Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

When A Community Needs Care

Leah S. - Okeechobee, FL

That's Medicaid *shares stories of people covered by Medicaid at critical points in their lives, underscoring the importance of stable health insurance coverage in building a Culture of Health.*

When **Leah** was growing up her parents were self-employed and the family did not have health insurance. As a result, during a particularly hard financial period for the family, her mother did not receive care that could have caught cancer early.

"If you have no money to pay a doctor bill, you just don't go," Leah says.

Leah's mother managed to live a few years after a melanoma diagnosis, but passed away before she could experience Leah's college graduation, attend Leah's wedding, or spend time with all of her grandchildren.

This experience inspired Leah to ensure the members of her community—most of whom are on Medicaid—receive the support they need.

After many years of learning about the nation's health care system, Leah is now a leader at a local nonprofit that is almost solely funded by private donations and serves "anyone who walks in the door."

This results in helping her community with food assistance, mental health therapy, educational and career development, drug treatment, and anything else to support what is needed. Most recently that has been about 3,000 people a month who receive food from a mobile pantry and other supplies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I might not be able to fix everything for them, but I'll point them in the right direction," Leah says. "I have long-established trust with generations of families."

Leah has seen the negative health outcomes for people in her community who lack Medicaid, and knows the basic health services it provides are crucial for her friends and neighbors.

"Here in our community, it is life and death," she says. "When you are in a rural area and parents are getting by day-to-day, if they don't have coverage they don't seek health care until it is too late. So having that health coverage makes a huge difference."

www.ThatsMedicaid.org

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