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# 'They love it'

## CHC takes part in literacy campaign

By Nikki Patrick | THE MORNING SUN

When Makenna Bridwell, daughter of Dennis and Amy Bridwell, Frontenac, went to the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas on Thursday, she got more than a check-up or a shot.

The 2-year-old was also presented with a book about Clifford. "Puppy!" said the delighted 2-year-old as she opened the book and pointed to a picture of the big red dog.

CHC was one of the first facilities in Kansas to participate in the Turn a Page, Touch a Mind literacy campaign, and has distributed nearly 1,100 books to local children since 2004.

"This works really well with our mission, which is to help children be healthy physically, mentally and emotionally," said Jason Wesco, CHC chief operations officer. "Around 40 percent of our patients here are children."

He said that the program covers children from infancy up to age 5 or so, and books are provided.

"This takes the guesswork out for us," Wesco said. "All the books are developmentally appropriate for each age group. And they're not used books — we give these kids good, brand new books."

Dua Siam, RN, is the one who usually gets the pleasure of handing out the books.

"We usually start them as early as six months," she said. "We have books in English and in Spanish. There are even some that are in both languages, so they are very culturally friendly. When the child has a big shot or trauma, then they get a book."

Siam usually picks out the books for the youngest children, while those who are a little older get to select their own.

"We have books all over the building," she added. "There are books they can look at in the waiting room, and in the doctor's room. We surround the children with books here, and they enjoy them tremendously."

Dr. Mazen Almidani, CHC pediatrician, agreed with that. He quoted a local parent as saying, "We never expected to get a book from the doctor. It's something our kids now look forward to receiving and then reading their new book that evening. They love it."

The early literacy program, which now has 20 sites in 14 Kansas communities, was launched with a start-up grant from the Kansas Health Foundation. The Kansas Pediatric Foundation, charitable arm of the Kansas Chapter, recently raised more than \$1 million from Kansas donors and secured an additional \$1 million challenge grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to help Kansas physicians continue their participation in the program.

"It would be really nice if this program spread, because children who grow up with a love of books and reading are better prepared to succeed in school," Wesco said. "This is not just for non-profit agencies like CHC. Any pediatrician can do it."

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SEAN STEFFEN/THE MORNING SUN

Makenna Bridwell smiles while looking at a Clifford book she received Thursday afternoon at the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas as part of the Turn a Page, Touch a Mind literacy campaign that the center participates in.

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