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## WORKING FOR HEALTH

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in

### LHF meeting highlights various parishwide initiatives

Patrick Boyd

Ruston is springing up with programs and services to help the community become healthier and provide citizens and students with more medical care.

The Lincoln Health Foundation's annual meeting was held March 22 to discuss just what initiatives are being taken to ensure a physically and mentally healthier community.

"The mission [of the LHF] is to improve health care and outcomes for the residents of Lincoln Parish," said Norman Haynes, CEO of Lincoln Health Foundation.

The LHF was founded in 2007 when Lincoln General Hospital was sold and the Louisiana Attorney General's office approved the establishment of the LHF as a health care conversion foundation.



By  
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To date, the total project funding for programs in Lincoln Parish from 2008-2012 is \$2,529,268. This includes funding for various projects such as The Health Hut and Life Choice's "Mentoring Of Moms" (MOM's) program for pre and post-natal education.

The LHF split up into committees, targeting three primary areas: healthier beginnings, healthier living and healthier outcomes and access to health care.

Every September and March, the LHF calls for proposals dealing with health services or health education and awards grants based on this criteria.

Various grantees shared at the meeting what the LHF's support has done for them, and how they have seen improvements in their various areas.

"We know health care is critical to children who are ready to learn and move on as citizens in this community," said Danny Bell, Lincoln Parish Schools Superintendent. "Having healthy children is going to make this a better community."

The LHF provided for two school nurses to be hired in the Lincoln Parish School system, and also bought equipment, 354 hygiene kits, 52 lice kits, 455 dental screenings and 1,113 dental visits.

"Having school nurses makes all the difference in the world," Bell said.

The LHF also made it possible for the schools to have a nursing software program, so that student's medical records can be accessed anytime over the J-Pam system all the schools use. While the state does not provide funds for elementary school counselors, the LHF provided a certified counselor for Ruston Elementary.

"This is such a huge blessing to our school system," Bell said.

Kathleen Richard, executive director of Life Choices, presented how the LHF's funding has helped projects like MOMs and their Growing Great Kids home visitation parenting program excel.

"This has been our busiest year so far," Richard said. "There is a lot of work in healthier beginnings, because there is a great need for these children to thrive." Richard said the MOMs program is now incorporating couples counseling, with married couples counseling each other.

Most participants in the program are first time mothers around the age of 21. Richard said Life Choices is seeing a different type of client now than they used to when they were called Crisis Pregnancy.

"We are seeing more girls without that support system at home," she said. "We are seeing the impact that one-on-one relationships can have on lives. The program is incredibly supportive and it is being well received."

Another grantee presenter, Janet Durden, president of United Way of northeast Louisiana, co-partnered with the LHF in 2010 and has helped jumpstart programs such as the Triple Play nutrition, education and fitness program for the Boy's and Girl's Club and the expansion of Family Counseling Center Program Services for the Louisiana Methodist Children's Home.

"This is a new opportunity for us," Durden said. "We were very honored [LHF] saw us as a valued partner."

Durden said United Way is dedicated to helping people and improving communities. "We have been working with Mr. Bell to help with education," she said.

"We also are working with Med-Camps of Louisiana to help target childhood obesity. We are very grateful for this partnership, and the LHF is making a difference."

The last grantee to present was Dr. Leonel Lacayo, CEO and medical director of The Health Hut.

"This is a community taking care of its own," Lacayo said. "The need absolutely was here." Lacayo talked about The Health Hut and its importance in the Ruston community and surrounding areas.

"Our services are very simple," he said. "We have been going all over Lincoln Parish every week. Patients see a continuity which is great."

The Health Hut is now working to try and get free insulin for its patients and a small business program where they will do free physicals and screenings for workers without medical insurance.

"Since some owners cannot insure their employees, the workers will never go get a physical," Lacayo said. "The small businesses are extremely hopeful."

At the end of the meeting, Haynes asked the board members and attendees where they should go next.

"Our committees are active and working and the issues of sexually transmitted diseases as well as teenage pregnancy," he said.

"We will also be looking at the implementation of nutritional programs for Lincoln Parish Schools."

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