

Stars speak for the cause

By *MIKE RUPERT*
Examiner Staff Writer

Eight-year-old Amber Hackett and her fellow summer campers at the Kennedy Recreation Center in Northwest were outside shooting goals Tuesday morning when up walked a special guest - soccer star Freddy Adu.

Hackett, a Stanton Elementary student, was all smiles as she filed into a line to get an autographed photo. "He's small, like us," she said. The excitement continued when Adu's D.C. United teammate Jaime Moreno arrived.

The soccer stars were part of an all-star cast kicking off the 2005 Covering Kids & Families Campaign aimed at providing free or reduced health care for children. The event coincided with the release of a national report showing the nation's 8.5 million uninsured children were 10 times less likely to receive the medical care they need compared with insured children. The report also found that more than 40 percent of uninsured Latino children do not receive any medical care.

The report, "Going Without: America's Uninsured Children," shows 10 percent of the District's 113,271 children do not have health coverage. D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams said the number is a vast improvement over years past. Williams said Medicaid and city initiatives have provided insurance to 72,000 more children in the past six years, but he added, "There still is a lot to do."

"Everyone in America needs access to affordable health coverage, but when the health of a child is at stake, the need is all the more urgent," said Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which released the report Tuesday.

U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, who was raised in a poor Latino neighborhood in New York City, told the gathering he remembers waiting in long lines to receive free health care as a child. His mother was too proud to ask for help, he said. An estimated 7 out of 10 parents with uninsured children can receive free or reduced-cost medical coverage for their kids, Carmona said.

mrupert@dcexaminer.com

COVERING KIDS

Parents of uninsured children can call 1-877-KIDS-NOW to find out if their children are eligible for free or reduced-price health coverage.