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Foundations to fund alliance

Hospitals support FWAACA's mission to provide cancer education, screenings, aid to minorities.

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Turner: Funding for organization is critical



Frierson: Cost may prohibit healthy choices

The Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance (FWAACA), a grass-roots organization formed in 1996, has received several boosts in funding, including a challenge grant from the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation.

For every \$1 raised in either memberships or donations, the St. Joseph foundation will match \$2 up to \$27,600.

FWAACA also recently received a funding commitment from Parkview Hospital Foundation of \$105,000 over three years.

"It is probably safe to say that cancer has touched every single household in this (central and southeast) community – and if it hasn't, it probably will," said Evelyn Frierson, executive director of FWAACA.

Frierson herself is a cancer survivor. In 2000, nine years after giving birth to her "miracle son" – as she calls him, because for years she was unable to conceive – she was diagnosed with cancer.

"When first given the diagnosis, I felt as though I was doomed," she said, noting several people she knew had died from various cancers.

But thanks to access to good medical care and successful treatment, she is active and well again.

Many in the black community are not so fortunate. Being poor largely contributes to health disparities among blacks.

"Unfortunately, an adequate diet, living in a community that one would feel safe walking in for physical activity and having access to quality health care (are) synonymous with middle and upper class. It is very difficult to make healthy choices when it is cost-prohibitive," Frierson said.

The mission of FWAACA is to educate, advocate for and collaborate with other organizations in the prevention and early detection of cancer in the African-American as well as in all medically under-served populations in the Fort Wayne area.

"We have been in this community for over 10 years, providing education on better nutrition choices and improving lifestyles," said Pat Turner, the organization's board president. "All of our programs are nationally tested, best practices from notable organizations, and they are designed specifically for at-risk populations.

Among the recent programs offered through FWAACA:

A free Prevention Clinic, 5-7 p.m. the third Wednesday of every month at 2700 S. Lafayette St., in Lafayette Medical Center. The clinic is run collaboratively with the Allen County Health Disparity Coalition.

Screenings offered include: blood pressure, HIV/AIDS, colorectal cancer, weight, glucose, prostate cancer, cholesterol, mental health and dental.

Case management and immediate referrals to medical providers are available. Individuals with Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance should bring their cards, as some screenings are covered by insurance.

A new Medical Resource room is available at the organization's offices on the lower level of the Lafayette Medical Center. Visitors have access to up-to-date information on a variety of health issues, including via free Internet access.

Step-A-Fonics, founded by Joyce McGown – physical exercise through dance activity

Other programs include:

Down Home Healthy Living – aimed at decreasing colorectal cancer through diet, physical activity and early detection/screening.

For Men Only – men's health issues, including prostate cancer prevention and screening information.

Stay Beautiful-Stay Alive – separating myths from facts on breast and cervical cancer

Shop talk – cancer awareness presentation for beauty/barber shops

Colorful Transitions – support services for cancer patients, survivors and caregivers

Health fairs – at churches, schools and community centers

Research study participation through the Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer

In January, FWAACA was given status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

"Funding for our organization is critical. We have to step away from grant dependency and move into diversification of funding," Turner said. "We're in need of our community's support."

FWAACA

The Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance is seeking memberships and donations.

Annual membership is \$10-\$100, depending on level of benefits, with lifetime membership at \$250.

Company membership begins at \$50 for a small or nonprofit organization.

Tax-deductible donations can be mailed to 2700 S. Lafayette St., Fort Wayne, IN 46806.

For more, go to www.fwaaca, visit the office at 2700 S. Lafayette St. or call 399-6461.