Healthy Homes Catches a Silent Killer

At first glance, Monica’s home on the southeast side of Grand Rapids appears to be in great shape.

“Monica called us because she was concerned about lead in her home, but when we got there we could tell that almost all of the paint was in very good shape and there were basically no other safety hazards for children. Monica keeps her home very child friendly,” said Kyle Shutz, Community Health Educator at the Healthy Homes Coalition.

What couldn’t be seen was the carbon monoxide pouring out of Monica’s oven.

As a part of the Healthy Homes for Healthy Kids program, Kyle did a routine inspection of all the gas burning appliances in the home and found that Monica’s oven was putting out excessive amounts of carbon monoxide, a silent killer. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas, but high exposures can lead to sickness and even death.

Monica promptly called DTE. The utility came out and inspected the appliance and confirmed that high levels of carbon monoxide were coming from the oven, recommending that it be replaced. After this ordeal, Monica expressed how shocked and worried she was for her three children. Monica immediately contacted the landlord who quickly had the malfunctioning appliance replaced.

“I knew that carbon monoxide could be dangerous, but Kyle told me more about how the CO could reach different levels,” said Monica. “I feel a lot more comfortable in the house and I’m ready to bake. Now I know what signs to look for out for.”

As part of every home visit, the Healthy Homes Coalition takes carbon monoxide readings around all fuel-burning appliances. Every month, Healthy Homes uncovers a couple more malfunctioning devices. Every month, more silent killers are caught.

Special thanks goes out to the PNC Foundation for their support in 2011 that helped the Healthy Homes Coalition acquire the technology to detect carbon monoxide and natural gas leaks. Together, the Healthy Homes Coalition and the PNC Foundation are keeping children safe!
Targeting Asthma on Grand Rapids Southeast Side

The Healthy Homes Coalition has launched a new initiative to intensively target asthma triggers in children’s homes on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. With some supplemental funding, Healthy Homes is intensively canvassing the neighborhood bounded by Division, Hall, Madison, and Garden and gathering data through the public record, sidewalk surveys of housing conditions, and door-to-door interviews.

The goal of this effort is to identify households with children where poor housing conditions are making it difficult to manage the child’s asthma.

Once homes are identified, families will be recruited to participate in the existing Healthy Homes for Healthy Kids program with enhanced assessments to address asthma-specific conditions.

As an added bonus, additional resources are being made available to mitigate conditions in the home that lead to asthma attacks.

The primary purpose of the program is to help children with asthma breathe more easily. Second to that, the Healthy Homes Coalition will demonstrate that environmental interventions can be a cost-effective way to improve children’s health with the added benefit of improving the community’s housing.

This intensive neighborhood effort will also help ensure that the community receives resources intended to reach the children who live there. The effort will promote the Get the Lead Out! lead hazard abatement program as well as fire alarm installations by the Grand Rapids Fire Department and Healthy Homes.

“By being deliberate and thorough in our approach, we can be sure that resources get directly to the children most in need,” said Healthy Homes Executive Director Paul Haan. “Our community is rich in resources. It’s critical that we waste no time in applying those resources to address compelling needs.”

The Fair Housing Center of Western Michigan is partnering with Healthy Homes to support this increased level of service delivery.
Building Healthy Futures Success

The Healthy Homes Coalition celebrated another successful year at the organization’s fifth annual Building Healthy Futures event at Calvin College’s Prince Conference Center on September 25. Nearly 200 friends and supporters attended.

The event was opened by welcoming words from Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell, who reflected on the early efforts to protect children’s health in Grand Rapids by fixing homes—efforts that led to the birth of the Healthy Homes Coalition. The Mayor extolled the value of prevention as paying dividends for both the children served and the community at large.

Healthy Homes’ Executive Director Paul Haan then shared some reflections on partnership and opportunity, followed by a video that featured two families served by the Healthy Homes Coalition in recent months.

The most captivating part came when Randi Challendar shared her story. Randi attended the event two years ago, just after her ten-month old daughter was hospitalized with lead poisoning. She returned this year to provide a powerful testimony about how, with just a little information and support, parents can rise above huge challenges to create bright futures for their children. Randi will soon be the owner of a lead-safe home, and she is a tireless advocate for lead poisoning prevention, sharing her story with both parents and elected officials to make sure that more children are protected.

Partnership: The Secret Ingredient

The following is an excerpt from Paul’s comments at the recent Building Healthy Futures event.

Raising children, as many of us know, is not always easy. Particularly when they are three years old and picking things up left and right, learning new things every day.

As a parent, I want the best for my three-year-old son Ben. In our home, we are blessed with two good jobs that help us afford the things we need. And Ben and I are blessed to have Julie as a mother and wife—as she knows so much about child development as both a mother and an educator.

But we still need partners. Two jobs means that we need partners who can watch Ben and help him learn when we cannot be there. We are thankful for his grandparents Jack and Barb, for his school North Park Montessori, and his day care at Bethlehem Lutheran.

We are thankful for partners like our neighbor Doug, an experienced carpenter who can help out Ben’s not-so-handy dad as I work to maintain our 100-year-old home to keep him safe.

We are thankful for partners at our church, Trinity Reformed, who take the time to reinforce the messages that we are teaching Ben about what it means to be an agent of change, of healing, of reconciliation in this world.

You see, we won’t be successful raising Ben alone. We need to raise him in partnership with others. Think about the people and organizations in your life that have been your partners. If you have children, think about all the people who have helped you raise your children.

At Healthy Homes, we take the idea of partnership so seriously that we don’t call the families we serve our “clients” or our “cases.” Instead, we call them our partners, because we can’t do a thing to keep their children healthy and safe without their hard work.

Partnership. It’s an essential ingredient for success in this work. The result is healthy and happy children.
Thanks for Your Support!

Thanks to all who donated at our 2013 Building Healthy Futures Luncheon. We appreciate your contributions!

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Yes! I’d like to help children grow up strong, smart, and healthy by protecting them from environmental hazards in their homes by becoming a supporter of the Healthy Homes Coalition!

Name(s): __________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

City: _______________________________ Zip: __________

Email: ____________________________ Phone: ______________________________

Sponsorship Amount
___ $25.00 Basic Member
___ $50.00 Regular Member
___ $100.00 Supporting Member
___ $200.00 Sustaining Member
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Checks should be made payable to:
Healthy Homes Coalition
742 Franklin SE
Grand Rapids MI 49507

Or made online at www.HealthyHomesCoalition.org

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   $1,000 per year for five years.

☐ Healthy Futures Builder
   $500 per year for five years.

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   $250 per year for five years.

Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan
(616) 241-3300
Featured Program:
Integrated Pest Management

The Healthy Homes Coalition’s mission is to improve children’s health and wellbeing by eliminating harmful housing conditions. One way this mission is accomplished is by helping families rid their homes of pests, most notably cockroaches, mice, and rats.

The Healthy Homes Coalition uses an approach referred to as “Integrated Pest Management.” IPM is a holistic method of pest control that not only addresses serious pest infestations, but also works to keep pests from getting out of control in the first place. IPM uses techniques to ensure a home is not an attractive place for pests to live by removing water, food, and sources of shelter. These strategies, coupled with safer alternatives like bait stations, will manage pest problems without jeopardizing the health of the people that live in the home.

At Healthy Homes, we do all this without using toxic sprays or dangerous fogggers or bombs. Keeping true to our mission, we don’t want to replace one hazard (pests) with another (toxic pesticides where children live and play).

Why is it so important to rid children’s homes of pests? Pests like cockroaches and mice can trigger asthma attacks and put children in the hospital. It has also been proven that children growing up with cockroaches are more likely to develop asthma in the first place. Without pests, children breathe easier.

Rather than coming in and just doing it for them, the Healthy Homes Coalition teaches families how to implement IPM strategies that use environmentally safe and family friendly approaches to eradicating pests in the home. This way families can ensure that the pests stay out—without the help of ongoing outside resources.

The Healthy Homes Coalition provides the partner family with a report and together we come up with a plan to address the pests. Through the IPM program, many families see a reduction in asthma symptoms.

To qualify for the program families must:
- Have a child living in the home with asthma.
- Be low-to-moderate income.
- Live in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Call the Healthy Homes Coalition at (616) 241-3300 to fill out an intake form and set up a first visit.

Our Current Programs

Healthy Homes Assessments
Trained staff assess the home for a wide variety of children’s environmental health concerns, including lead, asthma triggers, radon, carbon monoxide, accidental injury, and more. Assessments are followed-up by the development of an action plan, education, and connection to resources.

Smoke and CO Alarms
Free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms installed in the home.

Radon Testing
Free radon testing for families participating in Healthy Homes Assessments. $5 do-it-yourself kits available for all others.

Pest Management
Help eradicating cockroaches, mice and rats using child and environmentally friendly tactics.

Classes and Education
Healthy Homes offers a wide variety of classes for parents and professionals.

Eligibility
Most of Healthy Homes’ programs are restricted to low-moderate income families with children birth through age five living in pre-1978 housing in Grand Rapids and northeast Wyoming. Call (616) 241-3300 for details.
Keep Pests Out of Your Home This Winter

As the weather begins to cool and pests like mice and cockroaches begin to search for shelter, the best way to prevent them from making their way into the home is to remove any points of entry.

- Repair seals and screens in windows and doors.
- Locate gaps in the house, inspect the underside of siding.
- Stuff gaps with copper mesh and seal with spray foam.
- Caulk gaps between trim and siding.

To make your home inhospitable to pests, follow these steps.

- Eliminate clutter throughout the home.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Dispose of garbage in a sealed trash can.
- Eliminate sources of moisture.

For more information on managing pests in the home, contact the Healthy Homes Coalition at (616) 241-3300.