

Student Volunteers Boost SCHIP Enrollment in NY

By Houkje Ross

Closing the Gap, State Children's Health Insurance Program • January 2000

William Ching was uninsured as a child and considers it an injustice for any child to go without health care. That's why he volunteers for the Student Health Outreach Project (SHOUT), an effort of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) to use student volunteers in SCHIP outreach and enrollment efforts.

"As a future physician, I have an ethical and moral obligation to do this," says Ching, a senior at New York University's School of Medicine and a member of the student section of the American Medical Association (AMA).

SHOUT began in 1998 as a partnership between the CDF's New York chapter (CDF-NY), Northern Manhattan community-based organizations, and student volunteers from Columbia University. Their charge was to increase enrollment of uninsured children in the heavily African American and Hispanic Washington Heights and Harlem neighborhoods.

During the six-month pilot phase, SHOUT succeeded in enrolling approximately 200 children using 25 student volunteers, according to Sarah Katz, project coordinator for SHOUT at CDF-NY. "Families have responded well to the young students' energy and enthusiasm," she says.

Expanding the Pilot Project

This year, SHOUT has continued as a student-run effort, Katz says. The project takes many different forms, but the overall goal is to recruit and train students and then link them to community-based efforts to educate families about the availability of free and low-cost health insurance. Students are trained to see families through to enrollment. SHOUT students receive training on New York's Medicaid and SCHIP eligibility guidelines, application processes, how families access health care through the programs, confidentiality issues, and outreach strategies.

Ching and other medical students from the student section of AMA then educate their peers and the medical community about issues of the uninsured. "We want to make sure that medical students are acutely aware of the issue, and that the problem doesn't get lost in the shuffle," Ching says.

The student section of AMA has taken SHOUT on as its national service project, involving 40,000 medical students at 140 medical schools across the country. "The Albert Einstein College of Medicine is holding workshops in educating medical students, hospital staff, and attending physicians at local hospitals about the scope of the problem of uninsured children," Ching adds.

Medical students provide hospitals with information about their local population and whom to contact concerning enrollment. Medical students are also being trained on how to carry out enrollment themselves.

Other student activities include:

- **Conducting educational presentations** to parents at day care centers, schools, tenant associations and other community meetings. They also talk with families and inform them of the SCHIP program.
- **Passing out flyers** in commercial districts, laundromats, check-cashing sites, and public housing facilities. Flyers are in English and Spanish, and list all SHOUT sites and times when student volunteers are available to help families. Each enrollment site has its own version of the flyer with specific hours of services and phone numbers.
- **Sharing SCHIP information at community forums**, including coalition meetings and staff meetings of community-based organizations. Students also encourage organizations to refer families to SHOUT sites. Volunteers attend at least one community event per week.
- **Helping families fill out SCHIP documents**, including helping families understand requirements and doing follow-up work to ensure that applications are completed.

There are now seven SHOUT projects in the state of New York, which uses student volunteers from several universities, high schools, and youth organizations. Each project is different but most focus on outreach and education, Katz says. "Students in the Columbia SHOUT project are the only ones who currently help families enroll at two community-based sites, but this could change as the other programs develop," she says.

"The CDF plans to launch similar efforts all across the country," says Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the CDF. "The student volunteers are an important part of our nationwide effort to be sure that every child receives the quality health care they deserve."

For more information about the SHOUT Project, contact Sarah Katz, project coordinator, (212) 697-2323. ❖

