

We Are Hear2Help

By Buffy Ashmore

Imagine living in a community with little to no community resources. Just for a moment think about being a part of a community without organizations to provide services to assist with unmet needs. Fortunately, we live in a community with many resources available to assist families and individuals with everyday needs. With the assistance of 2-1-1, an information and referral resource, information is readily accessible by phone or computer. Still, many find it difficult and frustrating to navigate the process of accessing and utilizing these resources and for this reason many community resources remain untapped or under-utilized.

Hear2Help (H2H) is a collaboration between Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3), a local non-profit organization dedicated to making a difference in health and wellness of Polk County, and Foothills Health Network (FHN). The program was developed to provide and disseminate information on community health and wellness resources, as well as how to access those resources in Polk County. The program is volunteer-based and utilizes agency personnel or “front-line workers” who have ongoing contact and relationships with the community in an effort to more efficiently educate on existing resources, but more importantly, to listen to the needs, gaps and barriers to access. During the initial planning phase for the program, a focus group including several agency personnel, provided insight and information on how the H2H program would be most beneficial to their agency and clients. Through this focus group, much needed information was captured and H2H was developed. H2H works with agencies by providing volunteer and staff training on the newly developed volunteer training manual and community resource guide. We recognize that each organization is different, and depending on the organization, volunteers, front line workers, training specifics and logistics may differ, however the program deliverables remain the same. The program was developed with this in mind and will be replicated and customized to the needs of additional organizations. H2H was not developed to replace 2-1-1, but rather to enhance the service by providing more resources and the opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

Thermal Belt Outreach (TBO) was the first organization to receive training on the H2H program. TBO serves Polk County families and individuals that need assistance with day-to-day necessities such as food, utilities and housing. Their mission is to provide compassionate assistance to Polk County residents who do not have the resources to provide for their basic life needs. After meeting with Executive Director George Alley to provide more information on H2H and assess the need for the program, it was clear that H2H and TBO were a perfect fit and a partnership would benefit the community

tremendously. To date, a total of 18 Thermal Belt Outreach staff and volunteers have been trained in the H2H program.

H2H is also working with the Meeting Place Senior Center/ Meals on Wheels, an organization that strives to enhance the quality of life for senior residents in Polk County. In addition to congregate meals for seniors, they provide activities to seniors through recreational and social activities and educational opportunities. The Meals on Wheels program serves the senior population with home-delivered meals. Executive Director Pam Doty is excited to be partnering with the H2H program. This partnership offers a great opportunity to reach the elderly population and educate on community resources. Staff and volunteers have been provided with the training and materials and will start the program soon.

Last but not least, the H2H training has been provided to Polk County School nurses and counselors. By partnering with the schools, H2H can reach many families with unmet needs throughout the community. School nurses and counselors will take information and knowledge gained through the H2H training and share it with principals, teachers and other faculty. Many thanks to Ronette Dill, Curriculum Director for Polk County Schools, for welcoming the H2H program and coordinating the training.

H2H is still in its infancy; however we feel that we are making tremendous progress. The program will be most successful through community partnerships and collaborations. If you would like more information on the H2H program, please contact Buffy Ashmore, Program Director at 828-894-8271 ext. 222 or hear2helppolkcounty@gmail.com. Check us out online at www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org/hear2help. Make sure to also check out the online community resource guide.

Buffy Ashmore joined PF3 in early September 2016 as the Hear2Help project manager. In that role she developed the Hear2Help program and volunteer training through creating a volunteer training manual and community resource guide. In late October 2016, she assumed the additional role of part time coalition coordinator.