

# For Example...

## The Great Yo-Yo Giveaway



### Summary

When Carilion Giles Memorial Hospital received a “Project Connect” grant from the Virginia Health Care Foundation to enroll children in CMSIP and Medicaid, project staff began developing many strategies to boost enrollment in their communities. One particularly fun and innovative effort is worthy of special note. This school-based effort, employed first in Giles County and later in Bland County, has proven effective in identifying uninsured children who are eligible for the state’s insurance programs.

Relying on the eagerness of elementary school children to please their teachers and win prizes, the project decided to enlist their help in reaching out to their parents. In January, 1,602 letters, on bright yellow paper, announcing “Free Insurance for Kids Who Qualify”, were given to students at the 3 elementary schools in Giles County. Teachers told their students that if they took the letter to their parent, had them complete the information, and returned the form to the school, they would receive a free gift. Included on the form was a place for the parent to fill in the name of an uninsured child, the name of the student returning the form and their homeroom teacher. Some of the guidelines for the insurance programs were included as well. Parents were permitted to write “unknown” in the space for the uninsured child if they did not know of any at this time. This confirmed that the parent had at least read the letter and would be able to tell someone else about the program in the future — and it allowed every child who completed the assignment to receive a gift.

As many parents of elementary school students can attest, children of this age will take such an opportunity very seriously and are often quite persistent in having their busy parents complete the assignment. The children who returned completed forms were given yo-yos (pretty cool looking ones) as their prize. After the first group of students received their yo-yos, other students saw the prize and were motivated to return their forms as well.

According to program staff, the “great yo-yo giveaway” worked so well in producing the names of uninsured children that the effort was repeated in 4 schools in Bland County. Outreach staff are now following up with phone calls and scheduling appointments to help families complete the Medicaid/CMSIP application where appropriate.

### The Steps

*Target schools* – Elementary schools were chosen because incentive programs work very well with that age group.

*Get permission* - Once the Superintendent agreed, school principals were each contacted for permission.

*Establish a school contact* – In some cases this was a school nurse, in others a secretary. This person distributed forms and letters to teachers, collected forms, and gave out prizes.

*Select the prize* – Yo-yos were chosen because they were “cool” and available at low-cost.

*Design material* – Project staff created and copied the form and delivered them to the

schools along with a letter to teachers describing the initiative.

*Distribute prizes* - Once forms were returned, the school contact was given the names of the students who were to get a prize and the correct number of yo-yos (including one for each classroom teacher).

*Allow for a second chance* – Staff returned the next week to collect more forms and give out more prizes.

*Follow-up on names* – Project staff are now making phone calls to contact the parents of uninsured children identified through this initiative.

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## Results

In Giles County, 144 completed forms were returned containing the names of 56 uninsured children who met the preliminary guidelines. In Bland County, 240 yo-yos were given out and 39 names of uninsured children were received. These figures do not include the parents who contacted staff on their own because they had seen the form. While the total number of children enrolled from this initiative is not yet known, the number of uninsured children identified is significant given the size of these southwest Virginia counties, the number of children estimated to be eligible, and the enrollment numbers to date.

## Lessons Learned

- ☀ Be careful about the instructions. Because there was no cover letter, a confusing message was inadvertently added to the back of the form in Bland County. Some students returned the form without ever having shown it to their parents. Because the mix up was not their fault, these students also received prizes for returning the form as instructed.
- ☀ Set firm dates for return of the forms. It is a good idea to set one additional return date following the initial distribution of the prizes—many students returned forms when they saw their classmate's prize—but there must be a final cut-off date so forms do not continue to trickle in long after the program is over.
- ☀ Any “prize” that is considered desirable by an elementary school student will work—just make sure it is acceptable to the school system beforehand. Yo-yos that made noise were not chosen because they could be too disruptive to classes.

## Cost

- \$ The cost of materials was nominal as forms and letters were produced in house.
- \$ The yo-yos were bought wholesale from the father of one of the program staff at a cost of just 50 cents each. (Total cost: \$192)
- \$ It took about 25 hours of staff time to plan, implement, and make initial follow up phone calls. Additional staff time will be necessary to help some of the families complete the application.

## Unintended Consequences

This initiative has definitely increased awareness of CMSIP in the counties. Since the forms and yo-yos went home, project staff report many more inquiries and comments from residents about the insurance programs. In particular, teachers appear more aware and involved in making referrals to the program.

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# For Example...

*A series highlighting good ideas in CMSIP/Medicaid outreach in Virginia.*

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