Health & Wellness Feature

"From the very beginning, our mission has been to provide the expertise and guidance to help our community’s young people make the best and most informed decisions about their health and wellness," says Diana Wilhold.

When you discuss the BJC School Outreach and Youth Development Program with Diana Wilhold, you can’t help but be impressed by both her passion and her knowledge of more than two decades of the program’s challenges and successes. That makes sense, because she’s not only the program’s founding director, she’s also a gifted communicator with a background in education.

The School Outreach and Youth Development Program was formed in January 1991 by Diana, then working for what was then Barnes Hospital, to help St. Louis-area school districts address high-risk behaviors that may cause long-term harm to young people. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies those high-risk behaviors as being tobacco use, substance abuse, nutrition, physical activity, sexual health behaviors and safety.

“At first, my role was to bring programs to schools,” explains Wilhold. “Barnes really didn’t have pediatric outreach programs at that time. And from the very beginning, I reached out to other community agencies and resources to coordinate our efforts and increase their effectiveness.

“It was never the intent that Barnes would be going it alone,” she continues. “Nor could we, because our service area was so large. Our role is to provide health education and prevention programs in all of the schools in the whole St. Louis metropolitan area. We’re in Jefferson County, St. Charles County, St. Francois County in partnership with Parkland Health Center, St. Louis City, and Madison County in partnership with Alton Memorial and 4 other Illinois counties. We support the hospitals in all of those areas through our efforts in their schools.”

Pulling Together to Help Educate a Community

Through partnerships with public, private and parochial schools, Barnes — and later BJC HealthCare — invested time and resources to help address community concerns and continues to take an active role in sharing in the responsibility of being involved and engaged in many schools’ Coordinated School Health Plans.

“We strongly feel a shared commitment to provide health and prevention education and support for school-aged youth in our community. Not because it’s mandated by any governmental agency or institution, but because we’ve always believed in it. In fact, back in the ’90s, when many health care organizations were cutting their wellness efforts, BJC was increasing their funding of our education outreach program.”

– Diana Wilhold, Director, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development Program
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