

## “Raising Healthy Children”



I recently heard a prophetic and profound quote from Frederick Douglass, “It is easier to raise a healthy child than to repair a broken man.” Some truths are clearly timeless. We have known for quite some time that prevention (or the earliest possible intervention) of issues . . . be they medical, emotional, social or educational . . . is the prudent investment for our society. Real dollars, as well as human costs, are reduced when we spend our time and treasure on raising healthy children rather than repairing broken adults.

Arguably, however, we have yet to make our “walk” match our “talk.” Most of the national debate currently going on around health care is about coverage for adults. That’s an important conversation that needs to continue. However, in Texas, we must remember an inconvenient fact concerning health care for our children. For yet another year,

Texas takes the dubious title of having the highest number of uninsured children in the nation. Out of the roughly 9 million uninsured children in the entire United States, ONE SIXTH, or roughly 1.5 million uninsured children live in Texas... That’s 250,000 more uninsured children than California, over 500,000 more uninsured children than Florida, and over ONE MILLION more uninsured children than the state of New York. When I share these facts with community groups, inevitably someone suggests that all the uninsured children in Texas must be undocumented immigrants. Wrong. If you take out all the undocumented children from the Texas figure, we still have more uninsured children than any other state.

Children who are uninsured are most likely to be from single parent families who have low income and low parental education. All three of these markers are associated with lower skilled jobs that are the least likely to provide employer sponsored health insurance programs. To make matters worse, Texas has one of the lowest percentages of employer sponsored health coverage in the nation.

### **At Any Baby Can, the uninsured children we serve generally fall into one of three categories:**

- 1.) Poor children in families who qualify for public benefits but frequently “fall off” Medicaid for any number of reasons (inadequate eligibility system, frequent renewal required, proving medical condition, having a birthday, parent’s modest wage increase puts family several dollars over the limit, etc.).
- 2.) Poor children who do not qualify for public benefits and must rely on limited “safety net” services. These “safety net” programs are available to county residents through the Travis County Health District. Unfortunately, our neighboring rural areas have very limited access to these types of services.
- 3.) Children in families who occasionally bump above the income requirement for CHIP but do not have employer coverage (a single father with 2 children who works construction, has no employer coverage and sometimes makes just over the \$37,000 CHIP cut-off).

For a young child just starting out on life’s journey, whether or not they receive appropriate health care has multiplying effects throughout their life. Are we willing to continue a system in which almost 1/5 of our Texas children do not receive appropriate health care primarily because they are poor? Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics indicates that a poor child is four times more likely than his middle class counterpart to develop a critical or chronic illness. This trend is evident early on in the disproportionate number of poor children with asthma and childhood obesity. The sadder news is that as they move through life, these children will grow into adults with significantly higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and even cancer.

We know from history that our current system raises a huge number of broken men. We also know what it takes to raise a healthy child. Thank you for your commitment to the belief that any baby can reach his/her potential. It is with your partnership and energy that we will continue to align the “walk” to the “talk” for our youngest children.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Balthazar  
Executive Director  
Any Baby Can