

## In Her Own Words

*Nisha Abdul Cader, MD '95, pediatrician, is the medical director for the Suspected Abuse Response Team, pediatric consultant for Martha's Place Children's Assessment Center, and supervising physician at the Juvenile Service Center for the County of San Luis Obispo. Dr. Abdul Cader also works with Tri-Counties Regional Center, providing eligibility and medical consultation for the developmentally disabled. She received the 2012 Hands on Hero Award for her dedication to the health and well-being of the youngest and most vulnerable residents of San Luis Obispo County. As a medical student and pediatric resident at Harbor-UCLA, Dr. Abdul Cader co-founded the UMMA Community Clinic in South Central Los Angeles.*

Recent research links how abuse, neglect and exposure to violence not only affect long-term quality of life, but also directly influence brain development. These factors are compounded in children with developmental disabilities or special needs due to prenatal substance exposure. As a pediatrician serving the most vulnerable populations in San Luis Obispo County, I apply these concepts in my evaluations and treatment to support physical and emotional development.

Since 2006, I have collaborated with the multidisciplinary team at Martha's Place Children's Assessment Center, named after a local adopted teen who took her own life as she struggled with the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure. This San Luis Obispo County and nonprofit partnership, which opened its doors to the birth-to-five population in 2006, provides comprehensive assessment and treatment to children with prenatal substance exposure, or at-risk behaviors that may interfere with development. The assessment identifies unique challenges and strengths and provides a road map to a variety of services.

While 74 percent of children with drug and alcohol exposure meet the criteria for ADHD, their symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity are often aggravated by standard ADHD medications. Foster children face higher risk and are found to be prescribed more psychotropic medications for ADHD and other mental health concerns. An early childhood comprehensive evaluation helps identify causes of behaviors and developmental delays, which may otherwise be misinterpreted and mislabeled in educational and placement settings.



For more information on Martha's Place Children's Assessment Center, visit <http://sloparents.org/2009/10/marthas-place/>.

At Martha's Place Children's Assessment Center, Nisha Abdul Cader, M.D. '95 provides pediatric assessments, focusing on the developmental and medical effects of prenatal substance exposure, abuse, neglect and drug-endangered environments. Photo courtesy of Nisha Cader, M.D.'95