

Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly

PF3: Highlights from 2016

By Buffy Ashmore

As the year 2016 closes, Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) reflects on a year of growth, opportunity, and wellness promotion in Polk County; 2017 promises to bring even more exciting advances for the organization. PF3 has served Polk County for the past twelve years as an “all-volunteer” coalition. After recently receiving non-profit status with the state of North Carolina, PF3 was able to secure outside grant funding in order to enhance current activities and begin new ones to support local wellness and health equity.

PF3 continues to support 2-1-1 locally for Polk County. If you aren't already aware, 2-1-1 provides 24/7 access online (nc211.org) or by phone (2-1-1) to community resources and can be requested by state, county, city, or zip code. Professional information and referral specialists work with callers to assess their needs, determine their options and identify appropriate programs/services, give support, intervene in crisis situations and advocate for the caller as needed. 2-1-1 is an invaluable service that provides much needed information. To supplement 2-1-1 listings with services provided by organizations outside the non-profit realm and to include information on short term or intermittently available resources such as classes, support groups, and community meals, PF3 is in the planning stages for their newest project, Hear2Help.

The Hear2Help (H2H) program is a collaborative effort between PF3 and Foothills Health Network that will leverage existing relationships by training volunteers and front-line workers to provide and share information on community health and wellness resources, as well as how to access those resources in Polk County. Hear2Help will pilot the program with two community organizations before expanding to offer these resources community and agency wide. We are super excited about this initiative and cannot wait to launch the program in January. Keep a lookout for more information that will be released from H2H, as well as potential community volunteer opportunities with the program. Initial funding for H2H comes from the Foothills Health Network, with additional dollars for program continuation and a part time coalition coordinator coming from Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and Polk County Community Foundation.

Another exciting initiative PF3 is bringing to the local community is the COPE (Cost of Poverty Experience) Simulation. PF3 is very excited to have two facilitators for this

program that were trained through Think Tank in Dayton, OH. Erika Bradley and Jane Armstrong attended training in late summer, organized and worked tirelessly to bring the simulation to Polk County. Each simulation can accommodate approximately 40 participants, but requires the support of the 2 facilitators and 20-25 volunteers. On November 17, the first Polk County COPE Simulation was held at Sunny View Elementary School for community and organization leaders. A brief survey was conducted with ALL responding participants giving the COPE experience high marks. 92% of participants said that they would recommend the simulation to others. One participant shared the following “My expectations were met 100%. While I did not know what to expect from the simulation itself, my goal was to gain a greater empathy for those who live in poverty. And while this is just 'the surface' of what that struggle means to families, I feel that my eyes have been opened a bit”.

Another participant shared “I think you did an excellent job of presenting the obstacles people in poverty face. They live in a constant cycle of crisis. Due to the lack of income and the high cost due to lack of ability to get loans or credit cards it makes life very challenging. Children are often the ones that pay the price of poverty. They feel inadequate to their peers and learn survival behaviors that sometimes stay with them through their lifetime.”

PF3 plans to provide additional COPE simulations in 2017, and is working to secure funding to support these presentations.

In 2016, PF3 also completed a 2-year North Carolina Coalition Initiative (NCCI) grant obtained in response to the 2012 Community Health Assessment priority for Polk County to reduce substance abuse and tobacco use. The NCCI grant resulted in two new permanent prescription drug disposal take-back units, a local Drug Recognition Training, distribution of Deterra Drug Deactivation Packets, lock box (200 units) distribution at Department of Social Services and local churches, and distribution of 4000 rack card pamphlets. Funding for this project ended June 30, 2016, however RHA Health Services (Asheville) has committed resources towards sustaining these endeavors in Polk County.

Would you like to join us? PF3’s next general meeting is Thursday, January 26, noon at the Polk County Library. All are welcome! For more information visit the PF3 website at www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org. or contact Buffy Ashmore at pf3coordinator@gmail.com.

Buffy Ashmore joined PF3 as the Hear2Help project manager in early September and then assumed the additional role of part time coalition coordinator in late October. Buffy has 16 years of experience working in community health. She has a background in public health, not for profit organizations and most recently for profit and

corporate health in the hospital setting.