VIRGINIA GAZETTE NEWS

OLDE TOWNE MEDICAL & DENTAL CENTER GETS READY TO CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF HELPING THOSE WHO NEED HEALTH CARE

VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE DENTAL SCREENINGS AT THE GIVE KIDS A SMILE EVENT AT OLDE TOWNE MEDICAL & DENTAL CENTER ON APRIL 22. (COURTESY OF AARON THOMPSON)

BY EVELYN DAVIDSON | EVELYN.DAVIDSON@VIRGINIAMEDIA .COM | STAFF WRITER

JAMES CITY — Housed in the same building as social services, some may not be familiar with the medical office there, but for the patients it serves, Olde Towne Medical & Dental Center offers invaluable services that can be difficult to find elsewhere. The center's mission is simple: "to provide quality, cost-effective, coordinated and preventative primary health care to clients, regardless of ability to pay."

Take Urbanna resident Aremi Reyes, who recently traveled an hour from the Middle Peninsula just to receive care at Olde Towne.

Reyes heard about the center from friends and goes for services such as checkups and mammograms. She doesn't speak English, but the center has volunteer translators and some of the staff are bilingual.

Patients also come from other areas in Virginia, including New Kent County and Newport News.

Aaron Thompson, who has been executive director of the center since 2020, explained what it's like to walk through the center's lobby and see patients who have been denied service at other places.

The elation of people who have suffered and finally received care, Thompson said, makes his nearly hourlong commute to work all worth it.

Since its opening in 1993, Olde Towne has grown from a few rooms to half of the building that also houses the James City County Department of Social Services.

The center has around 44 full-time and part-time employees, as well as 35-40 volunteers. This includes five nurse practitioners, an optometrist and a dental director.

Some of the volunteers are specialists, such as cardiologists, neurologists and physiatrists, who work at other practices but volunteer their time at Olde Towne.

Services offered include in-house labs, immunization clinic and prenatal care. The center will have seen around 4,000 individual patients this year.

For funding, the center holds fundraisers, has private donors and receives jurisdictional grants. It works closely with James City County. For instance, Olde Towne is responsible for the pre-employment screening of James City County employees.
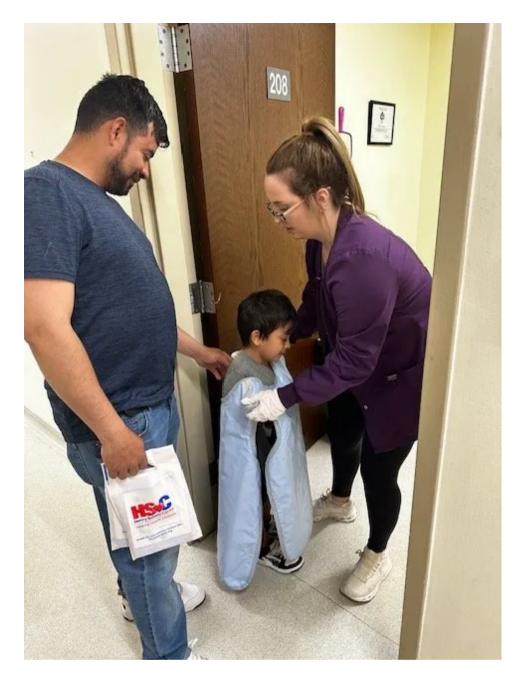
The center also receives income from serving its patients.

"We have the belief that no one is ever turned away, regardless of ability to pay," Thompson said.

However, Olde Towne is not a free clinic, Thompson pointed out. Rather, it works on a sliding scale based on the patient's income. It works with uninsured, underinsured, Medicare, Medicaid and many commercial health insurance providers.

A young patient gets ready for X-rays at Olde Towne Medical & Dental Center in James City County. (Courtesy of Aaron Thompson)

Olde Towne Medical & Dental Center serves the Williamsburg, James City County and York County areas. Evelyn Davidson/staff

For Stephanie Betancourt, of Williamsburg, Olde Towne is like a lifesaver.

Betancourt said she didn't get approved for Medicaid and was struggling to find a new primary care physician. Many places required a monthlong wait for an appointment, but Betancourt couldn't risk waiting that long. She had previously visited the emergency room for abdominal pain and was worried that she might be experiencing complications from an intrauterine device.

She recently was able to schedule an appointment at Olde Towne, and said the staff worked hard to get as much done in one appointment as possible so she wouldn't have to schedule multiple return appointments.

"It gave me a lot of peace of mind," said Betancourt, who feared that she might have cervical cancer.

Olde Towne is also the only provider of adult dental Medicaid in the area, so it has a long waiting list of patients. It currently has four operatories in the dental suite. Thompson hopes to hire a part-time dentist, as well as a full-time dental hygienist from Virginia Peninsula Community College.

During the pandemic, the center continued to serve its community, only shutting down for 10 days. In order to care for patients' safely, the center established a telemedicine program in which it had designated treatment rooms and curbside visits.

"It was phenomenal that they were able to pivot as quickly and seamlessly as they did," Thompson said.

The pandemic also sparked a deeper focus on integrated care, a combination of primary care and behavioral health.

Olde Towne partners with Bacon Street Youth and Family Counseling and received a grant from Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center to help start their integrated care model.

When it comes to expanding the center, Thompson wants add more providers, nurse practitioners and physician assistants. He also wants Olde Towne to become a federally qualified health care center in the future.

Moving forward, Thompson hopes to make more people within the community aware of the services and resources that Olde Towne can offer. Those who use the center say the services are invaluable.

"We are so grateful for the care at Olde Towne," the wife of a patient wrote in a "success story" shared on the center's social media pages. "They treat us like family. The providers there truly have a calling and we are so glad they care for folks like us."

A family sits in the waiting room at Olde Towne Medical & Dental Center's Give Kids a Smile event on April 22. (Courtesy of Aaron Thompson)

The center will celebrate its 30th Anniversary Gala on Sept. 30 at the Williamsburg Lodge. The fundraiser helps support the underserved populations of greater Williamsburg that depend on Olde Towne for their health needs. For information on tickets sponsorships, visit www.otmdc.org.

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