



Family Centered

newsletter for Calistoga Family Center

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\$143k in Tax Refunds Returned to Families

Tax season 2007 has come to a close at Calistoga Family Center and 114 families are now smiling a little broader for their experience. During a ten-week period the volunteer tax preparers for VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) processed a total of 131 returns, including returns from 2004 and 2005.

The refunds to the families totaled \$143,733 or an average of \$1,785 per family. "This refund is a windfall to our families," said Indira López, Education Coordinator at the Family Center. "Considering that the average family earned \$20,700 last year, this represents nearly a 10% increase in the familys' income."

These monies, returned to families in our community, make a profound difference in the lives of people. Some taxpayers said they would put the money into savings or pay off accrued debt. One delighted couple was able to put an advance deposit down on an apartment in town and move the family in from their remote location, closer to the schools. Another gentleman was able to use his refund as seed money to begin his own small business.

The team of volunteers, comprised of Jim Barnes, Ray Branstetter and Elsa Alonso, donated 115 hours of their time over the tax season. "I am delighted we could offer this service," said Ms. López. "Thank you so much to our volunteers for making these miracles happen."

300 Children Receive Affordable Health Insurance

Patti couldn't concentrate in class. Her skin hurt, she itched, she scratched herself raw. She was unable to pay attention to lessons, and was disrupting the other children around her. Patti had eczema, but couldn't go to the doctor. She had no health insurance, and the family had no money to spend on a doctor visit.

The cost of health insurance in the U.S. has increased by double-digits every year for the last five years, while wages have increased only 1.7%. An estimated 14% of children in Napa County under the age of 18 are without health insurance, and 22% are without dental insurance. "The cost of insurance should never be the issue," stated Wendy Lopez, Community Liaison for Calistoga Family Center. "With low-cost coverage

offered through Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, Healthy Kids, and Kaiser Children's Health Plan, virtually every child can be insured."

Since June of 2006 Ms. López has been seeking out uninsured children in Calistoga and arranging for their coverage. She advises parents on the appropriate health plan, assists in the enrollment procedure and follows up with parents on the proper use and maintenance of their children's insurance. On April 28 Ms. López enrolled her 301st child, a one-week old infant, just in time for her first check-up. "It is wonderful to see children who desperately need medical and dental attention finally get the help they need," said Ms. López.

The Family Center works in close collaboration with the local preschools, elementary and high schools, Clinic Ole and Sister Ann Dental Clinic to locate children who need coverage. Children have received regular check-ups, had cavities filled and been fitted with corrective glasses, thanks to these programs.

Patti's teacher contacted the Family Center about her medical situation. Ms. López was able to speak with the parents and enrolled the child in a health plan. Patti received the medical attention and prescription she needed, and she was cured of her aggravating skin condition.

Parents and Kids Play With Their Food

How many times did your mother scold you, "Don't play with your food"? Yet that is just what 86 participants did during a series of three classes, Family Fun with Food and Fitness in March and April.

Parents and children met three Saturday mornings to learn about the benefits of a healthy diet, how to incorporate healthy snacks into their daily routines, and to have fun with their food. Families baked Sweetheart Cupcakes, tasted exotic smoothies, and created crazy critters from fruits and vegetables.



Joni Stellar, Nutrition Education Coordinator at Calistoga Elementary School, partnered with Calistoga Family Center to produce these events. "Children are discovering healthy, tasteful foods a fun manner," stated Ms. Stellar. "Our hope is that children exposed to tasty snacks will incorporate more healthy foods into their diets."

Children who eat foods lower in fats and sugars, stay physically active, and maintain an appropriate body weight can decrease their chances of developing type II diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and cancer.

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