individual day laborers and having these workers lead health promotion sessions for their peers. Many of the workers utilizing the Graton Day Labor Center have skills far beyond the jobs they are being hired to do. One such laborer is a physician from Mexico currently working with dignity as a hotel housekeeper. It is our great hope that as these individuals identify themselves, WCHC will enable them to use their skills to help their peers through the Center.