Volunteers Deliver Two Meals a Day, With a Side of TLC

In an interior hallway of a senior housing complex near Cedars-Sinai, Carole Avidon knocked on a door and announced, “Mr. Kessler, it’s Carole with Meals on Wheels … Take your time.”

As she has done many times before, Avidon waited patiently for 79-year-old Leon Kessler to open the door. She was carrying a bag containing two meals: a still-warm tray of stuffed peppers, mashed potatoes and carrots; and a chicken sandwich with a banana, cranberry juice and pound cake.

Avidon is one of a number of volunteers who pick up meals at Cedars-Sinai each weekday morning and deliver them to homebound seniors and others in need. For more than three decades, the medical center has provided kitchen space and staff for the local Meals on Wheels program.

The Los Angeles Fire Department is using a grant from Cedars-Sinai to buy stair chairs, which help firefighters rescue people trapped in buildings.

Grants Give a Boost to Public Safety Efforts

Public safety agencies in Los Angeles County will be able to improve their first-responder capabilities thanks to Community Benefit grants from Cedars-Sinai totaling $357,000.

The grant recipients include the Los Angeles Fire Department, Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, Beverly Hills Fire Department and Beverly Hills Police Department.

Cedars-Sinai is awarding a total of $3.3 million in grants to private organizations and government agencies dedicated to community health, education and public safety, and whose efforts will improve emergency response services and benefit underserved residents. The grants fund projects in areas such as South Los Angeles, West Hollywood and Venice, where Cedars-Sinai is continued on page 2

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First Responders Among Recipients of Grants from Cedars-Sinai

engaged in wide-ranging, long-term initiatives to improve community health and safety.

A significant portion of the grants to first responders went to the LAFD for the purchase of evacuation stair chairs, which have revolutionized the ways firefighters rescue people trapped in buildings.

“We asked the LAFD what their greatest needs were for the community that they serve, and they said it was stair chairs,” said Jonathan Schreiber, director of Community Engagement at Cedars-Sinai.

The foldable rescue chairs, which cost several thousand dollars each, weigh about 35 pounds and can handle loads up to 500 pounds. The chairs can be adjusted for the size of the passenger and the height of the operator. In addition to having four wheels and a lifting bar, the chairs are equipped with track-type belts on runners that, when the chair is tilted back, make contact with the stair treads so the chairs can glide down without lifting or bumping.

“It used to be they would put a person in a bedspread or a tarp, grab the corners and carry them down, which was dangerous to everyone involved,” Schreiber said. “With the stair chairs, it’s a simple solution that takes one person and minimizes the previous risk.”

LAFD Battalion Chief Armando Hogan said the stair chairs will make firefighters’ rescue operations safer and more efficient.

“The Los Angeles Fire Department would like to thank the great Cedars-Sinai Health System for their generous contribution of 83 evacuation stairwell chairs that will enhance our public service to all the communities of Los Angeles,” Hogan said.

“The collaborative partnership between Cedars-Sinai and our Los Angeles Fire Foundation allows the LAFD to acquire additional equipment and supplies that subsidize a limited city budget. The LAFD values, respects and appreciates Cedars-Sinai Health System for recognizing and addressing a public safety need.”

Other first-responder grant money went to the LAPD for a program that gives child passenger safety seats, bike helmets and bike lights to people who can’t afford them. The Police Department also received funds so its Sober Graduation program can purchase iPads, laptops and video equipment, as well as a Plexiglas trailer to transport a mangled vehicle, for its anti-DUI presentations.

Grants for public safety were also awarded to the following agencies:

- Los Angeles County Sheriff’s
Stair chairs purchased with Cedars-Sinai grant money will make Los Angeles firefighters’ rescue operations safer and more efficient.

Embracing Our Community

Department for 50 computer monitors
• Los Angeles County Fire Department for off-road emergency vehicles
• Beverly Hills Fire Department for CPR training materials and medical equipment for its Community Emergency Response Team
• Beverly Hills Police Department for chemical, radiation and biohazard detection equipment; and for its Explorer Post program, which mentors high school students interested in law enforcement
The American Red Cross Los Angeles Region received grant money for earthquake kit supplies for the PrepareLA programs at West Hollywood Park, Fairfax High School, Beverly Hills High School and the Pan Pacific Park Recreation Center.

“With 10 million people living in the Los Angeles area, helping in a catastrophic disaster is too large a task for any one agency,” said Monica Diaz, communications director for the American Red Cross Los Angeles Region. “With grants like these, it brings our various agencies together in a unified effort and allows us to serve the community in the best way possible.”

Area health clinics that offer affordable medical services to low-income and underserved residents have received more than $1.44 million in Community Benefit grants from Cedars-Sinai, part of the medical center’s commitment to supporting and strengthening the region it serves.

“Cedars-Sinai is committed to making sure the entire community has access to healthcare,” said Jonathan Schreiber, director of Community Engagement. “Some of the projects funded were straight infrastructure projects, which can be a challenge when raising money, and yet they are vital to keeping the doors open to provide access to medical care for everyone in need.”

Sharing the Community Benefit Grant money are the Saban Community Clinic and the Venice Family Clinic, which offer primary healthcare; Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, which offers reproductive healthcare services; and the Maple Counseling Center, which provides low-cost mental health services.

“This grant is a key piece of our being able to implement an electronic health records system, which will allow us to provide better care to our patients,” said Jeff Bujer, chief executive officer at the Saban Community Clinic, which has four locations across West Los Angeles and Hollywood. Bujer estimated the cost of launching that electronic medical records system to be $2 million.

“Despite our own fundraising, we still had a big bucket to fill, and this grant from Cedars-Sinai takes much of the pressure off and allows us to move forward with confidence,” Bujer said.

The Venice Family Clinic — with seven locations in Venice, Santa Monica, Inglewood, Mar Vista and Culver City — provides healthcare to more than 24,000 patients each year. The grant from Cedars-Sinai will enable the clinic to make much-needed repairs and updates to its telephone systems, air conditioning and elevators.

“Every dollar we raise and bring in goes directly to patient care, yet we often have needs that relate to the support systems that allow us to provide that patient care,” said Elizabeth Forer, the Venice clinic’s CEO. “Cedars-Sinai understood that and invested in it for us, and we are thankful.”

The grant to Maple Counseling Center will fund capital and infrastructure improvements.

At Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, the grant will pay for renovations, as well as updates to technology and medical equipment at several locations. Some of the grant funds for Planned Parenthood will be spent on turning storage rooms into counseling rooms. In South Los Angeles, which has the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases in Los Angeles County, the grant money will provide for more testing and outreach programs.

“Every year, Planned Parenthood Los Angeles provides lifesaving cancer screenings, STD testing and treatment, contraception, health counseling and much more to nearly 150,000 patients,” said Sue Dunlap, the organization’s president and CEO. “Thanks to Cedars-Sinai’s support, we’ll be able to improve and expand the provision of high-quality reproductive healthcare at some of our busiest health centers in Hollywood, Santa Monica and South Los Angeles.”

Health Clinics to Share $1.44 Million in Grants From Cedars-Sinai
Teachers use Cedars-Sinai's Healthy Habits toolkits to spark lessons and discussions about good nutrition while students eat breakfast.

Kids Learn to Find the Fun in Healthy Foods

The school day was just beginning at Sixth Avenue Elementary School when teacher Deborah Blanchette grabbed the attention of her second-grade class by giving them this riddle to solve: “I am red outside, and I have a crown tip at the top of my round skin. Inside of me are ruby red seeds, shaped like tear drops. Who am I?”

The children were eager to respond, but before acknowledging their raised hands, Blanchette reminded them, “Don’t forget, you have to answer in a complete sentence.”

“It is a seed,” said one boy.

“It is a strawberry,” said the next child to be called on.

The third student to venture a guess got it right, prompting Blanchette to hold up a card showing a picture of a pomegranate. The back of the card was filled with information such as the fact that Spanish explorers first brought this “tart, sweet, spongy” fruit to America.

After a discussion about which food group the pomegranate belonged to and whether its skin was edible, Blanchette said, “This is a really good antioxidant. It helps you, but you have to be careful because it can make a big mess on your clothes.”

Blanchette, like other teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, makes regular use of Cedars-Sinai’s Healthy Habits toolkit, a set of colorful, educational cards containing food facts, math problems, recipes, riddles, jokes and other materials that spark lively lessons and discussions on good nutrition. Teachers refer to the cards first thing in the morning as students eat a free meal provided through the district’s Breakfast in the Classroom program, or use them during other parts of the school day.

Cedars-Sinai has distributed about 400 toolkits to teachers and staff at 16 elementary schools that participate in the medical center’s Healthy Habits program, which helps fight obesity in vulnerable communities of Los Angeles’ Mid-City and surrounding areas. The program, which provides education for children and their parents and training for teachers, offers 10-week workshops on nutrition and fitness in second-grade classrooms, as well as refresher courses for third- and fourth-graders and middle school students.

Cedars-Sinai community health educators developed the Healthy Habits toolkit in cooperation with a number of teachers and school administrators. Blanchette, who has taught second grade at Sixth Avenue for 18 years, was among the first to try it out.

“It’s compact and teacher-friendly,” she said. “You can teach right from the cards. They’re fun, and they get the kids engaged.”

Healthy Habits Associate Director Carolyn Buenaflor, MPH, said the lessons in the toolkit reinforce language arts, math and science concepts while providing information on healthy food choices.

Epic, the company that developed Cedars-Sinai’s electronic medical record system, contributed funds to print the toolkits, which include pictures of a wide variety of nutritious foods children might not have been exposed to, such as those pomegranates, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.

Blanchette said the lessons in the toolkit encourage her students to be more adventurous eaters: “Kids get stuck in a rut, and they just want to eat certain things. I want them to be open to trying different things and to make healthier choices instead of always grabbing the chips.”
Students’ Summer Work at Cedars-Sinai More Than a First Job

Opening Doors for At-Risk Teens

For one high school student, working in Cedars-Sinai’s Human Resources Department this past summer was “an opportunity to step outside my comfort zone.” For another, who said, “I want to help improve patients’ lives,” a summer job at the Spine Center confirmed a desire to pursue a medical career.

These students were among 20 from low-income neighborhoods across Los Angeles who marked a milestone at Cedars-Sinai over the summer — their first job.

Each summer, Cedars-Sinai’s Youth Employment and Development (YED) program partners with the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office, the city’s Economic and Workforce Development Department and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce to employ at-risk students from underserved areas as part of the Hire L.A. youth summer employment program.

For eight years, Cedars-Sinai has been participating in the program, which is designed to prepare young people for the future while strengthening the local workforce. Students who expressed interest in the healthcare field went through an interview process to land paid office jobs around the medical center.

The chamber of commerce offered students job-skills workshops and then invited them to a screening and interview process with various employers. Students were employed in areas including the Samuel Oschin Cancer Center, Pediatrics, Ambulatory Care, the Emergency Department and Materials Management.

“We help them build a foundation of basic job skills,” said Andrea Perry, YED administrator. “It’s all about teaching them, and the staff members who supervise them are very patient. The students see doctors and nurses on TV, but they don’t see the business side of a hospital. We provide a real-life career showcase. And they learn that you can start in one place and advance through different positions to get where you want to be.”

Some of the students who worked at Cedars-Sinai over the summer had to take two or three buses to get to the medical center. “That’s how much they wanted to be here,” Perry said. “They get that this is an opportunity that could lead to something else.”

Diamond Jackson, a University High School student, wants to become a nurse, and her job in a nursing unit over the summer gave her a chance to observe RNs in action. “I feel like I’m more educated on who nurses are, what they do and how they do it,” Jackson said. “Speaking with some of the nurses made me feel better that what I want to do is possible. The summer program laid down the foundation for me to get started on my career, and I’m truly grateful for that.”

Diamond Jackson (left) works with her supervisor Frances Chen, a research administration coordinator in the Cedars-Sinai Department of Gastroenterology.
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Kessler, a retired real estate broker who never married, is among the clients who receive two meals a day during the week, with the option of weekend meals delivered on Friday.

Kessler answered the door with a smile and led Avidon into the kitchen of his small apartment to put his lunch and dinner in the refrigerator. He would later eat the meals while sitting in his well-worn recliner and watching the news on TV.

Like all seniors who rely on Meals on Wheels, Kessler lives on a modest, fixed income. While dealing with the effects of Parkinson’s disease, he approaches life with a sense of humor, looking forward to that knock on the door and the opportunity for some verbal play that comes with each day’s delivery.

“These meals are a necessity for me,” he said. “It means I have some cash in my pocket. And it’s no fun to cook for yourself.”

Avidon bantered a bit with Kessler before leaving. As she headed out the door, she felt satisfied that she had brightened his day. “I get a lot out of this,” she said. “People are so appreciative.”

Avidon became a Meals on Wheels volunteer a couple of years ago during an ongoing battle with cancer. She discovered that helping others was a good way to keep her own spirits up.

Food Services staff members make about 60 meals each weekday for Meals on Wheels, and recipients pay just $5 a day, or $6.50 a day for food from the medical center’s kosher kitchen (other preferences such as vegetarian meals are also honored).

The Meals on Wheels program at Cedars-Sinai serves Beverly Hills and adjacent areas. To apply, call 310-423-3517 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to noon.
COACH Gives a Shot in the Arm to Kids in Urgent Need of Immunizations

When the COACH for Kids and Their Families® team recently took to its mobile medical vans to provide back-to-school immunizations in some of Los Angeles’ disadvantaged communities, team members came face-to-face with long lines of urgent needs.

A 14-year-old boy was so far behind on his immunizations that he needed a polio booster shot usually given to 5-year-olds, and numerous other children needed as many as five shots to catch up on the vaccines they had missed.

Keeping up with immunizations required by state law to prevent outbreaks of diseases such as measles, chickenpox and whooping cough is one of many health challenges facing low-income Angelenos with limited access to affordable healthcare.

COACH for Kids and Their Families®, a program of the Cedars-Sinai Maxine Dunitz Children’s Health Center, helped these families meet the immunization requirements by participating in a series of back-to-school community events over the summer.

The COACH team, which brings free medical services to disadvantaged communities through its two mobile vans, provided immunizations at locations that ranged from a low-income housing complex and Markham Middle School, both in Watts, to the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum near Downtown. The team provided 4,645 immunizations for 2,009 children in FY 2013.

COACH Program Director Michele Rigsby Pauley, RN, MSN, CPNP, said the COACH team provided immunizations to more than 2,000 children in FY 2013.

Community Benefit by the Numbers

- **10,677** Number of adults reached in FY 2013 through Cedars-Sinai’s participation in L.A. community health fairs, where nurses provide health screenings and information on conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes.
- **27** Number of schools where Share and Care art therapy programs are offered by Cedars-Sinai’s Psychological Trauma Center. This includes 18 elementary schools, six middle schools and three high schools. Training programs to help parents improve communication and other parenting skills have been expanded to include all these schools.
- **62** Number of high school students who participated in Cedars-Sinai’s Annual Nursing Career Luncheon, which included inspirational talks by nurses as well as tours of the medical center.
- **200** Number of public and private community organizations that collaborate with COACH for Kids and Their Families®, a program of the Cedars-Sinai Maxine Dunitz Children’s Health Center that provides no-cost health and social services to disadvantaged children and families.
- **1,189** Number of second-graders who participated in a series of 10 Healthy Habits workshops on nutrition and fitness taught at 15 elementary schools by Cedars-Sinai health educators in FY 2013. The program now includes refresher courses for students in third and fourth grade as well as workshops for sixth- and seventh-graders at Pio Pico Middle School.
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extra pressure was on families as this school year approached because the Los Angeles Unified School District had eliminated its grace period — all children had to be up-to-date on immunizations before they could start school. Yet the parents and children who lined up at the vans didn’t have access to a physician or clinic, or they couldn’t afford the vaccines.

Many parents brought pre-teens to COACH for a Tdap booster shot to prevent whooping cough (pertussis), a requirement since 2011, when the state responded to a 2010 outbreak of pertussis by requiring students to get the vaccine before entering seventh grade.

“We saw many children who were behind on their immunizations because there’s a lot of transiency in the population we serve,” Rigsby Pauley said. “Kids tend to fall through the cracks. We look through their records to see what immunizations they’re missing so we can get them caught up.”

Some children whose families have recently immigrated to the United States arrive with no immunization records and have to start over.

The COACH team applies a special sensitivity to children who respond to the sight of a needle with protests and tears. A toy chicken that lays eggs is among the tools used to distract the youngsters, who are then rewarded with small gifts that bring back smiles.

This sensitivity was particularly helpful when an autistic 12-year-old boy came to one of the back-to-school events.

“He was very fearful and combative,” said COACH nurse practitioner Anne Traynor, RN, MN, FNP-BC. “I wasn’t sure we were going to be able to give him the two shots he needed.”

But three members of the staff worked together to reassure the boy, who ended up shaking their hands as he left the COACH van with a bandage on each arm.

COACH provides a wide range of free health and social services on a regular basis as the mobile medical vans visit schools, homeless shelters and community centers in Downtown/Skid Row, Pico-Union/Central Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, Inglewood, Lennox, Crenshaw/Mid-City, Watts and Compton.

“We saw many children who were behind on their immunizations because there’s a lot of transiency in the population we serve.”

Michele Rigsby Pauley
COACH program director

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