



Since 2004, Collin County's neediest have benefited from WIC director Michelle Patrick's unique skills in public health and statistics.

Her knack for strategic planning, program evaluation, and policy development, makes her the "go to" person for all non-profits in the county.

"I've built that relationship over the years — if folks are looking for information I know where to find it," she said. "I've been able to help non-profits get the funds they need to reach the neediest in Collin County."

She began her career as a grant development

officer to attract funds for non-profits in Collin County, so she knows the area. Now she has a chance to apply that experience to her current WIC director position. She also volunteers as vice chair of the Community Needs Assessment committee for the United Way for the North Texas region, the North Texas Council of Governments Criminal Justice Policy Committee, and as a Board Member for Hope's Door the county's domestic violence shelter.

"I've always been kind of a data geek, using data for program planning and decision making," she said. "I'm in an awesome situation right now, because I'm able to see how WIC impacts all the non-profits in our counties — it's a pretty neat job to have," she said.

Sometimes the information requires more exploration.

"If you have clients living in high-economic areas, that makes you start wondering, 'Why are they there,'" she said. "Is it because they are living in an apartment complex or with other family members 'What's going on with this?'"

Other times statistics provide direction or help justify changing a clinic location or hours of operation based on the population needs in the county.

"If you map out all your clients and try to figure out why this person is traveling to this clinic, you might ask, 'What if I opened up more hours here? Would it make it easier to come to a clinic that's closer to their home?'" she said. "In September 2007, we needed to decide whether to renew our lease in a little house in Frisco or move to a larger, more accessible location."

Her research results prompted her to open clinic #4 in Frisco. She uses many resources to help her decision-making, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and U.S. Census data. Tracking clients and looking at poverty levels and other data help her planning process.

"We decided that a larger clinic could be supported in Frisco and by January 2008 we opened a new clinic. The latest GIS map shows participants are now traveling to the closer Frisco office than to another office across county," she said. "I am also keeping an eye on whether it is time to open up a new clinic in the northern part of the county."

Patrick is interested in examining the poverty levels and looking for ways to create new services if needs continue to rise for a county in transition.

"It's fascinating to me, to overlay a map with levels of poverty in the county," she said. And what you should see is the areas with your greatest poverty should have the greater number of participants," she said.

The Collin County clinic serves more than 11,000 clients per month of the county's eligible population.

"We've seen a 14.2% increase from last year, which is pretty amazing," she said. "We're still trying to figure out what's happening. When you're living in one of the wealthiest counties in the country with one of the highest median family incomes — we need to know what's going on here with increases like that."

Other WIC clinics may be able to benefit from Patrick's curiosity and skill in researching populations in need.

"Michelle has been a real asset to the WIC program since she joined us a couple of years ago," said Patti Fitch, Clinic Services Branch manager. "I am excited that she has agreed to share some of her process with other WIC directors by offering an IDL training on using GIS and other data to make program decisions. We hope to see an increase in serving our potential eligibles once some of our other local agency directors have had a chance to employ the tools she uses."

FY'08 DFW WIC Participation Increase

