



“A key message is to see a physician on a regular basis.”

Joseph Petreycik, Bridgeport Hospital

Helping the Greater Bridgeport Community to Know Their Numbers

A local partnership is working to make a difference in the health of the Greater Bridgeport residents. The Primary Care Action Group (PCAG), led by Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent’s Medical Center, is a collaborative effort that includes local health departments, community health centers and other organizations to improve the well-being in our most vulnerable residents. One of the initiatives of PCAG is ‘Know Your Numbers,’ a program that conducts free health screenings in local food pantries. These screenings also help to raise awareness of the need to improve the nutritional quality of food items from food pantry donors, therefore, positively impacting the health of our community.

Since 2014, volunteers from Bridgeport Hospital, St. Vincent’s Medical Center, local nursing students and other partners, have visited feeding sites, which includes food pantries and soup kitchens, to help identify adults at-risk for chronic and potentially debilitating illnesses. These screenings take place year-round, with the majority held every February in honor of National Heart Month. In addition to providing health screenings, the Know Your Numbers (KYN) team also works to connect individuals to healthcare professionals to make sure they are seen for follow-up care, if needed.



The work of the KYN team has evolved over the years to include a focus on the food available at these feeding sites. “We have noticed a consistent trend in Bridgeport. Our work, to change how people donate items to soup kitchens and food pantries, is improving the health of people we screen,” stated by Marilyn Faber, Co-chairperson for PCAG’s Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Task Force. Healthy foods including fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains are now becoming more available. Fruit-infused water has started to replace sugary drinks and brown rice and whole grain pastas are now being offered at local soup kitchens.

The availability of more wholesome foods can start to empower individuals to overcome significant obstacles to healthier living. According to Joseph Petreycik, Co-chairperson of Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Task Force, this initiative is, “influencing what foods are served at local pantries.” The KYN team is working hard to create a system of care for people who are food insecure. The program offers nutrition education, and referrals to providers to prevent or manage diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks.

Petreycik also emphasized, “A key message is to see a physician on a regular basis.” For instance, during a Know Your Numbers screening, a 25-year-old man, of normal weight, was screened and had dangerously high blood sugar levels. After a referral, a primary care physician was able to see him immediately and he was diagnosed with diabetes. After being prescribed medication and making lifestyle changes, his diabetes is now safely being controlled. Another woman was screened and her weight, cholesterol and blood pressure were all above normal. In one month she was able to lose 10 pounds by using the information she was provided by the KYN team. She is also happy to report that she no longer needs her blood pressure medication.

Since 2014, the group has conducted over 1,500 KYN screenings. During the winter of the 2017 KYN campaign, 21% of participants screened needed referrals to new primary care providers. We also identified participants with elevated blood pressure (39%), high cholesterol (39%) and elevated A1c results, 64% of those screened with known risk or history of diabetes. Almost all participants were counseled by a trained nurse to learn more about nutrition and healthy food choices, specifically targeting their conditions and overall health results.

Looking ahead to National Heart Month in February of 2018, the Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Task Force is planning to improve the quality of the existing KYN program. A high priority is to develop a basic training curriculum for the food pantry managers and volunteers to teach them how to read nutrition labels. The training will provide a consistent knowledge base across all pantry workers to assist their clients with specific health and dietary needs. They are also working with our partners to help pantries implement a system to label food items on the pantry shelves to easily identify the healthier choices. For more information about the KYN, campaign, including where to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, visit www.GetHealthyCT.org.