

# Aides translate, gather vitals

## Doctors say help essential at Free Clinic

By Maria Gonzalez, [mgonzalez@VenturaCountyStar.com](mailto:mgonzalez@VenturaCountyStar.com) April 24, 2004

They're known as "los doctores" to some of the patients. But these teens aren't the doctors -- yet. Some Conejo Valley high school students are putting their Spanish-speaking skills to work at the Westminster Free Clinic in Thousand Oaks.

Working side by side with patients and doctors, the teens do everything from taking patients' medical histories to translating doctors' diagnoses. The program has inspired many of the teens to consider careers in medicine.

Mireya Candelario and Alma Garcia are two of the 30 teens participating in the HEALTH Matters Teen Training Program. Wearing navy blue scrubs and keeping a stethoscope at hand, the teens prepare the patients for the doctors by taking their weight, height, blood pressure and vital signs.

Candelario, 16, has been part of the program for two years. The Westlake High School junior, who lives in Thousand Oaks, came to the United States from Mexico when she was 5 years old.

"I know how it feels to not speak English," Candelario said. "It's hard not knowing."

The free clinic offers free basic exams eve Wednesday night to low-income or homeless residents who lack health insurance. More than 80 percent of the people using the clinic are Latinos, increasing the need for Spanish-speaking volunteers.

The Latino mentoring and training program was started at the clinic three years ago by program director Lisa Safaeinili. The program received an \$8,750 grant last month from Destino: The Hispanic Legacy Fund through the Ventura County Community Foundation.

At the clinic, the teens also translate medical histories for the patients. Doctors rely on the histories to figure out what is wrong with the patient, said Dr. Arbi Ghazarian.

"Communication is the key to deciphering what's going on," Ghazarian said. "Without translators, really, I can't do anything."

Sometimes unusual words snag the translations. At one point, Candelario couldn't summon the Spanish word for kidneys -- rinones.

Guillermina Barajas of Thousand Oaks recently brought her 70-year-old mother, a diabetic, to the clinic for blood tests. Barajas, who has been to the clinic before, said the teens do an excellent job. She called the program a positive way for young people to spend their time.

"You can tell they want to be here because they enjoy what they're doing," Barajas said in Spanish.

Garcia, 17, of Simi Valley has been working at the clinic for two months. At first, getting a good blood pressure reading was one of the hardest things to do because "you have to listen for it." Now she does it with ease.

"It makes me want to go into medicine," said Garcia, who wants to be a surgeon.

The knowledge that she's helping people boosted Candelario's confidence about her career choice.

"At first I thought I couldn't do it," Candelario said. "It's helped me a lot because this is what I want to do. I want to be a nurse."

Cindy Vincent, co-founder of the clinic, said she would like the program to eventually offer scholarships for the teens to continue with medicine in college. The program has helped them know that they can have careers in medicine.

"They know it's not pie in the sky, something so difficult and unattainable that they can't do it," Vincent said. "Now they do it every week. It really makes things real for the kids."



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Roberto Valladares, 19, a Moorpark College student, explains test results to patient Maria Raymundo, 51, of Thousand Oaks, who is being treated for diabetes at Westminster Free Clinic in Thousand Oaks.