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Free health clinic in Galveston expands beyond treating teens

By KATHRYN EASTBURN The Daily News 9 hrs ago



Liz Ginn, right, a physician assistant at the Teen Health Center at Moody Early Childhood Center in Galveston, talks with Ma Ramos, a teaching assistant at the Moody center, and her daughter Dianna Medina in the new health center on Thursday, A 28, 2019.

JENNIFER REYNOLDS/The Daily News

A new Teen Health Center, expanding services beyond adolescents, opened this week at the Moody Early Childhood Center, serving patients from infancy to age 21.

The Teen Health Center will offer free physical and mental health care at Moody Early Childhood Center, 1110 21st St., for children enrolled at the center as well as employees and their families.

The opening of the new clinic follows the closing of Teen Health Centers on the mainland at the end of last school year after primary funding for two clinics in Texas City and La Marque was withdrawn by University of Texas Medical Branch's Department of Pediatrics.

“We fought closing on the mainland,” said Angie Brown, executive director of Teen Health Center Inc. “But this has given us the opportunity to focus on island kids. We can impact Galveston kids from cradle to career, providing them full, complete medical and mental health support from pre-kindergarten through college.”

Moody Early Childhood Center operates as a nonprofit in partnership with the Galveston public school district and was established in 2016 to prepare Galveston children for kindergarten. Enrollment is a little less than 200. Tuition is scholarship-based and offered on a sliding fee scale to all children, regardless of family income.

Teen Health is putting together a list of resources, such as low-cost health care providers on the mainland, for families and school district staff no longer served by Teen Health Centers, Brown said.

Free vaccinations, lab tests, hearing and vision screening, physicals, treatment of minor injuries and sick patient diagnosis and treatment for acute and chronic conditions will be available at the Moody center to all children in day care and pre-school programs, aged six weeks to 3 years old, to their family members and to staff and their household members.

Services for everyone under age 21 are free. Employees and family members age 22 and older can receive services at the clinic for a flat \$25 fee.

Maria Ramos is a teaching assistant at the Moody center and her 14-month-old daughter, Dianna Medina, is enrolled in day care.

“I love that I don't have to leave work when I need to go to the doctor,” Ramos said.

Her other family members, including Dianna's siblings, can also use the clinic.

The Moody clinic is the fifth one established at island school district locations since Teen Health Centers first began operating in 1985 on the Ball High School campus. Other clinics are at Collegiate Academy at Weis, Austin Middle School, Central Middle School and Ball High School.

Originally focused on the health and mental health needs of adolescents, the clinics have expanded services to parents and district employees over the years, and are now lowering their gaze to the district's youngest residents.

"I'm really happy to have a Teen Health Center that specializes on the needs of really little kids," said school nurse, Kris Barrie.

Barrie's office is the first stop when a toddler at the early childhood center gets a bump or scrape or isn't feeling well. Her office connects with the clinic next door operated by physician assistant Liz Ginn, who takes samples, runs labs, conducts examinations, writes prescriptions and makes referrals for specialized care when needed.

"The school nurse keeps up with vaccine records, and if someone needs a vaccination, they can just come next door," Ginn said.

Sick or injured children with a consent form on file are not required to have a parent with them to be seen at any of the Teen Health Centers, including this one for the youngest children. Classroom aids and teaching assistants accompany little ones to the nurse's office and the clinic.

School-based health centers like this one share similar goals and operating guidelines, including strengthening regular school attendance, lowering chronic absence, improving general health and establishing a level playing field for all children in terms of availability of health care and mental health resources regardless of economic circumstance, according to the national School-Based Health Alliance.

Funding for Galveston's Teen Health Centers is largely provided by philanthropic support from the island's large, private foundations, making it an outlier in the growing arena of school-based health centers around the country, most of which are

offshoots of major medical centers or larger institutions, requiring a more bureaucratic structure, Brown said.

“We are the only one, I believe, that does not charge students anything, doesn’t require insurance, Medicaid or out-of-pocket expenses,” Brown said. “The generous philanthropic resources available to us here in Galveston make that possible.”

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