Community Benefit Report: Making a Difference Where We Are

The Penn State St. Joseph Community Benefit Report is created to inform the public about the programs or activities that are sponsored or supported by the hospital to promote health and healing in the greater community. Whether it is improving the communities’ access to health care services, enhancing the health of the community, advancing medical or health knowledge, or reducing the burden on their community efforts, these stories will offer insight and create understanding of Penn State St. Joseph’s dedication to the communities we serve, and of our daily efforts to help patients find the best, most affordable and quality healthcare possible.

The report is a quick, but by no means comprehensive, overview of programs Penn State Health St. Joseph supports to improve access to healthcare and education to the communities we serve. In this report you see how we work collaborative to build healthier communities. You will experience it through our efforts with Centering Pregnancy, Free Flu Shots, Free Dental Clinic, Guts & Glory Expo Digestive Wellness Expo, Stroke Support Group, Breast Cancer Screening, Smoking Cessation, Pediatric Health & Safety Circus, and Girls on the Run.
Dear Friends:

We are proud to publish this community benefit report, and to develop this in conjunction with the students from Dr. Kesha Maria Morant Williams Communications Arts and Science Class at Penn State Berks. The students were able to see with “new eyes” the intimate role that our health care organization plays in addressing community health and wellness needs and the positive impact we have on the quality of life for all in our community.

Penn State Health St. Joseph has consistently fulfilled its responsibility to the community not only by providing high quality medical care but also doing it cost efficiently while also maintaining a transparent approach to all consumers about the cost of care. St. Joseph commits financial and staff resources to support numerous programs and services that benefit the community through education, prevention and support. Our efforts remain aligned with the Community Health Needs Assessment we conducted with community partners and which we are working collaboratively on again to assess and address the community’s most pressing needs.

As you will read here, the depth and breadth of our public efforts are both extensive and inclusive and meant to meet people where they are in terms of providing for their care and educating them on wellness.

Looking to our future, Penn State Health St. Joseph will continue to collaborate with others in the community who are committed to address the health and wellness issues that will help Berks to work toward its collective goal of remaining a great place to live, work and play!

John R. Morahan
President and Chief Executive Officer

Thank You Penn State Berks...

Special Thanks to Dr. Kesha Maria Morant Williams, professor of Communications Arts and Sciences, at Penn State Berks. Her fall semester communications class devoted its time and talent to research, interview, write and edit the articles appearing in this Community Benefit report. The students also took photographs and develop other multimedia content. The guidance Dr. Williams’ offered her students resulted in a range of articles that present a unique perspective on the positive impact a healthcare system has in meeting the health and wellness needs of the community. Dr. Williams’ students’ participation in this project exemplifies Penn State’s commitment to “engaged scholarship” which offers students out-of-classroom academic experiences that complement in-classroom learning.
Little eyes well up with tears that flow down the cheeks of the young child’s face as the needle piercing their skin delivers the life-saving Flu vaccine.

This drama happens millions of times a year as people take precautions to build a wall of protection to prevent a deadly virus from reaching their immune system by having a flu shot.

Once an individual receives a flu shot the vaccine causes antibodies in the human body to develop within two weeks.

Penn State Health St. Joseph annually hosts a free flu shot campaign that often attracts nearly 2000 people.

On the morning of the free offering this past fall, hallways on the Bern Township campus quickly filled with people who brought entire families and friends. Legs might have grown slightly weary with the long line at the start. But the public was kept busy with various surveys and informational packets and chatter amongst themselves, often about many attendees discussing how they never miss their flu shot.

As I walked through the crowd handing out surveys, I met Jeremy Klopp who brought his wife and two children for their shots.

“The event is great, there is a bit of a wait but it is worth it!” he said enthusiastically.

We also discussed how some people have never had a flu shot in their entire lives. Not knowing that they are exposing themselves and others to illness that could be prevented with the vaccine.

Mr. Klopp said that “Not getting a flu shot is like not changing the oil on your new BMW, its preventative maintenance.”

The National Institute of Health recorded that 5-20% of Americans catch the flu each year. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 could possibly die due to the high rate of flu cases in the United States.

The best thing people can do to protect themselves from the flu virus is to get vaccinated, so that their bodies can have a fighting chance against it. It also helps to lessen community outbreaks of the flu virus.

Everyone who took advantage of Penn State Health St. Joseph’s free flu shot took a giant step in protecting their body as well as the health of the community!
A group of jovial women gush over Catherine’s healthy baby girl, who clearly has her mother’s eyes. As Catherine Nunez, 21, looks on she jokes and laughs with Kim Hunter, a Registered Nurse at Penn State Health Downtown Reading campus, who counseled Catherine through the Centering Pregnancy program she participated in during her pregnancy.

Today, Catherine drops by with her three month old daughter, Amaris, to reconnect and visit the staff who were so instrumental in the delivery of her healthy child and questions swirl about her adjustment to life as a new mother.

To outsiders, this interaction may be reminiscent of a gathering of old friends however this group of women is a part of an innovative program at Penn State Health St. Joseph, called Centering Pregnancy. This program creates a new dimension to prenatal care with its self-care set-up and engaging group sessions.

Catherine decided to join Centering Pregnancy when hospital staff recommended this program to her during a regular prenatal visit, when they saw how nervous she was at preparing to become a first time mother.

“Everyone was scaring me with these stories,” she explained, “but coming to this group prepared me for the good and the bad that was going to come.”

The goal of this 2015 award winning program is to empower women to make healthy choices for themselves and their unborn child. The Centering Pregnancy program offers supportive group sessions, where women can build long lasting relationships and a lifetime of knowledge.

Unlike the traditional approach to prenatal care: arrive for a prenatal visit, check in with a receptionist, and wait to be seen by a doctor individually, Centering Pregnancy transforms the experience. By placing women in a safe space among others with similar due dates, over the course of ninety minutes they receive checkups, share information and ideas, and offer support and friendship to each other. Members of the group also have access to medical professionals, including midwives, who can help answer their clinical questions.

For expecting mothers in the program, they walk through the front doors of the Penn State Health St. Joseph Downtown Reading Campus at 6th and Walnut Streets and head right to the Centering Pregnancy room. Music plays as they enter and each person is greeted by a team made up of: a Community Health Advocate, Midwives, Registered Nurses, and Doctors—eventually, it gets the feel of a family reunion!

This support system for expecting mothers is heartwarming. The staff know each woman by name, without having to check a chart.

The women in today’s session commence, after completing the self-care portion of the visit, seem to commence to chatting all at once about their weekly activities and their plans for the upcoming weekend. This was new mom Catherine’s favorite part—talking and sharing with others who were experiencing what she was.

She was comforted knowing the other women were encountering the same struggles and emotions she was. It helped her realize she was not alone.

“At first I was very afraid and uncomfortable. I was afraid of everything, but once I saw her, she put me at ease,” as Catherine points and smiles at Kim Hunter, who runs the program.
Kim then adds, “We establish relationships here.”

Marlene Rivas-Cortez, 18, of Reading, walks in the room and is greeted by staff immediately with smiles and questions about how she has been.

The Centering Pregnancy program’s self-care set up encourages women such as Marlene, who is a first time expecting mother, to teach herself how to take and record her own blood pressure and weight with the assistance of a staff member. A midwife then measures Marlene’s belly with a tape measure, and together, they listen to the baby’s heartbeat.

Marlene says, “I joined Centering Pregnancy because it is my first baby, and I want to be more educated about being pregnant and what to expect as a first time mother.”

Marlene enjoys relating to the other expecting mothers.

“I get more care here by having connections to other physicians for certain needs. My biggest take away from this program is the relationships I’ve created,” she explains, “I plan to stay in contact with these women after birth to visit each other and to have our babies meet.”

In the safe space of a circle, the women and staff gather around to begin their discussion led by Sabrina Turner, a Certified Nurse-Midwife at St. Joe’s.

Sabrina asks the women a series of child care questions to see if they agree or disagree based on what they have been taught in class and their previous life experiences.

With education and awareness about important topics learned from the group, Catherine had odd cravings for soap during her pregnancy, but she did not give in, she says. She thought of what she learned from Kim and knew not to do it.

After giving birth, Catherine said the first month was crazy. “I was hardly sleeping. I tried to think of everything I could remember from class; she’s either hungry or needs a diaper change.”

Catherine experienced high blood pressure and was diagnosed with Preeclampsia at one of her sessions during the self-care portion of the program. The staff monitored her new diagnosis closely and educated her about Preeclampsia’s risks.

When Catherine delivered, her newborn was so unexpectedly tiny, she had no clothing to take her daughter home in. The staff at Centering Pregnancy provided her with outfits for her newborn daughter.

“They are very, very supportive here; giving you advice, giving you clothes, Kim helped me out a lot. I feel happy, I feel blessed,” she said.

Andy Pacheco, 25 of Reading, is expecting her second daughter. She joined Centering Pregnancy and is surprisingly gaining new information and education that she was unaware of with her first pregnancy.

She enjoys when women in the group talk about going through the same things she is. Though she already has a child, Andy was shocked at how much new information that she was learning from the group sessions.

“I look forward to continuing the relationships I’ve built by keeping in contact with these women and bringing my baby girl back for them to see her, and to see their babies, as well,” she said. “The atmosphere is very welcoming here and I have no doubt that I will be back if I decide to have another baby in the future.”
Down a long brightly lit hallway smiling children are waving to clowns, ducks, and other characters as a rainbow of colors “jumps” out of the walls.

The Pediatric Health and Safety Circus sponsored by Penn State Health St. Joseph is meant to be fun, but with a message about health and safety such as dental hygiene, dangers of medicine, nutrition and much more.

In a room, a man with a nametag that reads Darren and a white lab coat smiles and laughs with the children and their parents; the children are enthralled by his tone of voice not wanting to look away as Darren, a pharmaceutical resident, presents “Medicine is not Candy.”

As good as those Flintstones vitamins may taste to children, he cautioned, eating them, well, like, Candy can be very dangerous. As if they needed a reminder, after his talk each student received a “Mr. Yuk” sticker, the universal symbol for alerting children to things that can be harmful to them.

“By making children aware we are preventing them from getting very sick,” he explained holding a larger binder that contained what must have been every kind of medicine one could think of and its harmful side effects.

A mother, Lauren, stands there with her two children, one on each of her hips and looks to see what each room has to offer. This is the second year she and her family have attended this event and notes that after coming last year, her daughter “definitely brushes her teeth better.”

Ducking into another room we meet an enthusiastic pediatric nurse named Ester. She happily greets each visitor, while a bright TV screen shows an interactive video of dancing characters teaching children about gun safety.

“If children see a gun they might not know what to do, so it’s important to teach them using tools that help them in ways their young minds can understand,” Ester said.

Like this video, like this entire circus, kids—and their parents—walked away with many lessons that will keep them safe as the grow.

by Daniella Bosak
You wake up, get the kids ready for school, drop them off, go to work, pick them up, help them with homework (while trying to make dinner), eat as a family, clean things up, get the kids bathed and then into bed.

It is finally that glorious time of the day! The only 15 minutes out of the 1440 minutes in the day that you get to yourself: shower time.

While you’re washing the suds off, you feel something different—a lump on your breast. You think to yourself, “Hm. That’s weird. I’ll just try to remember to bring it up at my next physical.”

It is often human nature to dismiss these matters. People often think illness happens to other people, not me.

The disconcerting truth is that illness can happen to anyone, at any time, but we improve our chances by taking part in regular screening and other preventative type activities such as proper nutrition and exercise.

Elbouse Dorsinville is a breast cancer patient being treated at Penn State Health St. Joseph. Just back from a round of chemotherapy, “Sometimes you hear about what happens to other people and all you can say is ‘WOW!’ Until it happens to you, you don’t understand,” she explains.

Fortunately she has the help of Nancy Fonseca, Penn State Health St. Joseph’s Oncology Social Worker. You see, Nancy, too, is a breast cancer survivor putting her in the same position as many of her patients.

Now cancer free, Fonseca uses her own illness and experiences to connect with patients. And, she is a fount of knowledge when it comes to the many aspects of receiving cancer care.

“We support our patients in many ways that many never really event think about, initially,” she explains. “We can provide transportation to office visits, financial assistance, but, most importantly, we provide love.”

Adds Elbouse: “They are always there to make me smile. When I go in with a sad face, I always leave with a smile.”

She says Nancy and the Cancer Center staff care deeply about their patients and their recovery and they often end up becoming friends.

“Nancy is my angel. She has been there, she knows how it is, and she makes me feel comfortable,” says Elbouse.
Supporting the mind after a stroke

It’s 2003, the house is silent and the bedroom is pitch-black except for the moon peaking in between the drawn curtains. It was just like any other typical night, or so Raymond Ernst thought. In the middle of the night he sat up and quickly realized he did not have strength in his legs to get out of bed. Even though the experience was peculiar he went back to sleep. In the morning while at the breakfast table, he experienced another episode, but this time he also was confused. That’s when his wife called 911—in a panic. He was not aware of exactly what was happening, but she knew something was very medically wrong with her husband.

“My body felt heavy; I had not strength and I could not sit up. All of the sudden I was in the ambulance,” he explained, befuddled at the time to the cause of the problem.

Rushed to the hospital, Raymond was connected to a number of state of the art medical devices, but it was the CAT scan of his brain that “informed” Raymond and his wife that he had suffered a stroke.

It is very common that the victims of strokes have no idea that their brain may be undergoing changes such as a blockage or a bleed that can lead to two different kinds of strokes. For many people a stroke starts out as a bad headache and most people don’t think twice about it. It is a sign ignored at their own peril. The warning signs and symptoms for stroke also include numbness of the left side of the body, vision loss, facial paralysis, and the inability to verbalize his thoughts.

“Every stroke is different, and I think it is very important for people to be informed about the warning signs,” Raymond says.

The compassionate team at Penn State Health St. Joseph agrees with Raymond. The project IMPACT nurse, Kristin Miller, holds a stroke support group which meets the second Tuesday of every month at Penn State Health St. Joseph in Bern Twp.

“Our main goal is to educate the community about strokes and also to give victims a comforting atmosphere to share their stories” says Kristin.

The Group is open to anyone in the community and newcomers are always welcome. Raymond, along with his sister and her spouse, attend the monthly support group.

“It has been a great way for him to stay in touch with his family and keep them up to date throughout his recovery” explains Kristin.

Besides the opportunity to share and connect with others, the stroke support group also features an expert guest speaker every month who discuss topics such as healthy diet, exercise, anti-coagulant medications, physical and emotional changes after a stroke and much more.

A dozen years later, Raymond says he feels great. Besides the fact that the left side of his body still experiences numbness and he has to be careful when picking things up with his left hand, he has come a long way.

“My brother and sister are my biggest supporters,” Raymond added gratefully.

Surviving through a stroke is blessing all on its own. The road to recovery can be scary and overwhelming, but survivors and their loved ones that join Penn State Health St. Joseph stroke support group are never alone.
The Reading Phillies First Energy Stadium is buzzing. As people flow into the park, they are being greeted by attendants with warm, friendly smiles who are cheerfully handing out free goodie bags. However, we’re not at a baseball game but rather a Health and Wellness Expo event, called Guts & Glory.

The stadium has been transformed for an event focused on digestive health and wellness. The weather is bright, and the crowded sun kissed. Aromas of healthy foods fill the drive along by a slight breeze. It is perfect weather to learn about your health and what you can do to maintain it.

Children mass at the entrance as they create artistic images from the assortment of colorful chalks; pumpkin art is another creative outlet as are other activities like sliding down a colorful inflatable to facing the challenge of climbing to the tippy top of the rock-climbing wall.

Guts and Glory is in its second year, founded by Dr. Aparna Mele, a gastroenterologist, and supported by Penn State Health St. Joseph. Dr. Mele’s non-profit, My Gut Instinct, is driven by a mission statement to promote community awareness of health and wellness through preventative health care and holistic wellbeing.

A Gallup poll that ranked Reading as the 9th most obese city in the U.S. inspired Dr. Mele to take on the considerable challenge improving the digestive and overall health of the Berks Community.

The elements of living a healthy lifestyle comes with challenges such as not enough hours in a day to stay healthy, a way to stay motivated and ready access to healthy foods and while overcoming the situations can feel daunting, Dr. Mele suggest that small changes make a tremendous difference in healthy lifestyle choices.

“Everyone’s ‘inner physique’ is built differently and knowing how to accommodate and take control of one’s own health is key to a happier and healthy life,” she explained.

Guts and Glory’s focus is not solely focused on the overweight population because, Dr. Mele points out, even people who appear to think could be consuming a diet that is bad for them.

That was the takeaway for attendee Diana Shefton.

“I learned about the new various vendors from local area that I didn’t know about before,” she said. So impressed was she that Diana plans on participating as a vendor even in the future as she owns her own vegetarian catering service called Go La Di Da Vegetarian Catering Service, LLC.

Another Community member, Ralli Melnyk, attending the event for the first time, learned about homemade honey and aromatherapy products. She noted that vendors were able to provide useful information, especially when it came to preventable diseases.

Deb Sands, an RN with Digestive Disease Associates mentions, said she believes “in good health and taking care of our bodies.” Her professional goal, she said, is to educate the public and offer information about the many ways to prevent disease and encourages the public to come in checkups, I including adhering to the guidelines for regular colon cancer screenings.

As attendees at the Guts & Glory event know, there are fun, playful, and energetic ways to motivate and improve your lifestyle.
Bullied
Into Addiction

It can start with a simple nudge. “Come on it won’t hurt” or “Dude, you’re so lame. Take a puff.” And lead to life of addiction...for millions of people.

That’s how it started for Beth. A mature women holding a smoking cessation pamphlet and sipping from her water bottle, Beth’s addiction began as peer pressure and the habit has lasted 43 years—almost her entire life.

She currently attends the Smoking Cessation course at Penn State Health St. Joseph, called “Stop Smoking”—as if it were that easy!

The free course is open to anyone who wants to learn methods to cease smoking and who might need the support of others. While deceptively simple to explain: Smoking cessation is the process of discontinuing tobacco smoking and using smoking substitutes, the support group’s real success is in helping people to focus on the hard part, how to actually quit—for good.

“I was the frightened teenager leaning against the wall, standing in front of my school, hanging out, just waiting for the doors to open. I tried to avoid these bullies who walked by every day,” Beth recalled. “They said if I didn’t smoke they were going to beat me up, so at first I just pretended. I’d just take a puff and hold it in but they caught on to that.”

“No you really got to smoke,’ so I put the cigarette to my lips and that’s how I started,” she recalled

As she cleared her throat, Beth explained her gravelly voice this way, “Because I quit smoking. The hard stuff in my lungs is breaking down, making it hard to talk.”

Putting her right hand to her throat with eyes gazing out window, “I’ll tell ya, maybe twenty years ago my mother said to me, ‘I’ll offer you $10,000 if you quit smoking,’ but no, it was just too addicting.”

Recently, Beth was diagnosed with a lung disease known as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

With a deep sigh, “After being diagnosed, they said if I kept smoking I would eventually need a ventilator,” Beth explained.

“I can’t run. I need to be able to run, because my children are going to have grandchildren and I’ll want to be able to chase them,” Beth said.

Then, she added, seemingly in disbelief, “My daughter is twenty-two and she smokes. I can’t get her to quit no matter what I say to her.”

Beth hopes her daughter will overcome the addiction before she, too, suffers long term health consequences. She hopes her daughter also can find help is through the classes offered by St. Joe’s.

“The teachers have a good attitude,” she says. “They say all the right things. They don’t make you feel like a loser.” The program is led by Douglas Albright, the Director of Respiratory Therapy at Penn State Health St. Joseph.

For Beth a combination of things is helping her quit, but perhaps it was the psychological method offered by Albright, who has taught the program for decades, that has helped the most:

“Plan in advance; if you’re tempted, remind yourself, you’re worth it. Situations like slip-ups are not setbacks. We’ve learned it’s not a failure, just get up and start over,” she recounted Albright’s wisdom.

Staring out the window as two children raced across the parking lot, perhaps a vision the grandchildren she hopes to someday chase, she said: “The support is wonderful, it makes me feel like I’m not alone.”

And, maybe, just maybe with professional help from St. Joe’s, faith in herself and that image of scurrying grandkids, will help Beth finally conquer the habit forced on her 43 years ago.
The large, loud gymnasium suddenly turned quiet as blonde haired, nine-year-old Stella Blue stood up to give her version of an “I feel” situation.

“I feel sad when you call me names, because it hurts and I would like for you to not call me names next time” is what came from Stella Blue’s mouth and, even more important, Stella Blue’s heart.

As she sat back down with the group of 22 girls, five more eager girls raised their hands to give their version of “I feel” statements.

“Arianna” coach Sherri calls out, “how about you?”

Unlike many of the other girls, you could tell by the way she spoke that Ariana was not nervous.

As she began to stand, the words came pouring out.

“I feel angry when you push me down to the ground, because it hurts. I would like for you next time not to push me to the ground,” she pleaded.

Every week on Tuesday’s and Thursday’s at 2:45 p.m., these girls gather together to have fun and learn new lessons, as part of the Girls on The Run (GOTR) program, then they practice them throughout the whole day. There are 32 girls and five coaches altogether at Rowen Elementary participating in GOTR. The program coaches, Sherri, Lorie, Cassie Red K, Lauren, and Kelly each take turns teaching. Today’s lesson was about being courageous.

Girls on the Run is a program for girls grades 3-8, that teaches them many life learned lessons and enables them to gain strengths such as self-confidence, love, and the ability to stand up for themselves. Penn State Health St. Joseph was one of the founding sponsors of the program in 2012 as part of its Healthy Community Initiative.

Kimberly Rivera, the executive director of Girls on the Run, has worked long and hard along with many others to bring GOTR to Berks County. It is currently active in 21 schools and at the Body Zone, and more than 340 girls have participated in the recent season. Girls on the Run takes place in the fall and spring over a twelve week period and ends with a 5K run. This program exists solely to build upon the character of these young girls, allowing them to feel motivated and loved in life.

As coach Sherri recalls, “I was teaching in my classroom one day and I was really stressed. I couldn’t get my thoughts together when one of my previous Girls on the Run students- Vanessa- came over to me and said Mrs. Sherri, stop, think and breathe”

Lorie, another coach, says “the principle approached me in the hallway one day and says to me, I can tell just by looking at the girls which one of them are in Girls on the Run just by the way they walk and talk”.
Penn State Health St. Joseph is a tax-exempt network consisting of Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center, Penn State Health Downtown Reading Campus, Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Group and Penn State Health St. Joseph Physician Hospital Organization. Founded in 1873 by the Sisters of St. Francis, the network provides a full-range of outpatient and inpatient diagnostic, medical and surgical services. The 380,000 sq. ft., 212-bed state-of-the-art hospital and health campus opened in late 2006 on 40 acres in Bern Township, and became part of Penn State Health in July, 2015.

Routinely ranked among the Top 50 Heart Hospitals in the country in quality metrics, Penn State Health St. Joseph also is nationally certified as a Center of Excellence in Chest Pain, Stroke and Heart Failure. Nursing care also has earned the distinction as a “Pathways to Excellence” accredited facility.

The system has 16 Ambulatory Care Centers stretching from Elverson in Chester County through Berks County to the Schuylkill County border. The centers offer urgent care, imaging studies, lab work and other ambulatory services and procedures. The Downtown Reading Campus at 6th and Walnut Streets anchors the ambulatory network and is the largest primary care provider in the City of Reading, operating out of a thriving 266,000 square foot facility that provides family practice, women’s and children’s services and diagnostic services. The downtown facility has been lauded as a model for inner city primary care as well as offers innovative patient center approaches to maternity and diabetes management. It also is pioneering the implementation of patient centered medical home practices.

Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Group is a network of nearly 100 physicians and mid-level providers. The group includes: specialists in Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Hospitalists, Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Neurology, Neurosurgery, General Surgery, Women’s Services and Vascular Surgery and is committed to providing the Berks community with the best medical care available from board certified and fellowship-trained physicians. Penn State Health St. Joseph’s 380 member medical staff consists of board certified and fellowship trained physicians. Penn State Health St. Joseph also offers a family practice medical residency program, and provides clinical training for several nursing and allied health professionals. The network has nearly 1600 employees, $220 million in annual revenues and nearly 50,000 annual emergency room visits.

Fully accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Additional information on the medical center can be accessed through its website at www.thefutureofhealthcare.org.