



YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY HEALTH

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF SERVICE,
BELOVED NONPROFIT KEEPS PACE WITH THE TIMES

By Vickie Mitchell / Photos by Bill Luster

Baby Health Service's logo is simple — a boy's head in blue silhouette. A cowlick shoots up from his crown; a pointed bang shelters his forehead. He is the much-loved symbol of the equally loved grassroots nonprofit, which provides free medical care to children who don't qualify for government assistance and who can't afford health insurance. The blue boy pops up on a sign by the Baby Health Service clinic door, on brochures, on needlepoint pillows in the office.

"We love our blue baby," said Kathleen Eastland Mattacola, president of Baby Health's board and manager of the Keeneland Gift Shop. "We are a brand. We are 100 years old."

Baby Health Service, though, does not act its age. As needs of the Central Kentucky children it serves have changed, the spry centenarian has changed as well.

"We have to," Mattacola said. "We are a nonprofit that is 100 years old, and in healthcare; we have to be on our toes."

In the past few years Baby Health has made a number of significant changes. It extended its medical care to include older teens, restarted a free monthly dental clinic, renovated and updated its walk-in clinic, and launched a wellness program to combat childhood obesity.

Nurse practitioner Delwin Jacoby examines 8-year-old Manuel Hernandez.

"If you don't change with the times, many not-for-profits don't continue to grow," said Alice Buchart, a past president and the incoming president of Baby Health.

Baby Health's scope was fairly narrow when it was founded in 1914 as Baby



Milk Supply.

Led by Emma Haggin, mother of Keeneland president Louis Lee Haggin II, a group of six Lexington women began distributing milk, formula, and cod liver oil to fight malnutrition and rickets in babies of poor families.

Within a few years Baby Milk Supply also was giving immunizations, sending its nurses to patients' homes, and providing medicines. It moved around town, finally settling, in the 1950s, at St. Joseph Hospi-

tal on Harrodsburg Road. Since 1983 its clinic has been housed in the lower level of a white-brick building owned by the hospital at 1590 Harrodsburg Road. It pays \$1 a year in rent.

Thanks to a 2012 renovation, the once-drab space is bright and cheerful. Its walls of happy pastels are punctuated by colorful prints; its furniture is light and contemporary. A mural covers two walls; a Yellow Brick Road — yellow tiles along two hallways — takes children to stations where they have their weight, height, sight, and hearing tested during well-child check-ups.

The makeover was funded by \$25,000 in gifts in memory of the late Carole Eastland, Mattacola's mother and a longtime BHS board member and president.

Boxes of free tomatoes, squash, and other seasonal fruits and vegetables line the entry hall. Several shelves are stocked with books in the large waiting room; more books and toys are in an adjoining playroom. A couple of racks hold donated clothing for children and adults. Every child is encouraged to leave with a book; parents are welcome to



From milk supplier to medical care provider, Baby Health Service's role has expanded over the years.

shop for clothing they or their children might need.

Adding to the clinic's welcoming atmosphere are the women who greet clients at the reception-area window. All are members of Baby Health's board, made up of 55 to 60 women who range from their early 30s to late 70s. Volun-

teering at the clinic, open weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to noon or 1 p.m., is part of the commitment they make as board members. Last year some 50 board members worked a total of 1,028 hours in the clinic's office.

"There are a lot of boards where you work on fundraising. Here, you have women who give their time as well as their support," Buchart said.

Volunteer physicians and a paid staff of two registered nurses and one pediatric nurse practitioner provide the medical care. The volunteer office staff allows them to focus on their work.

"They let nurses be nurses and doctors be doctors," Mattacola said.

Unlike the early days of Baby Health, most of the 12 pediatricians who volunteer are women. "They are the cream of the crop" in Lexington's pediatric circles, said clinic director Liz Kellen, a volunteer and board member. The nine doctors who were volunteers last year worked a total of 382 hours. A number of physicians in town also accept patient referrals from Baby Health when a specialist is needed.

Its reliance on volunteers allows Baby Health to operate on a small budget. This year's is \$191,000. Because Baby Health receives no government funding, it relies on private donations and grants.



The brightly colored waiting room makes the wait more inviting for patients such as Madison Howard.

Board members are heavily involved in the annual appeal to individuals and businesses. Lists of potential donors are divided among the board, and each member sends a handwritten, personal note and other campaign materials to those on her list.

The personal approach pays off. Although it is difficult to measure exact response because of anonymous gifts, the number of donations received is about 35 percent of the number of donor letters mailed.

Back in Baby Health's early days, leaders organized ballets and dinners as fundraisers, but that has not been part of the organization's recent past. So when the question of how to celebrate its 100th anniversary came up,

some didn't want much hoopla.

"Our sponsors didn't want to give money for a party; they wanted to give to support the clinic," Mattacola said.

But the cake and ice cream that feted its 90th anniversary seemed inadequate for its centennial, so Baby Health had a large dinner and party in late May at Keeneland. There were music, cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a brief program. The evening raised \$57,000 for the charity.



Clinic nurse Dan Cheney checks Ayden Mitchell.

BABY HEALTH THROUGH THE YEARS

1914

Led by Emma Haggin, six women found Baby Milk Supply to wipe out malnutrition and rickets in children by distributing milk, formula, and cod liver oil to poor families.

Haggin's son, Louis Lee Haggin II, would become Keeneland's president.

1920

Baby Milk Supply expands services. Its nurses give immunizations and make home visits. A weekly health clinic is opened.

Post-World War II

Welfare is created, and Baby Milk Supply shifts its focus to children who lack any form of health care coverage.

1956

Baby Milk Supply changes its name to Baby Health Service and incorporates. St. Joseph Hospital provides space for a clinic, where children from birth to age 13 who have no medical assistance or health insurance receive free treatment.

1950s

Baby Health Service nurses give free polio vaccines to eligible children.

1983

Expansion at St. Joseph Hospital forces Baby Health to find a new home. The hospital offers Baby Health the lower level of a building it owns at 1590 Harrodsburg Road for \$1 a year.

1997

Baby Health Service earns national recognition when it receives the President's Service Award for volunteerism from the Points of Light Foundation.

2002

Baby Health Service receives the Daily Points of Light Award, which honors volunteer organizations that meet critical needs in their communities.

New initiatives

As it moves into its second century, leaders are thinking of ways to make Baby Health even more relevant. “We are always thinking about how we can serve these underserved kids who are out there in droves,” Kellen said. “We say, ‘Hey, we should try this; hey, we should try that.’”

Among the new initiatives is the expansion of services to older teens. Previously, Baby Health treated children from birth to 13. Now, it treats children up to 18. Its doctors had urged the board to include the older children.

“Our numbers of children over 13 last year were close to our numbers for those



Zoey Howard reads while awaiting her appointment.

under 24 months,” Kellen said. “That is the reason it was so important for us to

go to 18. There was nowhere for them to go.”

With the older children come different medical issues, such as acne and sports-related injuries.

Baby Health also has ventured into wellness. Gifts made in memory of longtime board member Wende Bell created Wende’s Wellness, a program aimed at obesity.

Patients receive backpacks stuffed with a pedometer, two My-Plate dinner plates, and other items that promote healthy eating and exercise. This summer a raised vegetable garden was planted on an empty lot



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Volunteer Kathy Arms greets Ayden Mitchell and his mother, Jerrisha Miller.

behind the clinic. An exercise class for patients and their families is being offered.

Baby Health's patient profile also is changing, as a world map placed in the entryway last November demonstrates. By late August, 34 countries were stuck with pins.

"We are seeing more refugees from Africa and a huge influx of Honduran and Chinese immigrants," Mattacola said.

With so many international clients, communication can be a challenge. BHS has multiple tactics. Nurse Donna Sizemore and nurse practitioner Delwin Jacoby both speak some Spanish — Sizemore is fairly fluent and has done mission work in Spanish-speaking countries.

A tablet loaded with translation software comes in handy. Some patients bring a relative or friend who can interpret for them; others comprehend written English.

Need remains great

One of the biggest challenges Baby Health faces is the assumption that the Affordable Care Act and Kentucky's free or low-cost health insurance for children, KCHIP, have made its services obsolete.

Its numbers show that need remains. Patient visits by the end of August this year were 1,551 — 200 more than the same period last year. In 2013, Baby Health had 2,167 patient visits, almost 300 more than in 2012.

"There are still gaps," Kellen said. Among them are immigrant children who have no medical coverage and need immunizations before they can go to school. In other cases, working-class families make too much for government assistance but too little to buy health insurance.

"Affordable is a subjective term," Kellen said. "We know there are people who are making the decision between insurance and paying the rent. They aren't buying the insurance."

But the misconception remains. Each year the Lexington Fayette



A 2012 renovation added pastel walls, colorful prints, and new furnishings.



Lenasia Coleman gets her vision tested at the clinic.

Urban County Government ranks nonprofits on a number of criteria, then awards grants to the top 50.

"Last year we were No. 2," Kellen said. "This year we are No. 47."

As its ranking declined, so did the amount of its grant. Baby Health's leaders asked to meet with LFUCG and explained demand for its services were on the rise. Baby Health was ultimately awarded a larger grant.

"They were baffled," Kellen said. "They had no idea there was still a need."

As its leaders have said, as long as there is a need, Baby Health will be in business, with a dedicated team ready to serve Lexington's children and youth.

"All of these people," Jacoby said, "have a true dedication to taking care of kids, regardless of their ability to pay for it. We don't care what you do, where you are from; we just want to take care of kids." **KM**

BABY HEALTH THROUGH THE YEARS

2009

Baby Health Service receives the Central Kentucky Volunteer Award for a Nonprofit Organization.

2011-12

Baby Health expands its mission by offering medical care to children to age 18. The clinic unveils a renovation, funded by gifts in memory of longtime board member and past president Carole Eastland.

March 2014

Baby Health launches a monthly pediatric dental clinic for children with two partners, Bluegrass Community and Technical College's dental hygiene program and HealthFirst.

April 2014

The Lexington-Fayette County Health Department's Board of Health names Baby Health Service a Public Health Hero.

May 2014

Baby Health Services celebrates its 100th anniversary with a fundraiser at Keeneland. Honorary chairs are Dr. William Underwood, a Baby Health volunteer for 48 years, and Patricia Snedegar, a nurse from 1985 to 2008. The event raises \$57,000.

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