



PRIZES FOR PROGRESS

Second Place Winner

Northern Neck Free Clinic

In the Northern Neck and neighboring Middlesex County, we're a rural lot. A lot of space divides us, physicians are few, and health care doesn't come easy. Still, we love natural things, like dogs, and for nearly a quarter of a century the Northern Neck – Middlesex Free Health Clinic has followed the Virginia Health Care Foundation around like a little puppy.

After the public-private VHCF was founded 25 years ago, the NNMFHC came yapping on its heels a year later, starting as a one-night-a-week operation on October 7, 1993.

Early on, we found we like a lot of attention. This became especially true after our first donor, anonymous at the time but later identified as Phyllis Smith, gave us money to move out of borrowed clinical space at the Lancaster County Health Department – and borrowed administrative space at an attorney's office, and then at the town office – into our first home, a modular building at the end of a road in Kilmarnock. This gave us room to play.

The VHCF recognized the potential and gave us a \$141,895 grant for a three-year Nurse Practitioner Project (1997-2000). One advertisement and 65 applications later, we hired our first paid provider and along with our trusty volunteers started seeing patients five days and two evenings every week. We were growing up!

(VHCF was ahead of its time. Back then, nurse practitioners were barely used, almost a novelty, to fill provider spots. We've had at least one on board ever since, and when we last advertised it took two years – and flying in candidates from across the country – to find an NP who was a rural-health-care fit.)

This first VHCF grant made our house a home. It was our cornerstone. People in need could see our permanence, and so could our benefactors. Support from municipalities nearly tripled, value of services more than tripled, and these upward spikes have continued:

| | 1996 | VHCF NP Project | 2001 | 2016 |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Donations from county govts. | \$28,000 | —————→ | \$73,548 | \$189,906 |
| Value of services | \$411,272 | —————→ | \$1,329,634 | \$9,124,048 |

Also in 2000, the VHCF recognized the donor and volunteer who had made our house possible, Phyllis Smith, with the Heroes in Health Care Donor Award.

We like to play Go Fetch, and while we've lost some of the treats the VHCF threw out we were able to bring home five of those Heroes' awards. Phyllis's was the first. The next was the Physician award to Dr. Dick Baylor in 2003. Dr. Baylor was retired and nearing 70 when he helped sire us. A Clinic founder, he served virtually our whole history as Medical Director and on the Board, and now in his 90s he's still a cheerful soul and he still visits just to bring us joy.

A year later, in 2004, the VHCF recognized William B. (Billy) Graham, with another Donor Award. His contributions enabled us to move into our current 10,500-square-foot home, on a road and in a building named after him and his wife. Billy also led us into the land of the endowment to help secure our future.

In 2007 the VHCF recognized our Pharmacy for the Heroes in Health Care Teamwork Award, and in 2016 our Executive Director for the Heroes' Employee Award, but we're getting ahead of ourselves, chasing our tails, we're so excited. Down boy. Sit. Back to 2003.

(Nevertheless, we do like the pats on the head and the treats. They help invigorate us to go sniffing around for other ways to help our corner of the world. They also help with our visibility in Virginia. We could have barked all night and not gotten that kind of recognition).

In 2003, the Clinic was poised to make its move to a new building, one that included space for dental services – an area of health care so critically needed among those with low incomes. For several years we had been rounding up the people most in need of oral surgery and herding them by van to Richmond to get the life-saving care they needed. Clinic patients made 331 of these visits from 2000 through 2003. The VHCF gave us a three-year grant of \$316,500 to help open, staff and operate a six-chair Dental Clinic on site, which opened to a waiting list of 500. The grant enabled us to form a partnership with the VCU School of Dentistry, which has continued ever since, to serve as a rotation site for final-year dental and hygiene students to work with our staff dentist.

| | 2000-03 | VHCF Dental Program | 2005 | 2016 |
|--------------------------|----------|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Value of dental services | \$57,317 | —————▶ | \$580,735 | \$1,059,264 |

Ten years later, in 2013, the VHCF joined in a 1:1 challenge grant to upgrade and obtain digital dental equipment, software and computer hardware. This is helping us more efficiently track patients, visits, and procedures, and it puts us on the path for Medicaid billing, which will provide an additional revenue stream. We like streams.

The VHCF also helped grow our Pharmacy with a \$79,803 grant during 2008-12 in partnership with the Greater Williamsburg Medication Access Program. We'd already been using the VHCF's The Pharmacy Connection (TPC) to obtain hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of medicines (and still do). The partnership with GWMAP and the resulting funds paved the way for the Clinic to open an outreach site in Middlesex County, served by GWMAP, for patients to be able to pick up their prescriptions and get screened for eligibility. The Outreach Office opened in 2009, and within two years the number of Middlesex patients served increased by 75%.

Those four monetary VHCF awards total \$598,198. As significant as this is, the VHCF influence extends far beyond that. Not included is a joint operation with the Middle Peninsula – Northern Neck Community Services Board that in 2010 established a mental health program at the Clinic. This three-year VHCF-CSB-NNMFHC partnership added a vital component to our Medical Clinic services and reinforced our relationship with the CSB and its mental health professionals. During the years it operated, an average of 500 visits a year were made to the CSB counselor on site, and the Clinic continues having a mental-health component.

The VHCF has had a major impact in all our service areas – medical, dental, mental health and pharmacy. Still, that doesn't do justice to the benefits we've received. The not-so-measurable ones include all the donors and grantors who recognize the VHCF's support and the value it adds to the Clinic's role in meeting the needs of the underserved. The VHCF has been our health-care home, enabling us to be the health-care home for those in need on our home turf: more than 14,000 individuals have made over 150,000 visits and received over \$92 million worth of health care in our 24 years, and picked up more than 500,000 prescriptions.

We love our walks with the VHCF, when we are not on so tight a leash that we can't explore those holes in health care and dig out solutions. And we love having the VHCF tag dangling from our collar for the public to see. We're endeared to the public/private concept and support. We're all about public, whom we serve and engage, as patients and volunteers, and about private – the grantors and individuals who support us, not for the glory, but for the greater good. The VHCF exemplifies the best of both worlds.

Volunteers have spent nearly 350,000 hours walking with us through the health-care fields. As meaningful as the walks are, they're still costly. The Clinic's annual budget is \$1.3 million, all by donation. Taking the walks and meeting the budget would not have been possible without the VHCF by our side, tossing sticks, encouraging us, supporting us, and scratching our ears.