



Champions for Inclusive Communities Star Community

Yakima, WA

Community members across Yakima County, Washington are passionate, to say the least, about providing services to children with special needs in their community. This is best demonstrated by their integrated, family-centered services.

Located in central Washington, Yakima County's children are more likely than the average child to live in poverty, have a mother without a high school diploma, and speak a language other than English. The area is large geographically, and much of it is agricultural, serving migrant families. The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation are also located in the area. These particular demographics have only increased the need for coordinated, culturally competent services for children with special health care needs. Yakima's Children's Village is the "door" families use to access these services.

The Children's Village is a family-centered organization that strives to meet the needs of every individual family. Not only does the Village provide family support, it also provides clinical and educational services for both parents and children and serves as a resource to the entire community. It does all this with the assistance of a variety of partners throughout the community. Best of all, the Children's Village has sustained their efforts for a very successful 11 years and, even now, is growing, changing, and expanding.

Family-Led and Family-Driven

It all started with families. The Children's Village began over a decade ago when families of children with special health care needs decided they wanted a better system of care. This trend of family input is still in effect today. Beyond the Children's Village is the family-driven Yakima County Interagency Coordinating Council. The council is led by family leaders, with family representatives planning the agendas. In addition to families, there is broad representation from service providers across the county. As Jackie McPhee, a program director from the Children's Village says, the council is "family-led and family-driven."

Gloria, a member of the Parent to Parent Advisory Board and the Yakima County Interagency Coordinating Council, and a parent of a child with special health care needs herself, says, "The Children's Village is a shoulder to lean on." Children's Village and the surrounding community provides a learning environment that allows parents to educate themselves about

issues involving their child and become aware of other supporting agencies in our community. Not only that, they are also key in providing emotional support to families who may feel isolated and overwhelmed. Gloria says, "When I look to those parents whose child has now become an adult, I can look toward the future and what I can expect [for my own child]."

Communicating with Medical Homes

Assuring every child seen at Children's Village has a medical home was a focus of the Yakima community in planning Children's Village and was endorsed by the Medical Advisory Committee. Community providers communicate regularly with the child's medical home regarding the outcome of referrals as well as treatment plans. There is a successful focus on co-management between specialists and the child's primary care provider.

Recently, the Village conducted a survey of primary care physicians to gather opinions and suggestions regarding

What makes a Star Community?

ChampionsInC has created the Star Communities program to recognize exceptional communities.

Star Communities will show excellence in 6 Performance Measures:

- Families are partners
- A "Medical Home" provides coordinated care
- Children receive early and continuous screening
- Families have adequate funding/insurance to pay for services
- Services are organized so families can use them easily and are satisfied
- Youth receive necessary services to make the transition to adult life

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communication with the medical home. The physicians' response was tremendous, and their suggestions were taken very seriously. This is just one of the many ways the community works to ensure that primary care providers are working with all the other facets of care through every step of a family's journey.

Family Leaders Promote Cultural Competence

A Children's Village's priority is to increase cultural and linguistic competency and outreach to non-English speaking families. A key program in this effort is the Yakima County Parent to Parent program.

Maria, one of the Parent to Parent staff members, serves as the Hispanic outreach coordinator. In this role, she provides emotional support to a large number of Hispanic families, coordinates support groups, and acts as a cultural broker between families and providers. For example, Maria provided support to a Spanish-speaking mother of a young girl with seizures. The mother was concerned with the changes she was seeing in her daughter after a change in medication, but was unsure about her ability to communicate with the primary care doctor and specialist. Maria coached this mother through the process of connecting with the physicians and gave her the confidence she needed in order to trust herself and her expertise about her own daughter, despite the language and cultural barriers.

A Vision for Developmental Screening

Another important partner in the Yakima community is the Enterprise for Progress in the Community (EPIC). EPIC's Early Childhood Development Division provides early childhood education programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start. Children who qualify for these programs are screened for developmental delays and, if necessary, a smooth referral process is in place for full developmental evaluations at Children's Village. The relationships between staff and a mutual commitment to coordinate services for families have been enriched by the partnership and program co-location at Children's Village.

Transition: Providing a Link to the Future

Transition to adult life is something the community is becoming more aware of as time passes. Parents of younger children with special health care needs in the community are

looking to those youth who have successfully transitioned to adult life for guidance. Meeting other youth who have graduated from high school and have moved on to find work in the community is a "light at the end of the tunnel" for parents like Gloria. And meeting those youth and their parents is easy to do through family events sponsored by Parent to Parent.

A number of programs throughout the community are working together to provide a resource for youth with disabilities to successfully transition to adult life. At the high school level, employment training opportunities are being implemented through community-supported employment providers such as the Provident Horizon Group. These opportunities occur in partnership with local school districts.

In addition, Project Search provides high school students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in workforce training in a hospital or business setting. A partnership between Memorial Hospital and Provident Horizon Group allows Project Search to provide a one-year educational program for students with disabilities in their last year of high school. This program is very successful at helping the youth identify the strengths and abilities they can bring to the workforce.

Children's Village has also compiled a transition manual for families that better prepares them for situations they may face as their child transitions to adulthood.

Creating a Vision

Yakima is known for being a strong community committed to its youth. Supported by Children's Village and its partnerships, children with special health care needs in Yakima have been thriving for over a decade. When asked what guidance they have for other communities that are hoping to have the same success in sustainability, Diane Patterson, director of the Children's Village says, "The key is creating a vision that inspires your community to commit their time, resources, and energy. Once a community experiences success in supporting children with special needs, the effect is exponentially positive." It goes without saying that a significant amount of passion and dedication must also back that vision. And that is exactly what this community has: Passion. Dedication. And a vision.

Community Contacts:

Children's Village
3801 Kern Road
Yakima, WA 98902

Children's Village Director
509-574-3260

www.yakimachildrensivillage.org