



## Program helps kids get health care

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For thousands of people slammed by tough economic times, providing health care for children is nearly impossible. One local program is helping families get the care they need.

The group is called the Children's Health Initiative of Kern County. Its administrators said more than 33,000 children in Kern County alone don't have health coverage.

The organization helps families navigate the confusing process of getting access to affordable health care and quality coverage for kids.

In December, Alex Crespo and his family were at a crossroads. His wife had been laid off and Alex was transitioning jobs, so they had no medical coverage for their two children and one became ill. "He just had an issue. It was a skin rash. We didn't know what to do," said Crespo.

Health insurance programs such as Medi-Cal provide coverage for children in low income homes. But the bureaucracy of the system can leave many families unsure of the programs they qualify for and what's worse, the confusing process of filling out an application.

Program director Jan Hefner said many families will walk away without getting the help they need. That's where the Children's Health Initiative comes in. "And so by training people to assist them in making those applications, we have a much higher success rate in getting the kids insured and keeping them insured," said Hefner.

Crespo contacted the program after learning of his son's problem and was able to get immediate treatment. "It means the world. When your child's sick and you don't know what to do it's nice to know you can call somewhere and essentially have the problem taken care of," said Crespo.

To learn more, you can contact the Children's Health Initiative of Kern Co. at 866-863-0640 or log on to their website at [www.insurekernkids.org](http://www.insurekernkids.org)

The organization has 80 offices throughout the county and enrolls more than 1,000 children in health programs each month.