

# 9 months TO A HEALTHIER LIFE

BETTER KNOWLEDGE, PRACTICAL TOOLS, AND NEW SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR A HEALTHIER LIFE



Participants in 9 Months to a Healthier Life developed relationships with other community members during the 9-month program.

The **9 Months to a Healthier Life** challenge focused on healthy eating and exercise in a social environment across ethnic groups.

Over 9 months the weekly program allowed time and space for participants to building a team of supportive relationships, and learn from a team of experts on topics including:

- Nutrition principles for healthy eating and food preparation;
- Exercise options for different personalities and lifestyles; and
- Gardening skills and an introduction to the local farmers market.

Around these topics, participants each developed their own custom plan for reaching their health goals in ways that work best for their body type, cultural traditions, and personal schedule.

**“For me it was a blessing to be part of this program. It was nice to be able to meet people who are struggling with being overweight. This program gave me tools to help, and the motivation to get better. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”**



-- Andrea Aguilar

The program was geared towards engaging lower-income and minority populations that are at a higher risk of chronic health problems. The pilot program ran weekly from November 2020 through June 2021. Fifteen participants were selected program and 10 successfully completed

the full program. Many were successful in losing weight through healthy lifestyle changes and expressed interest in continuing meeting as a group. Others who have heard about the program have expressed interest, and the partnership hopes to be able to fund additional cycles of programming in the future.

**WHO WE ARE:** 9 Months to a Healthier life is a partnership of three community-based organizations-- Back Bay Mission, Believe Ministries, and Coastal Family Health who serve the East Biloxi community. The program is designed to be duplicated in other low income communities and communities of color throughout the Mississippi Gulf Coast, with Coastal Family Health being the common denominator across the region. Each of these organizations have a long-standing history of collaboration and community health impact in East Biloxi.

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# The Science of Community for Achieving Healthy Lifestyle Goals.

University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health research showed that participation in a community-based behavioral lifestyle intervention program to improve health not only helped people lose weight, increase their physical activity levels, and reduce their risk of diabetes and heart disease, but also increased their health-related quality of life by an average of nearly 10%.<sup>1</sup>

More than half of all Americans live with a preventable chronic disease and many such diseases are related to obesity, poor nutrition and physical activity. Mississippi at 37.3% has the second highest rate of adult obesity in the nation. 85% of Mississippi adults do not achieve the recommended amount of physical activity per week.<sup>2</sup>

A 2012 study shows that forming new, positive social networks simultaneously with positive well-connected social networks around weight loss and healthy lifestyle goals significantly increases the success of participants and reduces trends in obesity.<sup>3</sup>

“Community-based nutrition and health promotion programs play an important role in improving neighborhood health.”<sup>4</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED & NEXT STEPS

### Learning from Community Experts.

One of the key successful components of the program was bringing in key experts to share their professional knowledge with participants on topics of nutrition, gardening, and exercise.

**New Social Networks.** Another common theme among participants, was the value of making new friends and acquaintances with similar healthy lifestyle goals. A unique aspect of this program is that this happened across ethnic groups who began learning from and supporting each other.

**Dedicated Staff.** Securing funding for a dedicated staff person for this program will enable the program to grow and reach more community members with greater impact.



## Moving the Needle in Coastal Mississippi

### Community Health Indicators: Gulf Coast Community ExCHANGE

The **Gulf Coast Healthy Communities Collaborative**, facilitated by Mississippi State University's Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, continually pursues ways to provide better and more relevant data through our partnerships and through our free digital tool: **Gulf Coast Community ExCHANGE**. The ExCHANGE provides up-to-date local community health data and resources to assist communities in becoming more resilient places that improve health and quality of life on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Health indicators and trends are tracked here, and as organizations and programs across the region partner together to address community health we can watch the needle move over time! Indicators where 9 Months to Better Health Project can be expected to have a positive impact include:



**HEALTHY BEHAVIORS RANKING**



**ADULTS WITH DIABETES OR HEART DISEASE**



**ADULTS WHO ARE OBESE**



**ADULTS WHO ARE SEDENTARY**

To learn what these indicators mean and how the Mississippi Gulf Coast ranks in each, please visit: [GulfCoastCommunityExCHANGE.org](http://GulfCoastCommunityExCHANGE.org)

<sup>1</sup> Yvonne L. Eaglehouse, Gerald L. Schafer, Vincent C. Arena, M. Kaye Kramer, Rachel G. Miller, Andrea M. Kriska. Impact of a community-based lifestyle intervention program on health-related quality of life. *Quality of Life Research*, 2016; 25 (8): 1903 DOI: 10.1007/s11136-016-1240-7

<sup>2</sup> Mississippi Obesity Action Plan. Mississippi Department of Health. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Bahr, D.B., Browning, R.C., Wyatt, H.R. and Hill, J.O. (2009), Exploiting Social Networks to Mitigate the Obesity Epidemic. *Obesity*, 17: 723-728. <https://doi.org/10.1038/oby.2008.615>

<sup>4</sup> Christina I. Nieves, Rachel Dannefer, Arlen Zamula, Anthony Fonseca, Christa Myers, La'Shawn Brown-Dudley & Noel Manyindo (2021) A Qualitative Evaluation of A Community-Based Nutrition and Health Promotion Program, *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, DOI: 10.1080/19320248.2021.1898514

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