

Families First, mayor celebrate health care

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PORTSMOUTH — When Kim Yacobucci, a single parent, arrived in the Seacoast 4½ years ago and the promise of a job fell through, she found help in the form of Families First.

"I had no health care and no insurance, and low self-esteem," she said. "But I was welcomed with open arms."

Yacobucci is now a member of the board of directors at Families First, the Seacoast's nonprofit community health care center. "I believe it's the Seacoast's best-kept secret in health care," she said.

On Wednesday afternoon, the mayor of Portsmouth and several state representatives joined Families First staff and clients for an ice cream social in celebration of National Health Center Week and National Health Care for the Homeless Day.

Mayor Steve Marchand praised Families First for expanding access to quality health care for all members of the community.

The center, located at the Community Campus in Portsmouth, provides a range of health and support services to families and individuals regardless of the ability to pay. More than 88 percent of patients are from low- or very low-income households. Forty-eight percent are uninsured. After a welcome and introduction from Executive Director Helen Taft, Marchand read an official proclamation expressing the city's support for Families First and urging citizens to recognize the important contributions of community health centers.

State representatives on hand were Laura Pantelakos, Jim Powers, James Kennedy and Susan Kepner. A representative from the office of Sen. John Sununu, John Ellis, also attended.

Tess Kuenning, from the BiState Primary Care Association, thanked legislators for recent support in helping bring federal and state funds to community health centers like Families First.

Families First is one of 14 community health centers in the state and one of just two providing outreach health care for the homeless. Funding sources are patient fees and health insurance, including Medicare and Medicaid, government contracts, grants and local contributions.

Last year, more than 3,300 patients received services in the primary, prenatal and oral health programs.

City Welfare Officer Keith Bates noted that Families First serves 7 percent of the population of Portsmouth and "has achieved almost 100 percent recognition among its potential clients."

Attendees were offered tours of the facility and the brightly painted Health Care Van that stops weekly in seven locations to serve the area's homeless population.

"It's not just delivering medical services, it's establishing relationships," said Maureen Keating, project coordinator and the van's nurse. "Traditional delivery doesn't work; you have to go where the people are." Forty to 50 people each week receive basic health screenings, primary care, emergency dental services in the van, and referrals for counseling and support.

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Portsmouth Mayor Steve Marchand and Helen Taft, executive director of Families First Health & Support Center, at a gathering for guests and legislators yesterday afternoon in celebration of National Health Center Week and Health Care for the Homeless Day.

Courtesy photo

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