

Pediatrician's Passion Evolves Into Center for Childhood Safety

Kay Simmons

If a disease were killing our children at the rate unintentional injuries are, the public would be outraged and would demand that this killer be stopped," said Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, MD, ScD. Those words describe exactly what Green Bay pediatrician Gordon Haugan, MD, is trying to do. He is working to stop the killer—unintentional injuries—in a way that is fun for kids through the Center for Childhood Safety (CCS), an agency he founded after witnessing the severe brain injury of a bright, young patient.

"This kid was the catalyst for me to want to start CCS, because he made me realize that the safety lectures I gave kids in my office weren't sinking in. It made me ask how we could make the point with kids in a more fun way," said Dr Haugan.

Dr Haugan was then—and still is—passionate about educating children and their families throughout northeast Wisconsin on the prevention and elimination of childhood injuries that lead to disability or death. When he was honored with the Wisconsin Medical Society's 2014 Physician Citizen of the Year Award during its Annual Meeting Dr Haugan said, "The greatest single health threat facing kids today is unintentional injury. Every year more kids die of that than of the combined total of homicide, suicide, genetic defect, pulmonary disease, cardiac disease, cancer, and AIDS." His continuous and unwavering support for the organization he founded has allowed thousands of children and families to be touched by the Center's educational messages and programs, and has undoubtedly saved the lives of an unknown number of children.

CCS was established in 1991 by Haugan,



Gordon Haugan, MD, accepts the 2014 Physician Citizen of the Year Award at the Wisconsin Medical Society Annual Meeting in Green Bay in April.

a Prevea Clinic pediatrician, whose dream was to "put bike helmets on heads" when he assembled a board of community volunteers to form the Bicycle Helmet Safety Coalition, Inc. The Coalition's goal was to increase bicycle helmet awareness by focusing on at-risk children in the greater Green Bay area. The Bicycle Helmet Safety Coalition was based on a program in Denver, Colorado at the time called Headstrong, which featured members of the Denver Broncos in its ads. According to Haugan, "I realized that being in a small community with an NFL team provided us with a similar opportunity and was able to get some of the kids of Packers players who were also my patients at the time to pose for posters promoting bike helmet use for the Coalition."

That initial dream of putting bike helmets on the heads of kids has grown to a full-service

safety education "hub" with programs tailored to children from birth to teen. The Center now provides a variety of safety programs as well as injury prevention resources and sources on safety.

"Accidental injury is the number one killer of children under the age of 14. Each year more than 6.5 million young people are injured severely enough to land in a hospital emergency room, many with life-altering consequences. Yet, an astounding 90% of these deaths/injuries could be avoided through education and prevention measures like those offered through the Center for Childhood Safety," said Kimberly Hess, executive director of CCS.

The founding event for CCS was Winners Wear Helmets/Wee Winners Wear Helmets. This event—still held today—focuses on bicycle safety, brain injury prevention through helmet use, and understanding the rules of the road when biking. Each year 640 Green Bay at-risk 3rd graders and 400 Head Start students take part in this program. During the day-long event, which is a school district-approved field trip, students are fitted for their own bicycle helmets, made possible through the generosity of local service organizations. Students also view displays, complete bicycle safety courses, and participate in interactive demonstrations with area helmet-wearing professionals.

Another major concern of the Center is the safety of children when traveling in motor vehicles. Child passenger safety is a large part of the CCS program based on the fact that motor vehicle crashes are the number 1 killer and cause of injuries to kids in the United States. Statistics continue to show that 4 out of 5 car seats are installed incorrectly, which led the



Volunteers at Winners Wear Helmets – the longest running CCS program—demonstrate to kids how to properly fit their new bike helmets.

Center to establish its Child Passenger Safety (CPS) program in which certified technicians provide education and expert installation of child safety car seats through free community events and one-on-one appointments in collaboration with other Safe Kids Greater Green Bay agencies. In the history of the program, over 10,000 seats have been inspected in Brown County.

Hands down the most popular program at CCS is Safety Town according to Hess, which has graduated more than 3500 children since the program began 13 years ago. This fun, innovative program is a week-long, 15-hour summer safety camp, held in June and July, that teaches 4 through 6 year olds of all abilities and income levels how to stay safe in their homes, at school, and in the community.

“Safety Town is the bridge between what we as parents want to teach our kids and what is learned through life experiences and school... What an excellent resource!” said Kari Peterson of Luxemburg, parent of a Safety Town attendee.

This program offers children a classroom segment as well as a hands-on experience on the streets of the specially designed, child-sized Safety Town. With the help of trained safety professionals from throughout the community, children are taught to evaluate “safe from unsafe” and learn how to react safely when confronted with potentially dangerous situations. The children are put through a variety of simulated situations such as how to escape a house fire, how to safely cross a street, playground safety, and avoiding poisonous substances in the home. The kids who participate, and especially their parents, see the huge difference it makes in their lives.

“Safety Town thoroughly covers all the different areas that children this age need to be aware of—and in a manner that is easy for them to understand,” said Angie R, a parent whose child learned to stay safe at Safety Town.

The Center also has developed programs to keep infants and teens safe. The Safe Sleep



Summer program participants drive through the streets of the miniature Safety Town.



A teen volunteer teaches a Safety Town participant about road rules and safety.

Community Collaborative is a partnership with other Brown County nonprofit and public agencies that focuses on one-on-one parent education and public awareness, and provides complimentary pack-n-plays to prevent deaths and injuries related to Sudden Infant Death

has remained actively involved.

“Dr Haugan has never wavered in his support for the organization that he founded. He has led the organization as President of the Board of Directors through funding and staff changes, is a tireless fund- and ‘friend’-raiser

“The greatest single health threat facing kids today is unintentional injury. Every year more kids die of that than of the combined total of homicide, suicide, genetic defect, pulmonary disease, cardiac disease, cancer and AIDS.”

—Gordon Haugen, MD

Syndrome and unsafe sleep practices.

Teens learn about safe driving through events and activities in the Motor Vehicle Safety program. Using the proven curriculums of “Countdown to Drive,” “Every 15 Minutes” and “Celebrate My Drive,” youth learn about the avoidance of high-risk behaviors related to texting/distracted driving and drunken driving.

The demand for CCS’s services has increased over the years and continues to grow. As the Center has expanded, Dr Haugan

and attends the monthly board meetings on his day off,” said Kristin Bouchard, chair of the Center’s Board of Directors.

Despite the praise from Bouchard, Dr Haugan is quick to point out that the Center has many volunteers and partners who help make the Center a success, as well as generous benefactors year after year who help cover program expenses, allowing them to be offered free or at low cost.

“It takes significant resources to reach chil-

dren and families living in Green Bay and the surrounding area and that amount increases every year,” said Haugan.

To help ensure CCS has annual resources now and in the future to continue its life-saving mission, a special endowment fund has been established. The goal is to build this fund to at least \$250,000 within the next year. Haugan’s new dream is to make the Center even better and bigger by developing a permanent Safety Town that could be used all year around instead of just during the week-long summer session.

“I would love to see us have a Safety Town that is like the one they have in Naperville, Illinois, with full-size stoplights, railroad crossings, and other features that make it more realistic and fun for the kids,” he said.

When nominating Dr Haugan for the Society Physician Citizen of the Year Award, Prevea Health President and CEO Ashok Rai, MD, said, “Dr Haugan broadened his commitment to the well-being of children beyond the walls of the clinic.” That has been proven thousands of time over with each child who participates in one of the Center’s programs and is kept safer at home, school and play because of it.

To learn more about the programs offered by the Center for Childhood Safety visit <http://centerforchildhoodsafety.org>.

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