

# Building a culture of health in our communities

by Becky Slatin

**BJC** | Being active in your own health and taking an active role in the health of BJC's communities is what the BJC HealthCare mission is all about.

So, when the Healthy Schools Healthy Communities (HSHC) initiative began in 2014, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development became a natural partner in the program. HSHC, funded by the Missouri Foundation for Health, is a five-year initiative that addresses childhood obesity by increasing access to and awareness of healthy eating and physical activity opportunities.

Along with community partners and the St. Louis Public Schools, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development team members have been working with residents of all ages from St. Louis community neighborhoods, including Greater Ville/The Ville, Carr Square, Shaw, Carondelet, Bevo Mill and Forest Park Southeast, on a common goal to create and encourage a healthier community for everyone.

"We recognize that schools play a major role in the community, and the community is an important component of each school," says Erica Oliver, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development community health partner, who with her colleague Brittanie McMullen serve as BJC facilitators for the project. "Working in both schools and communities is a way to have a long-lasting impact on health as well as opportunities available to families who live in St. Louis city."

"We're here to help encourage lifestyle changes for people of all ages through a variety of programs," McMullen says. "We know it doesn't happen quickly, and it takes time, but we are doing this by building relationships, trust and support within these communities."

Thanks to BJC School Outreach and Youth Development's longstanding relationship with the St. Louis Public Schools, dedicated members of the BJC team bring their expertise to the program and act as a convener for many smaller community organizations with the schools and communities as a whole.

"We are bringing health information, health prevention education and encouraging a culture of health through a variety of venues," says Diana Wilhold, director of BJC School Outreach and Youth Development. "Our team is a steward in health education and provides the connectivity necessary to bring all the players together."

The BJC School Outreach and Youth Development team has been tasked with identifying and bringing programs to these communities that appeal to all ages and take away the fear of health by identifying fun activities that encourage movement and the positive aspects of good health, Wilhold adds.

"We're asking people to step up and move in ways that are beneficial and affordable," Wilhold explains. "Basic movement benefits our health and can be done in many ways, whether it is walking, dancing or even jumping rope."

While there are a number of programs offered through the HSHC initiative focused on creating change and awareness, two programs offered since the beginning of the program have continued to grow and impact an increasing number of people, from young children to grandparents.

"The Let's Move STL! Move Your Body Flash Mob and Double Dutch Showcase are citywide events that bring together people of all ages and encourage them to have fun and be active together after several months of practice," Oliver says. "These events are one-day events; however, the planning and preparation often includes months of practice and an opportunity for friends and family to be active together."

## Double Dutch Showcase

Young children to adults join together each year to highlight their Double Dutch jump-roping skills in this annual showcase. This year's event is Dec. 9 at Wohl Recreation Center, 1515 N. Kingshighway Blvd., in St. Louis.

Participants practice together for months beforehand, either during the school day as part of physical education and recess or throughout the community at various recreation centers, showing how a fun activity can also provide great exercise.

Last December, teams of three to five participants joined one another at the Wohl Recreation Center for the annual showcase, bringing back the nostalgia of Double Dutch.

In fact, a one-time grade-school Double Dutch team came together as adults, now in their 40s and 50s, to Double Dutch



Teams participate in last year's Double Dutch Showcase. This year's event is Dec. 9 at Wohl Recreation Center in St. Louis. | Courtesy photos

again and include their own relatives and community members.

"This event brings people of all ages together, not competing against one another, but supporting one another," Wilhold says. "It's a celebration of what you choose to do in being active."

## Let's Move STL! Move Your Body Flash Mob

Thousands of St. Louis Public Schools students and teachers and St. Louis community members, including members of BJC School Outreach and Youth Development, moved together on May 5 in one large flash mob. As part of the third annual Let's Move STL! Move Your Body Flash Mob, participants danced to two songs at area schools and Ballpark Village in downtown St. Louis.

As part of the nationwide Let's Move

initiative to "raise a healthier generation of kids," the flash mob has become a signature event for the HSHC initiative supported by BJC School Outreach and Youth Development.

"The hope is that, in preparing for these events, habits are established that include people having fun while being active," Oliver says. "The St. Louis Public Schools district actively participates and dedicates time during the day for kids to practice dancing and jumping rope together. In addition, kids are encouraged to practice at home with friends and family."

"These events allow kids to see school and community coming together with a consistent message — being active is important to overall health," she adds.

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Thousands of St. Louis Public Schools students and teachers and members of the St. Louis community, including BJC School Outreach and Youth Development team members, participate in this year's Let's Move STL! Move Your Body Flash Mob, May 5, at Ballpark Village in downtown St. Louis.