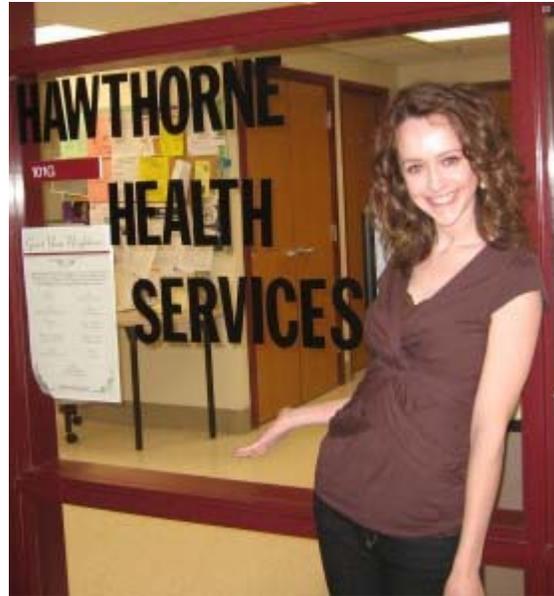


4.5 A Promising Model: Hawthorne Education Center and Clinic

Each year, Hawthorne Education Center in Rochester, Minnesota, offers more than 3,000 English language learners an unusually comprehensive approach to meeting their health care and health literacy needs. With a staff dedicated to helping learners and masterful leveraging of community and volunteer resources, the center has been able to offer primary health care on-site and free of charge to learners for the past seven years. They have also been able to offer ongoing health education in conjunction with ESOL and ABE classes.



Julie Nigon, the center’s program manager, shares that prior to the creation of their health literacy education program and the on-site clinic Hawthorne Health Services, “at least one ambulance per month was called to the school for student health emergencies.” Health disparities among learners, who hail from thirty countries of origin, were evident and limited access to care was a pervasive problem. Of the Hawthorne students who are fortunate enough to have health insurance, many are “functionally uninsured” – that is, their benefits are so low that out-of-pocket costs are prohibitive to using the insurance.

In 2005, Jennifer Rho, MD, MPH, a physician at the nearby Mayo Clinic, began to volunteer her services as doctor for the school’s population. Like Nigon, Dr. Rho noticed the significant health care needs among the learners and the considerable linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers that prevented them from accessing care. With Nigon’s blessing, Rho started the school’s clinic, which remains free to students and their family members. Since that time the center has run the clinic, health fairs, a cold and flu clinic, and a very well-received health education program for ESOL and other adult learners. The clinic is funded entirely through donations and staffed by volunteers.

Hawthorne Education Center maximizes leverage of community resources to continue offering its health services. Dr. Rho describes Hawthorne Health Services as a collaborative between the Education Center, Migrant Health Services, Olmsted County Public Health, and Winona State University. All learners in the school are given a booklet donated by a local organization listing available affordable community social services and health services.

Service learning partnerships play a major role in the health offerings at Hawthorne. Winona State's nursing program pairs nursing students with ESOL classes at Hawthorne to provide health education and support to ESOL learners while helping the nursing students develop sensitivity and skills for working with limited English patients from diverse cultures. In addition to working within ESOL classes, the nursing students offer an ESOL "book club" in which learners read level-appropriate health materials and discuss health topics. A Vista volunteer has also been crucial to the daily functioning of the Hawthorne clinic by serving as its office manager.

Dr. Rho credits the success of Hawthorne Health Services and health education to "high interest in health literacy among clinic staff, ESOL staff, community partners, and ESOL learners; and a high spirit of cooperation among project partners." Equally important, she states, are Hawthorne Education Center remaining in control of the efforts; careful selection of project partners to minimize individual agendas; reciprocal learning for ESOL learners and service learning students; and, utilizing a flexible, grassroots, bottom-up approach that incorporates civic engagement, community organizing, and service learning.

Dr. Rho states that Hawthorne is always looking for new partners and projects, some of which work out well and others less well. Recently, Mayo health care providers came to ESOL classes at the center to provide health education for the first time in advance of the school's cold and flu clinic. This turned out to be a reciprocal learning experience with the Mayo providers learning that they could not speak at their normal rate or use medical jargon with ESOL beginner levels and be understood. They also learned from ESL teachers that their method of demonstrating armpit temperature-taking over their clothes in beginner classrooms would lead to learners going home and trying to take temperatures over their clothes. Now Hawthorne ESOL teachers offer advice on effective, appropriate ways to communicate with and provide care to patients from diverse cultures on Mayo's Transcultural Patient Care Committee.