

Clinic offers health care to working moms, families

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Single working mothers and their children can receive free health care from a new Gilbert clinic.

The WellCare Foundation clinic opened in March at the Gilbert branch of the Boys and Girls Clubs of the East Valley and has since seen about a dozen families.

Typically, such single working mothers make too much money to qualify for state assistance. If their jobs offer health care insurance, often the co-pays and insurance premiums are too expensive. **About 175,000 mothers fall into this category in Maricopa County, according to Marge Ebeling, founder and president of WellCare.**

The foundation, along with a network of 60 health care practitioners, provides comprehensive health care to the families and focuses on physical, emotional and mental needs.

Families come to one of four clinics for check-ups and then can be referred to doctors across the Valley for further treatment.

With the economy, the clinics are beginning to see more working mothers with once stable jobs such as real estate managers, loan officers and teaching aides, Ebeling said.

The Gilbert clinic is open on Thursdays but Ebeling plans to expand the hours once more families sign up for the program.

There are about 350 families in the Valley who use WellCare.

"It's a population that is awesome to work with," Ebeling said. "It's hard for them to ask for help because at one time circumstances were different. They just need a hand up. They don't want a hand out."

The foundation operates under the idea that everyone knows a WellCare mom.

"She's the woman who you're standing with at the grocery store that you think must be doing OK," Ebeling said. "They aren't whining or complaining."

Lidia Cervantes and her children Luis, 14, and Diana, 8, have gone to WellCare clinics for a year and a half. Their appointment last week was for just a check-up, but last year, doctors discovered Cervantes, who lives in central Phoenix, had cervical cancer.

"You just always hope you never get bad

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results," Ebeling said, "but then you think, 'My gosh, they couldn't have afforded to do anything.'"

Ebeling was able to find physicians who agreed to treat Cervantes, 29, for free, and family members also received counseling to help them get through the cervical cancer.

"I beg until people say yes," Ebeling said.

After the Cervantes' appointment, a family from Maricopa was scheduled to be seen at the clinic. The foundation also partners with NextCare clinics to treat families after hours and on weekends.

"I'm happy there is a place like WellCare," Cervantes said. "Marge told me everything will come out fine. She is there a lot for me."

To be eligible, mothers must show proof that they are working and need to be uninsured.

Information: 602-263-7619 or www.wellcarefoundation.org.

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