

No One Stands on the Sidelines

By Linda Greensfelder

As most of our readers know, Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly has long been committed to supporting wellness in Polk County. PF3 focuses on promoting the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual wellness of all 20,000 + of our citizens – a tall order! As I write this PF3 end of year column, I think about December as typically a time for reflection, a time to review the challenges, accomplishments and blessings of the previous year and build inspiration and commitment to address all that awaits us in the year to come. A December column calls for celebration and then a call to action.

The celebration part of this column is easy! PF3 has had a busy and productive 2017. In partnership with Foothills Health Network, we've grown the Hear2Help Program, an outreach effort designed to train community volunteers and front line workers to provide information about resources available to Polk County citizens, and to learn about gaps in existing services and access to services. We've hosted five Cost of Poverty Experience (COPE) simulations, providing the opportunity for some 125 County school and government personnel and a variety of community leaders to better understand the experience of living in poverty. With the support of Polk County Community Foundation, plus St. Luke's Hospital, Pro Physical Therapy and other local businesses, PF3 presented in October the Polk Fit Challenge, a month-long event in which community members organized into teams to improve their health by increasing their physical activity. That event exceeded our expectations, attracting more than 350 participants. Another cause for celebration is our role in the Opioid and Substance Misuse Forum, sponsored by the Polk County Commissioners to increase awareness and build community energy to focus on this problem.

Perhaps even more exciting than all of these activities is the amazing collaboration that has allowed these things to happen in our county. This past year has seen agencies, non-profit and faith based organizations and individual volunteers come together in a way I've never seen before, all to make Polk County a healthier place for all of us to live. As members and/or partners of PF3, folks from the Foothills Health Network, St. Luke's Hospital, Polk County Schools, Polk County Extension, Polk Recreation, Polk County Government, Consolidated Human Services Agency, Steps to Hope, Thermal Belt Outreach Ministry, RHA Prevention Services, Rutherford Polk McDowell Health District, The United Methodist Church and other organizations have worked tirelessly to support our efforts. Others such as Polk County Community Foundation, Foothills Health Network, St. Luke's Hospital, local businesses and private donors have supported us with their dollars.

As robust as this collaboration and support has been, it is clear that to most comprehensively and effectively address the wellness needs of Polk County, EVERYONE must be involved. No one stands on the sidelines! Young and old, rich and poor, employed or not, everyone who lives in Polk County has a role to play in making their home a healthier place to live. Wellness doesn't

simply derive from access to medical care. It comes from living in a community where people live a healthy lifestyle, have enough to eat, have a safe place to live, take care of one another and respect and value one another. It comes from *everyone* doing their part by both addressing personal wellness issues and thinking beyond themselves to support the welfare of others.

As we move into 2018, let's take this message to heart. No one stands on the sidelines!! Here are some ways you can step into the action:

- **Continue to work on your personal health:** increase your physical activity, eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; eat less sugary and processed foods; don't put off that visit with the local health professional. And remember, healthy habits are contagious!
- **Suspend judgment:** Rather than criticizing, seek to understand, and let that understanding guide your actions.
- **Be a help to others:** look in on someone who is isolated; invite a neighbor to go for a walk or to have a cup of coffee; even a smile and a thank you go a long way!
- **Volunteer:** Big Brothers Big Sisters makes a tremendous difference in the lives of local children and teens. Meals on Wheels transports food to people who are house-bound. Thermal Belt Outreach helps our neighbors with food, utility assistance and many other needs. For a list of community resources including those that utilize volunteers, go to <http://www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org/helpful-documents.html> and click on *Hear2Help Community Resource Guide*.
- **Donate:** Financial support is another way to get into the action. The *Hear2Help Community Resource Guide* lists many quality causes to which you can donate. You can also directly support PF3 by donating online at <http://www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org/donate-to-pf3.html>

Please join the effort. Get involved. To create a truly healthy Polk County, each one of us must share our talents and resources. No one stands on the sidelines!!