



News

Bridges to Health celebrates fifth anniversary *Clinic has been helping the uninsured since '05*

[Print Page](#)

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Bridges to Health recently celebrated its fifth anniversary of serving the uninsured community in Grant County.

The health clinic located in St. Martin Community Center, 901 S. Branson St., has been medically helping the uninsured who fall at least 200 percent below the federal poverty rate since June 2005, and the dental clinic was implemented a few months later, Bridges to Health Board President Kelley Hochstetler said.

"Of course, we started with zero patients, and now we have over 2,500 patients," she said.

In helping those patients, the clinic has been able to provide about \$1.4 million in prescription medications free of charge to patients this year, Hochstetler said.

"It's a good tribute to Grant County," she said.

This amount of help comes from the 170 hours of volunteer work provided by local nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians and students a week, Clinic Manager Charlotte Peel said.

The clinic, which is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 to 8 p.m., has been able to add a diabetic clinic and exercise intervention clinic that focuses on pain management without medication because of the donated time, Hochstetler said. It is also occasionally open during the afternoon because of these volunteers.

Peel said that she would like to see Bridges to Health add a blood pressure clinic, have more afternoon hours available to patients and expand on the dental clinic.

"Dental is probably one of the hugest needs," she said.

In order to do this, Peel said more volunteers and funds are needed. Currently, the non-profit clinic is funded through volunteer work, donations, available grants and Neighborhood Association Program Tax Credits.

Hochstetler said some of the many blessings the clinic receives are the free diagnostics it receives from Marion General Hospital, the space that is given to them from St. Martin and the human resources support it receives from Family Services Society.

"We've had a great relationship with the community," she said.

She went on to add what a great relationship the clinic has developed with the community outside of those who support it, but also those who use it. The Bridges to Health patients now only have to use the emergency room when it is in fact an emergency and don't have to worry about medical bills eating away at their already small funds or missing work because they can't afford treatment.

"A lot of people have the misconception that our patients don't work," Hochstetler said.

She said majority of their patients do work; they just can't afford health insurance or aren't offered it because they work several part-time jobs.

Hochstetler acknowledged the new U.S. health care plan on its way and said they will still continue to serve those in need.

"We may have to adjust who we're serving, but we're still going to serve those that fall through the gaps," Hochstetler said.

All visits to the clinic are by appointment. For more information, call 662-7289.

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