All In Chicago: It Takes the Dedication and Support of Many Volunteers to Build a Healthier Chicago

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month, and at CommunityHealth, volunteers are one of the key pillars that make it possible for us to provide access to essential health care for the uninsured. We reached out to a longtime supporter and former volunteer at CommunityHealth to ask her to share her impressions on the importance of access to health care for all.

Written by, Mary Pat Studdert

I first walked through the doors of CommunityHealth in the fall of 2006. I was there for a tour after reading about volunteer opportunities in the clinic's quarterly newsletter. My children were all off to college, and I was asking myself, "What do I want to be when I grow up?" Something about CommunityHealth intrigued me, and I thought that I might be able to put my skills as a Registered Nurse back to work. I have to admit that I didn't know what to make of the free clinic idea, as the vision in my head dated to settings such as San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic where I had trained in college. Even though it was toward the end of the counterculture years, the Haight neighborhood and its buildings were pretty run down. However, when I walked through CommunityHealth's doors, that image of dilapidation was dispelled—"this looks just like my own doctor's office!" It was time to drop that stereotype from my thinking. The clinic was bustling, with clean rooms, organized spaces, and a committed staff providing high quality care. I could tell that each and every patient who walked through the doors was treated with

dignity. And I believed in the guiding principle the clinic espoused, that access to health should be available to all, "because no one should go without health care." But of course!

Well, after my tour I knew that I wanted to be part of this organization. I went back to talk with the Clinic Director and ended up becoming the first RN volunteer that CommunityHealth had engaged. I was committed, and I stayed for eight years providing health care. Along the way, I even served on the Board of Directors for four years. Dr. Serafino Garella, the founder of CommunityHealth, stated that "the success of CommunityHealth is not only the greatest professional satisfaction I've experienced, but also a confirmation that many people in our society can still believe in and act on their idealism." It's true. I had a skill and a passion for giving back to the community; I could volunteer at the clinic and truly make a difference in my patient's lives. Even though one might be a low-income, uninsured adult, that person wants the same thing as everyone else—they want to be healthy. It has been a privilege to volunteer at CommunityHealth to help people achieve that goal.

Mary Pat Studdert is proud to be affiliated with CommunityHealth, where she served as a volunteer nurse for eight years. During that time she spent four years on the Board of Directors, and also served as a co-chair of the annual Gala. Mary Pat continues to stay active with the clinic as a member of the Alumni Board.

We are so grateful to Mary Pat – and all of the volunteers who have made it possible for us to provide access to essential health care over the last 24 years. It is so important for the whole Chicago community to come together, to be "all in" on the effort to ensure that every Chicago resident has access to the right health care, in the right place, at the right time. It's up to all of us; we can do this – together.

Together, we can build a healthier Chicago. Visit www.allin-chicago.org to learn more about CommunityHealth's All In™ campaign. #AllInChicago