



IN THE FIGHT FOR
CHILDREN'S HEALTH,
CINCH
IS A HEALTH CARE HERO

For decades, doctors have encouraged new mothers to breastfeed their infants for at least six months because of the many health benefits breast milk offers.

But how practical is this advice when most workplaces offer no accommodations for women to breastfeed, many childcare centers are unable or unwilling to deal with expressed breast milk, and breastfeeding in public spaces often elicits disapproving glances or even confrontations?

Enter the Consortium for Infant and Child Health (CINCH). Based at EVMS, CINCH takes on challenging children's health-related issues like this one.

That *Inside Business* recently announced CINCH as a recipient of a 2015 Health Care Heroes award attests to the organization's success and impact. That it won in the category of community service offers insight into CINCH's unique approach.

CINCH works to implement programs and promote changes that make healthy practices and behaviors – like breastfeeding – more doable and sustainable. For example, its “Business Case for Breastfeeding” program helps companies develop policies and lactation spaces for nursing employees. And its “Breastfeeding Welcome Here” program has trained employees in more than 60 area restaurants and retail establishments in how to welcome nursing mothers.

Sattar Shaik is an IHOP franchisee in Chesapeake who enlisted CINCH's help when a breastfeeding customer posted negative comments on Facebook about her treatment by restaurant staff. In a matter of days, he says, “the CINCH team trained our 100 employees between both of our locations.”

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CINCH serves as a catalyst to engage the community, says CINCH Director Amy Paulson, MPH. “We help communities develop an action plan, find funding, figure out how to address these bigger-picture issues and move forward.”

CINCH was founded in 1993 through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to improve immunization rates among children in Norfolk. (It was originally named the Consortium for the Immunization of Norfolk’s Children.) In just two years, those immunization rates were up 17 percent.

After this impressive beginning, area

health leaders wanted to keep a good thing going. The CINCH acronym was modified to reflect a broadened mission in both scope and geography. With support from EVMS and the Children’s Hospital of The King’s Daughters, CINCH took on more issues — including obesity, asthma, injury prevention, health disparities, special needs and health-insurance coverage —and expanded to serve all of Hampton Roads.

Today, fighting obesity and addressing asthma in children remain core CINCH issues. Other focus areas include curbing tobacco use, training local health providers on children’s

health issues and more.

Housed on the EVMS campus, CINCH is led by Ms. Paulson and Assistant Director Matt Herman. In addition, a handful of temporary workers — the number depends on the needs of current projects and the funding of those projects — handle outreach, networking, problem-solving and advocating for their particular cause, program or initiative.

“One thing that sets CINCH apart is the way we approach any problem,” Ms. Paulson says. “Instead of one-off programs with limited impact, CINCH works to effect

lasting systematic and behavioral changes by reshaping everything from programs to policy to physical environments.”

Take exercise, for example. A typical approach might be a six-week program that teaches 100 children the importance of being physically active, starts them on an exercise regimen and measures their progress — a worthy endeavor for sure, but one that’s limited in the number of children it can help.

The CINCH approach, on the other hand, is to break down barriers to an active lifestyle. What about improving an entire city’s pedestrian and biking infrastructure?

Enabling thousands of children to ride their bikes or walk to school regularly can produce long-term results that can’t be achieved through a six-week exercise program.

In Norfolk and Portsmouth, that’s an approach the group has had great success with in the form of pedestrian-friendly routes with bike lanes, crosswalks, wheelchair ramps and curb cuts.

“Without CINCH, it is doubtful that Norfolk’s Bike Master Plan would have been possible,” says Paul Forehand, a Project Manager for the City of Norfolk. “The CINCH staff’s countless hours

of work to coordinate the requirements of various public, private and nonprofit systems made this Bike Plan a reality.”

CINCH also just launched two new campaigns to keep children healthy: 757RevYourBev, created to reduce the consumption of sugary beverages; and 757SmokeFreeRide, designed to dissuade parents from smoking in cars with kids.

“These kinds of changes,” Ms. Paulson says, “have the potential to improve lives for generations.” □



To view videos about the 757SmokeFreeRide campaign, visit evms.edu/magazine.