

Healthy Savannah Promoting Health With The Help of Faith-Based Organizations

AT A GLANCE

The Faith and Health Coalition is a Healthy Savannah committee that was formed in 2015 with ten individual members in its beginning. Currently it's made up of more than a dozen Faith-Based Organizations (FBO) that work together to encourage healthy practices in places of worship. Since the beginning of the coalition, various members have integrated the Faith, Activity and Nutrition Training (FAN) and faith-based funding initiatives to reduce systemic health inequities in Black and Hispanic communities in Chatham County.



APPROACH

To promote health in Chatham County we have been utilizing and sharing the Faith, Activity, and Nutrition Training (FAN) which is a faith-based program developed at the University of South Carolina. Each congregation that trains receives a stipend, tools, and support to encourage physical activity and healthy food options. Each church, mosque, and temple that have participated created their own unique way of affirming the importance of both physical and spiritual health in the lives of its members. These same FBO held health fairs, fall festivals, information sessions, vaccination clinics, back-to-school giveaways, and many other events funded through stipends. These events helped to raise COVID awareness, improve vaccine access and acceptance, and to promote an environment of balanced nutrition and physical mobility.

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES

The FAN program inclusion into the coalition in early 2019 came from the unified goal to encourage better balanced nutrition in order to reduce risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and coronary heart disease. According to a local 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by St. Joseph's/Candler Health System, 35% of residents were diagnosed with hypertension, and a total of 14% of residents diagnosed with diabetes. Communities often depend on their health-care providers or government agencies to deliver health promotion and education to help prevent disease. However, many people are not reached and the concept of prevention before illness is missing. There is a lack of engagement from FBO in encouraging their congregations to adopt healthy behaviors. One of the reasons for this includes a scarcity of federal funding for faith and health partnerships that could potentially bridge gaps surrounding and maintaining overall wellness. It's important to connect these two sectors to enhance the outreach into the community. It is crucial to have trusted advocates such as faith-based leaders, to create unwavering doubt in the approach to adopting healthy practices. Healthy Savannah's Faith and Health Coalition is eager to continue the collective efforts to strive for healthier communities through education in places of worship. This coalition continues to pursue the endeavors of changing the definition of health from "a sickness to be healed" to an "appreciation of a balanced lifestyle that includes faith, physical activities, and nutrition".

"Kingdom Life Christian Fellowship had the privilege of partnering with Healthy Savannah and the Faith & Health Coalition and its FAN program which has helped changed the trajectory of health and wellness in our congregation" -Pastor Yolanda-

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RESULTS

Fifteen FBO have integrated FAN into their communities and received funding to further their goals of supporting their communities with resources and aid in achieving a healthier lifestyle. The success is not only evident in the relationships created by the faith and health coalition members, but also in the lifestyle of these churches' communities. Activities have included:

- Physical activities during service
- Healthy eating classes offered after each service
- Gymnasium constructions
- Health education materials posted in churches' paper bulletins
- Health programs with information on how eating the right foods and exercising are connected

Since these support initiatives were implemented, meals served have changed from less nutritional to full ranged nutritional meals. Congregations have demonstrated true individual commitment to healthier lives.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

FBO's capabilities to influence healthier living is the spark that started the coalition eight years ago. This is what continues to fuel the initiatives to improve health for Chatham County residents. Following a great FAN adaptation across the coalition's churches, Spanish speaking FBO joined and voiced the need for this great program in their Hispanic communities. The FAN program is currently being translated to Spanish. This is a project the Faith and Health Coalition has been working arduously to execute. The coalition continues to have the support of the Centers for Wellness and Nutrition, and the Community Health Advocates to extend the training resources and health presentations to faith-based leadership.

GET INVOLVED

Join in on the Healthy Savannah coalition movement by visiting <https://www.healthysavannah.org/about/partners>.

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CONTACT

Paula Kreissler
REACH Project Lead
1602 Drayton St.
Savannah, GA 31401
P: 912.272.9494
Email: paula@healthysavannah.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

