

Sea Mar Community Health Centers

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Sea Mar Community Health Centers (Sea Mar) is a Federally Qualified Health Center and one of the largest community-based health providers in Washington, with more than 1,500 personnel and more than 60 diverse medical, dental, behavioral, and social-service sites. Sea Mar works to provide “quality, comprehensive health and human services to diverse communities, specializing in service to Latinos,” and leverages the SDH most frequently in youth development, social mobility (jobs and education), and housing. Sea Mar’s many SDH efforts include helping youth pursue healthy alternatives to risky behaviors, develop leadership skills, and attend college with the help of a Sea Mar scholarship; providing adequate, safe, and affordable housing; offering citizenship preparation assistance; providing child care and early childhood education, including the Reach Out and Read program; offering WIC services, operating a community kitchen, and providing food literacy, nutrition, and meal planning education; helping increase healthy menu options at a local restaurant and inspiring a similar initiative in a nearby town; providing opportunities for children and elderly residents to socialize and to learn from each other; supporting employment and academic achievement among adults, youth who are behind in school, and youth who have dropped out of high school; and helping residents advocate for healthy eating and active living opportunities.

The precursor to Sea Mar Community Health Centers (Sea Mar) began in 1977, when a group of Latino community leaders established a free clinic staffed by volunteers to address the health care needs of the Spanish-speaking community in western Washington. Since then, the clinic has grown into Sea Mar Community Health Centers (Sea Mar), a Federally Qualified Health Center and one of the largest community-based health providers in Washington, with more than 1,500 personnel and more than 60 diverse medical, dental, behavioral, and social-service sites. In 2010, with a budget of \$125.7 million, Sea Mar served about 143,700 urban and rural community residents, including homeless persons and migrants, through 581,100 patient visits. This CHC predominantly serves Latinos and Caucasians, but also provides services to African-Americans, Native Americans, and Asians or Pacific Islanders. Forty-four percent of patients have Medicaid coverage, 41 percent are uninsured, and nearly 92 percent fall at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

Sea Mar Efforts to Leverage the Social Determinants of Health

The leadership and vision of CEO Rogelio Riojas is one of the major driving forces behind Sea Mar's efforts to leverage the social determinants of health (SDH). Rogelio has been the head of Sea Mar since its inception in 1978. Under his leadership Sea Mar developed from a single medical clinic in Seattle's South Park neighborhood, to a comprehensive health and human services organization serving 10 counties in Washington State. His "vision for the wellbeing of the underserved in our communities has been not only a vision, but a strategic action plan for the organization," said Sea Mar Senior Vice President Carolina Lucero. It is what inspires the organization "to providing quality, comprehensive health, human and housing services to diverse communities, specializing in service to Latinos," including providing leadership and advocacy to empower the communities served.

Three of Sea Mar's efforts addressing underlying factors in the health of its patients and the community began in the mid-1990s and continue to this day. One of them is Sea Mar's Child Development Center to provide child care and early childhood education. The center offers essential bi-lingual education that will benefit the well-being children between the ages of one month and twelve years, build a commitment to the importance of health, and provide family partnerships and performance standards that demand high quality education to encourage a smooth transition into elementary school. An essential component of the Center is the Intergenerational Program, which enriches the lives and spirits of the children and the elderly from Sea Mar's skilled nursing facility by providing opportunities for the two groups to learn from each other and socialize.

To address the needs of immigrants and migrant worker families, Sea Mar also established a citizenship preparatory program for adults, and a Farmworker Scholarships program to help children from seasonal or migrant farmworker families afford higher education. A description of the latter program follows.

Farmworker Scholarships

In 1995, the co-founder and CEO of Sea Mar prompted the community health center to establish a program to provide scholarships to high school and college students from seasonal or migrant farmworker families in Washington state. Students from these families often face enormous obstacles in completing their education. For many, attending four to eight or more schools in their middle and high school years is not uncommon. Additionally, many of the students work before school, after school and during summers to help their families meet daily living expenses. Other significant challenges faced by many of these students are language and cultural barriers not only in their communities but in the schools they attend. By providing scholarships, Sea Mar seeks to encourage students from farmworker families to continue their education and help them break the cycle of generations of backbreaking work and poverty.

Each year, approximately 140 of applicants are selected by an eight-person committee to each receive a \$1,000 scholarship for the academic year. The program is managed by administrative Sea Mar staff and sustained through a combination of funds raised from Sea Mar's annual charity golf tournament and auction, and donations from individuals and businesses.

The Farmworker Scholarships program has not been formally evaluated. However, since 1995 the program has helped an estimated 1,600 students pursue or continue higher education. In 2010 alone more than one hundred and forty \$1,000 scholarships were awarded to students in Washington State.

In the late 1990s, Sea Mar began to offer a youth-focused community program in reaction to prevalent problems with alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse and violence among school-aged children. Life Skills promotes healthy alternatives to risky behaviors by teaching skills to resist social pressure, manage stress and anxiety in healthy ways, set goals for themselves, and improve decision-making skills. In 2000 the organization opened one of its first housing projects, Sea Mar Motel, a migrant farmworker family housing facility. (This and other Sea Mar housing efforts are discussed below.) Around the same time, a call for recommendations for how to deal with a large number of students asked to leave a local community center for behavior issues inspired a community member to start an after-school boxing club to build self-confidence, leadership skills, and improve concentration both in and out of the ring. In 2001 Sea Mar began to support the club by donating space to box and accepting referrals to its medical, dental, and behavioral health clinics.

Several SDH activities started or came under Sea Mar's management within the past two years. The Latino/a Educational Achievement Project (LEAP) approached Sea Mar as its first choice and in 2010 became part of the organization. Established in 1998 as a non-profit by a group of educators and community leaders, LEAP is committed to identifying, proposing, and advocating for public policies that could improve academic achievement of Latino students in Washington state. LEAP/Sea Mar activities include an annual conference, leadership development, advocacy training and scholarships for students

Also in 2010, Sea Mar worked with the owner of a Mexican restaurant in Seattle who had approached the organization to develop a "diabetes friendly" menu. As a REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) coalition member, Sea Mar coordinated technical assistance provided by the Seattle & King County Department of Health, regional diabetes association, and the University of Washington. Mainstream media coverage of the effort caught the interest of others in a nearby city and inspired them to launch a health restaurant initiative unique to their locale.

Sea Mar has been very busy this year (2011) as well. The organization now co-sponsors an initiative to communicate the impact of health inequities in communities of color and promote efforts to increase access to physical activity and reduce tobacco. Sea Mar has also started its South Park Community

Kitchen pilot program to increase access to healthy foods and provide food literacy, nutrition, and meal planning education to participants. Furthermore, the organization has also launched a new education, employment, and training program in partnership with the City of Seattle, a local college and school district, and a local non-profit organization. Under this program, Sea Mar provides short-term job training and job placement assistance for adults, and paid work experience and community service opportunities for low-income and at-risk youth.

One of Sea Mar's long-standing areas of work is providing adequate and affordable housing. The organization's commitment to this kind of work was ignited in 1997 by a state legislature bill on farmworker housing. For decades, housing for farmworkers in Washington state was all but ignored, even while the agricultural industry was undergoing unprecedented growth. The bill would have allowed for construction of substandard housing for farmworker families that was without insulation, running water, or bathroom and cooking facilities. Sea Mar joined with the United Farm Workers of Washington and other community organizations and successfully convinced the Governor to veto the bill. Subsequently a farmworker coalition emerged, including the above organizations, some Seattle business people, and community members, to seek affordable, decent housing for the nearly 40,000 farmworkers who picked apples, cherries, and other hand-harvested crops in Washington. Two years and a successful public campaign later, the Governor declared farmworker housing as the state's number one housing priority and convinced the state legislature to begin long-term investment in farm worker housing. Out of this experience grew Sea Mar's various housing programs to improve living conditions for farmworkers and low-income families.

As one of several organizations working to address housing needs, in 2000 Sea Mar opened Sea Mar Motel, a migrant farmworker family housing facility located in a remodeled former local hotel in the southeastern part of the state of Washington. In 2009, Sea Mar became the owner of Cannon House, a safe and affordable assisted living residence in Seattle's Central District. In 2010, the organization established César Chávez Village in Seattle's South Park neighborhood to provide housing to low-income families. Then in 2011, Sea Mar opened farmworker housing facilities La Posada East (which includes the former Sea Mar Motel) and La Posada West, in Pasco, Washington. Construction of another low-income family housing project is expected to begin in Spring 2012. A description of the César Chávez Village housing complex follows.

César Chávez Village, Affordable Housing Complex

Since 2010 César Chávez Village provides 25 townhouse-style rental apartments to low-income families, including five units reserved for families transitioning out of homelessness. Located in Seattle's South Park neighborhood, residents live within walking distance of a commercial business district, multiple bus lines, retail and grocery stores, employment opportunities and an elementary school. A community center is located nearby, offering organized activities for children and seniors, life skills training classes, and a

full-sized gym and baseball fields. Residents are able to utilize many of Sea Mar’s services that are located right next door, including a nursing care and childcare facility and maternity support services, and need to walk less than a half mile to the nearest Sea Mar medical clinic. There is on and off street parking, a public garden space, and on-site staff who can provide information on various community resources and assistance in accessing them.

Since Sea Mar had been conducting housing programs for years, Sea Mar’s Executive Director and Board of Directors formally declared affordable housing as an organizational priority in 2005 and incorporated it into the mission statement. That year, the César Chávez Village housing project was set into motion. After weighing options to determine the best location for Sea Mar’s affordable housing development, leadership settled on a parcel of undeveloped land directly behind Sea Mar’s skilled nursing facility and less than a half mile from its South Park medical clinic. The housing complex is owned and operated by an affiliate LLC of Sea Mar.

César Chávez Village was built with the help of federal and state funding. The project cost \$8.2 million to build and is financed by a low interest loan through the state. The housing program is sustained through rent income and Section 8 funding that makes it possible for Sea Mar to provide reduced rent fees based on the family’s income. The Maternity Support Services program at the Sea Mar facility adjacent to César Chávez Village provides support during transitions from homelessness and is funded by a five year grant that Sea Mar received in 2009 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The housing complex has had renters in all 25 of its two, three, and four bedroom units since it opened its doors in the fall of 2010. Even though there are no formal evaluations for this effort, the story of a Sea Mar patient provides an example of how the organization is successful in improving the health and well-being of its housing clients: A mother of three, Kim’s children were taken into foster care when she was unable to provide adequate housing for her family. After she secured housing at César Chávez, she was able to get her kids back, find a job, and is now married.

How Sea Mar does it all

Sea Mar’s “infrastructure” for leveraging the SDH to improve the health of clients and the community can be described as follows:

SDH Program Management and Staff – Sea Mar relies on its team of 1,500+ personnel to advocate at the organizational, local, state and national level for programs and services that will create environmental as well as individual changes, all of which in turn result in improved health and social outcomes for those Sea Mar serves. The management of individual SDH programs is divided up among several departments or divisions, including the Preventive Health Services, Community Services, and Communications and

Education. The Child Development Center and Intergenerational Program is under the management of the skilled nursing department head, and the housing projects are owned by an affiliate LLC of Sea Mar and are overseen by the Director of Housing. These divisions range from 5 to 150 staff members. For staffing its SDH programs, the organization often hires its own, permanent staff from the community.

Grant proposals are primarily written and managed by two individuals within Sea Mar's administrative staff in collaboration with Sea Mar's 10 department heads. The Executive Vice President and Deputy Director also credits these department heads as very good and savvy in seeking funding. In fact, the Sea Mar Preventive Services and the Behavioral Health divisions often draft grant applications themselves to review with others.

Developing SDH Programs – The directors of each division meet regularly as a formal interdisciplinary team to develop and coordinate Sea Mar programs and services. The idea that “availability” of services does not equate to “accessibility” of services has been, and continues to be, an important factor in how and what services Sea Mar develops and implements. Sea Mar also often relies on its clients, staff members, and Board of Directors to identify opportunities for new SDH programs and provide feedback on services provided. The organization may reference electronic health records and community surveys to decide whether or not to pursue or sustain a program.

SDH Program Funding and Sustainability – For the past 16 years, Sea Mar has been raising funds for many of its programs, including its efforts leveraging the SDH, through the organization's annual charity golf tournament and auction for which many individuals and businesses donate a variety of items, including vacation packages, sports and cultural event tickets, art work, and celebrity autographed photos. In 2011, the event raised \$250,000. Additional funds are obtained through patient revenues, donations from individuals and businesses as well as state and federal grants. For its housing projects in particular, Sea Mar takes advantage of low interest loans to build or remodel properties, and rent income and Section 8 funding to cover maintenance expenses and sustain the programs. Overall, the organization estimates that 28 percent of its total budget is directed to fund programs that address the physical, social, and/or economic conditions in the communities served.

Partnerships and Networks – From the neighborhood to the federal level, if there is a network, collaborative effort, or partnership that could be beneficial to western Washington, Sea Mar is almost always a part of it. Though the number of these partnerships may seem “mind-boggling” at times, as the Executive Vice President and Deputy Director puts it, it is made possible to maintain by Sea Mar's staff size: more than 1,500 members.