

Reach Out and Read program comes to Tribal clinic

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Dr. Allison Empey first encountered Reach Out and Read as a pediatric resident at Oregon Health & Science University's Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland.

"I was first exposed to Reach Out and Read when I started seeing my patients in clinic," Empey, a Tribal member who served on Royalty when she was younger, says. "I wanted to bring it to the Grand Ronde clinic because I have read the evidence on how it works, but I've also witnessed first-hand the excitement for books and the new interest in reading aloud with my own patients and their families."

Empey graduated from McMinnville High School as a National Honor Society valedictorian, from Stanford University and the University of California-San Francisco School of Medicine. She is now a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Reach Out and Read is a Boston-based national reading program that operates through health care facilities.

When young patients come in each year for well child exams, physicians and nurses "prescribe" a book for them to read with their parents. They also describe the importance and value of families reading aloud together.

Empey secured \$700 for 2014 and the Tribal Health and Wellness Clinic was ready to run with it.

"We have been wanting to give kids books at their well child exams instead of toys for a while," says Nurse Supervisor Terri Andries, who, along with Diabetic Case Manager Te'Ona Davidson, is running the program in Grand Ronde.

"We really felt books would be bet-

ter for child development and learning. We didn't have the funding for books so when Allison approached us about the program, we jumped at the chance to be part of it."

The nonprofit has run the program since 1989. It now serves 4.2 million children through 50,000 programs across all 50 states. Thousands of doctors and nurses promote early literacy and school readiness to young children and their families. Each year, medical providers distribute 6.5 million books to children, and invaluable literacy advice to parents, according to the nonprofit's website.

Empey, Andries and Davidson organized the program training for the clinic's health care providers during a lunch hour in May. Empey led the training.

The training covered the benefits of children reading books. One benefit is helping improve child brain development. Another is how reading to children improves their knowledge of language and how that interplay improves the parent-child bond.

Now that the program is up and running, Empey says, "I will have a limited role in the day-to-day logistics. I will check in often and if I see something that Reach Out and Read at Doernbecher is doing that I think would work at the Grand Ronde clinic, I will be sure to bring that back."

Davidson oversees the program. She ticked off her responsibilities: Making sure all current and new employees complete the training, keeping an inventory of books, ordering books, completing annual reports to qualify for the program, and following up and making sure funding is available each year.

Reach Out and Read's connection with Scholastic Book Club allows



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Jennifer Clark shows her daughter Arya a book that they received from Susan Wright, a Tribal family nurse practitioner, during a well child exam at the Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center on Friday, June 13. The clinic has started the Reach Out and Read program which gives families a book and a "prescription" to read.

Davidson to order from its website at a reduced price.

Davidson and Andries will each promote the program. They staffed a booth with information about it at the Family Night Out event on June 19. They also are sending out mailers and letters and posting promotional posters and fliers at the clinic.

Each child who comes to the clinic for a well child visit will receive one age-appropriate book

"We will probably give out about 100 books a year," says Andries. "We hope it will increase child and parent bonding, help combat illiteracy, prepare children for school, and be an incentive for families to bring their kids in for well care and not just when they are sick."

"I hope that this program will help to increase the number of books that patients have at home and that their guardians take the time to spend some time reading with them every day," Empey says. "If this happened, I would expect the school readiness of the children who get their care at the Grand Ronde Health and Wellness Department to increase.

"As a health care provider for children, part of my job is helping to advocate for issues that affect their health. So much of health is determined outside of the clinic walls. I'm really excited about this program and the potential it has to increase literacy, which ultimately improves health." ■

Grand Ronde Community Garden opens

Far right, Grand Ronde Community Garden Coordinator Patti LeClaire receives a hug from Tribal Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe, left, and a blanket from Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, right, during the grand



opening of the garden on Friday, June 27. LeClaire thanked all of the volunteers and Tribal staff who helped the garden and called the project a "community effort." She also thanked her husband, Scott, who also received a blanket for volunteering. Tribal Council members Reyn Leno, Kathleen Tom, Ed Pearsall and Harvey attended the opening. The Community Garden has more than 20 rows in which to grow produce, which will be distributed throughout the community (food bank, Elders' kitchen, preschool, Adult Foster Care, Social Services and a future farmer's market to fund the garden). DeLoe said the garden is the first step toward the community reaching food sustainability and sovereignty. During the ceremony, Harvey also thanked several volunteers with beaded necklaces. Jordan Mercier, David Harrelson, Leslie Riggs, Reina Nelson, Flicka Lucero and Kalene Contreras provided the cultural drumming and singing to open the ceremony and Tribal Head Start students sang. Above left, Head Start students, from left, Gabryl Guzman and Joshua Beeks enjoyed examining a radish. DeLoe said the garden has already produced 30 pounds of produce for the community.



Photos by Dean Rhodes