In a world where some people receive ongoing awards and a great deal of attention, it’s easy for us to forget, or fail to notice, that health heroes are actually to be found all around us.

Think about a time when a health worker made a significant difference in your life. For me, it can be as simple as the nurse who came in on her day off to give me a needed treatment, or as powerful as the primary care physician who likely saved my life when she noticed a potentially deadly skin cancer. If you don’t have examples in your own life, there are probably examples in the lives of your loved ones.

At the Health District, we find that there are unsung health heroes all around us, and they are making both simple and powerful differences in people’s lives every day.

In our offices, we put out “Caught You Caring” cards and the people we serve often fill them out.

They applaud the Larimer Health Connect Health Coverage Guides for helping people navigate the health insurance changes 2013 brought forth; Mental Health Connections for providing resources to those dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues; the Family Dental Clinic staff who serve thousands of people every year who would not otherwise be able to afford dental care; and our cholesterol and blood pressure screening team for allowing people to identify and treat serious progressive illnesses—to name just a few.

Their words express immense gratitude for receiving life-changing care and regularly remind me that there are many, many unsung health heroes in our midst. As you go about your life, don’t forget to look for the unsung health heroes around you—whether they save a life, give you back quality of life, reduce worry or make life a little easier—they change lives daily and we should be extraordinarily grateful for them!

Executive Director
To the Family Dental Clinic team:

“Thanks for literally changing my life!”

The Family Dental Clinic ensures that each patient is completely comfortable and all of the staff are competent and timely.

“It’s difficult for anyone to be in this position of needing help—I was treated with dignity and kindness.”

~ comments from “Caught You Caring” cards

A tight-knit team that maintains high standards and holds one another accountable, each staff member at the Family Dental clinic recognizes that none of them could do their jobs without everyone else on the team doing theirs.

“I’ve seen our staff do everything from giving a child a high five for their good brushing habits to drying tears, reassuring frightened patients, relieving pain and giving people the best smile they’ve had in years,” says front office supervisor Kris Hemby.

The clinic provides sliding-fee dental services for Health District residents who meet financial guidelines or who are covered by Medicaid or Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+).

Patients love the fact that they can always count on being treated with the utmost dignity and respect. “We’re a family,” Hemby says. “It’s all about giving the patient the best care we can.”

A few members of the Family Dental Clinic team provide support for one another before the busy workday begins. From left: dentist Rob Gartland, dental hygienist Doris Ross, front office supervisor Kris Hemby, dental assistant supervisor Zoe Thomas, and dental hygienist Beverly Sleight.

To the Cardiovascular Health Promotion team:

“Thank you for being kind, caring and for keeping us healthy!”

“You were professional, friendly, informative and easy to discuss issues with.”

“Thank you for your knowledge and patient explanation of my test results.”

~ comments from “Caught You Caring” cards

Sean Nielsen, a 21-year-old Health and Exercise Science major at CSU, and his classmate took advantage of a free Health District cholesterol screening after their professor encouraged everyone in their class to get tested. Nielsen’s screening revealed very high blood sugar levels and led to a diagnosis of insulin-dependent, type 1 diabetes.

“At the time, I was completely shocked,” Nielsen says. “Then I started thinking back and it made absolute sense given how I was feeling…it allowed me to put two and two together.”

The Health District’s screenings, regularly administered throughout the community by registered nurses Cheri Nichols and Julie Abramoff, measure total cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure and blood glucose levels and include a personalized consultation. “Though (Nielsen) was experiencing some symptoms, he didn’t have any idea that it could be serious,” Nichols says.

Nielsen proactively took the next steps of confirming the results with his doctor at CSU’s Hartshorn Health Center and was referred to University of Colorado Health’s endocrinologists and diabetes management education programs, where he learned to incorporate his treatment into his lifestyle.

“It’s still really new in my life and there’s a whole lot to learn—but I feel great now,” Nielsen, now 22, says. He recently celebrated his graduation from CSU with a mountain biking and rock climbing trip to Moab and is setting his sights on graduate school.

“Screenings are so important because they can identify previously undetected illnesses, allowing people to seek treatment and avoid the complications that can occur when serious progressive illnesses like diabetes and hypertension go untreated,” Nichols says. “It’s really why we have this program.”
To the Mental Health Connections team:

"Thank you for giving my wife and I information that fit our tough and complicated situation."

"You have made such an enormous difference in my life."

"Thank you for being compassionate, listening carefully and giving me some hope."

"It’s nice to know there is someone there who will listen and not judge me."

A partnership of the Health District and Touchstone Health Partners, Mental Health Connections works with a variety of local resources to link people with affordable mental health or substance abuse care that fits their unique situation.

One behind-the-scenes hero helping to make it all possible is Emily Leetham, the team’s administrative assistant. "Emily keeps everything organized and running smoothly, makes everyone’s job easier, and is always there to answer program questions with patience and expertise," says program coordinator Dee Colombini. "When someone needs something such as information, data or help of any sort, Emily finds a way to make it happen."

One of the most rewarding aspects of Leetham’s work is interacting with the pro bono providers in the community who provide low-cost counseling for clients. "I am always taken aback by their giving spirit and willingness to see clients at such a low cost," Leetham says. "It’s inspiring to talk with them and we are so grateful for their services."

Mental Health Connections offers confidential, free services as well as counseling on a sliding-fee scale basis, and accepts walk-ins and weekday appointments. After-hours crisis help is always available by phone.

A cancer patient on an insurance plan that was about to expire sought the help of Larimer Health Connect. She needed regular infusion therapy and couldn’t afford a gap in coverage. After several meetings with Health Coverage Guide Benita Wilson, who helped her work through the various roadblocks that appeared during the application process, she was able to enroll in a Connect for Health Colorado plan she could afford that included her doctors, treatments and prescriptions.

Starting last October, Connect for Health Colorado began offering individuals, families and small employers a new online marketplace for health insurance and access to income-based financial assistance. A project of the Health District, Larimer Health Connect was created to help local residents find quality, affordable health insurance.

“It’s very rewarding for us to witness people feeling like they can finally go see a doctor and figure out what’s been troubling them,” Wilson says. "It’s also very rewarding to witness the “aha!” moment that happens when a client truly understands their health benefits."

The Larimer Health Connect team excelled during the first six months of open enrollment and is considered an exemplary program in Colorado. "This team always goes above and beyond to serve clients and get them connected to resources."

To the Larimer Health Connect coverage guides:

"Insurance is a worry and it was great to have assistance."

"After a few meetings and working through several problems, you were able to find insurance for my family—thank you for going the extra mile."

"Thank you for being an extraordinary guide—I never felt rushed through the maze of information."

"I enjoy making sure our systems are working well in order for the mental health specialists to provide the best care they can," Leetham says. "This team always goes above and beyond to serve clients and get them connected to resources."

"You have made such an enormous difference in my life."

"Thank you for giving my wife and I information that fit our tough and complicated situation."

"It’s nice to know there is someone there who will listen and not judge me."

"Thank you for being compassionate, listening carefully and giving me some hope."

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Ongoing Project Partners

Corporations and Foundations
- Caring for Colorado Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente
- Colorado Health Foundation
- King Soopers
- Connect for Health Colorado
- OtterBox
- The Colorado Trust
- Owen Orthodontics
- Fort Collins Cycling Club
- Larimer County Department of Health and Environment
- Henry Schein Cares Foundation

Sponsors and Partners — HealthInfoSource.com
- Mental Health Connections
- Integrated Primary Care/Mental Health Program
- HealthPromotion
- Caring for Colorado Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente
- King Soopers
- OtterBox
- Owen Orthodontics
- Larimer County Department of Health and Environment
- Larimer County Dental Society
- Larimer County Department of Health and Environment
- Larimer County District Attorney’s Office
- Larimer County Health and Human Services
- Larimer County Office on Aging
- North Colorado Health Alliance
- Thompson School District
- Touchstone Health Partners
- United Way of Larimer County
- Pathways Hospice
- Poudre School District
- Larimer Health Connect
- The Women’s Clinic of Northern Colorado
- Total Vein Care
- Touchstone Health Partners

With thanks
A heartfelt "thank you" to the individuals, businesses and organizations that gave generously to the Health District in 2013. Our special programs included enrolling more families and children in insurance programs and improving access to dental care, especially for those with certain disabilities. We continue to seek community support for the Tooth Fairy Fund helping adults afford dental care, for the efforts of the Dental Health Partnership of Larimer County and for the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership. For information on how to make a donation, contact Jim Becker at jbecker@healthdistrict.org or (970) 224-5209.

Board of Directors
The Health District is governed by a publicly elected board of directors. Directors for 2013 were:

Celeste Kling
President

Bernard Birnbaum, M.D.
Vice President

Timothy O’Neill
Secretary

Steven Thorson, M.D.
Treasurer

Joe Hendrickson
Liaison to PVHS Board

Programs

Mental Health Connections
mental health and substance abuse services
525 W. Oak Street
(970) 221-5551

Family Dental Clinic
202 Bristlecone Drive
(970) 416-5331

Dental Connections
202 Bristlecone Drive
(970) 493-3366

Health Promotion
Step Free from Tobacco; cholesterol and blood pressure testing
(970) 224-5209

Community Impact Team
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Partnership; Dental Health Partnership of Larimer County; policy tracking and advocacy; resource development
(970) 224-5209

Integrated Primary Care/Mental Health Program
(970) 224-5209

Prescription Assistance
(970) 416-6519

HealthInfoSource.com
A comprehensive guide to local health information

2013 revenues, total
$7,916,458

2013 expenditures, total
$7,357,855

2013 expenditures, by program

Dental Services
32%

Mental Health Connections
9%

Community Impact
7%

Assessment, Research & Evaluation
2%

Gross, Partnerships & Special Projects
10%

Prescription Assistance
10%

HealthInfoSource.com
1%

Resource Development
1%

HC Reform/Special Programs
5%

Cholesterol Testing/Quit Smoking
9%

Programs/Services
92%

Dental Connections
2%

HealthPromotion
1%