

# The CHILD Project: Connecting Health Insurance with Lunch Data

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During the summer of 2009, I had the opportunity to spend 8 weeks working under the guidance of John Meurer, MD, and more directly with Kari Mattson, a Milwaukee Public Schools project coordinator at Community Advocates. We worked to develop more efficient and effective ways to provide information and facilitate enrollment in BadgerCare Plus for qualified families. This work was done through the use of federally provided information on students' free and reduced price meal program qualifications, as families qualified for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program are most often qualified for Wisconsin Family Medicaid coverage. By learning the process of using this data for developing potential outreach methods, I gained both a better understanding of the public policies aimed at the low-income population as well as crucial knowledge of health insurance coverage accessibility for this population.

By building collaborations with schools for planning and implementation of outreach methods, as well as attending and learning to coordinate evaluation meetings between school personnel and community partners with Community

Advocates and Covering Families and Kids (CFK), I was able to hone teamwork skills and gain a thorough understanding of the complex nature of working on a research project with the involvement of large school districts and a bureaucracy. Throughout the summer, I also had the chance to analyze data collected from the past 2 years and conduct literature reviews to gain a better understanding of the school-based outreach model.

This fellowship experience allowed me to grow not only as a student of medicine, but also as an individual who cares greatly about advocacy for unheard voices. The extent of dedication and passion I encountered working with advocates and experts in the field fueled my enthusiasm to learn more each day as I attended retreats and coordinated meetings. To see community health in action from behind-the-scenes made me realize the complexities and barriers that may be invisible even to a physician.

It was also challenging as I experienced frustrations brought about by the barriers of administration and time limitations due to the school-year dependent nature of this project.

I found myself repeatedly wishing that other medical students could have the same experiences to understand and keep in mind the subtle difficulties encountered by low-income populations as they search for access to care.

These experiences also made me ponder the greatly intertwined nature of funding in terms of not only medical care, but also advocacy for the community. During this time of economic downturn and public health changes, it was exciting to learn about the process of health policy reform and understand the logistical reasoning behind each step leading to a better plan of action for the general public, as well as experiencing the new implementation of Badgercare Core for Childless Adults. I now feel confident in my understanding of Wisconsin Medicaid policies, which was a major personal goal of this fellowship.

It is amazing to reflect on how much I have learned in just 8 weeks. I am more determined than ever to work toward meeting community health needs, especially for pediatric populations, and being involved with public health policy. I am indescribably thankful to the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation for the opportunity.

The goal of the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation's Summer Fellowship in Government and Community Service Program is to provide medical students the opportunity to increase their knowledge of how community organizations and/or government works with the medical profession to address health issues in Wisconsin. Each student receives a \$3500 stipend.

These fellowships require the support of donors to make the experience possible and physician mentors who help students develop their proposals and provide guidance. In 2009, the Foundation was able to provide 6 fellowship opportunities, which will be highlighted in various issues of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* throughout the year.

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