Rural Awareness

May 14, 2016 By Kimberly Morgan Bossley

Recently I traveled to Virginia to participate in a local community Cherry Blossom Festival. One of the Social Media Advisor's of The Bonnie Morgan Foundation for HCV had mentioned that her local town has a very large yearly festival and that it would be a huge benefit to bring awareness about hepatitis C to her community.

Her family has been very upfront about her adopted son having hepatitis C since birth. Now celebrating a cure on a trial for children with hep C her family was ready to put a local face to hepatitis C.

Although it rained early that morning during set up, our team was prepared to share pamphlets, promo items and our personal stories of fighting hepatitis C. Coming from a larger city I was not sure what to expect that day. I was met with excitement to see our booth was well received by the locals.

I let this family be the upfront "faces" for their community and sat back taking in number of those who approached our booth. I was not sure if it was the prize wheel that caught their eye or what, regardless once they approached inquiring more, we loaded them up with information about what hepatitis C is and the importance of getting tested.

Many stayed over 5 minutes discussing and sharing personal questions regarding how it is transmitted and how it is cured. One lady in particular came up to our booth and wanted a more private one on one interaction about the disease. She proceeded to tell me that a friend was recently diagnosed and was very scared. Almost in tears this woman was crossing barriers that before more awareness was out there it was a taboo to talk about. Noticing a very young child with her and a more rough appearance with her I understood that more than likely it was not a friend she was talking about. Respecting privacy and wanting to reach out and give this woman a hug, I shared everything I could about hep C. The longer we talked, the more at ease she appeared to become. The emotion in her voice became more confident and she kept thanking me for my time. I gave her a hug that seemed to release fear and I assured her that her friend does have great hope in a cure now.

What I have witnessed doing this advocacy now for over 3 years is more and more people are feeling comfortable approaching our booth, asking questions even if hiding behind an excuse "it is for a friend." I am just happy to see them reaching out to us regardless who they are speaking on behalf of. The more we get out in our communities and the more we share our personal stories,

the more people will step forward and seek help.

I was shocked at the fact that a 7 hour day of advocating within a small community we ran out of all our promotional items and brochures about hepatitis C. This confirms the urgency that there is a demand and need in smaller rural communities as well to share the importance about getting tested for hep C. We do have more awareness functions within the larger cities but the more rural areas are the ones getting hit with the epedemic.

Let us all start sharing our stories big or small they ALL matter.... It matters to the person secluded and alone in a scary diagnosis.

My team walked away this day with a big sense of pride in knowing and hearing such personal stories and the fact these people were willing to open up to us. Seeing the important job we did that day and the hundreds of lives that have now been informed about hepatitis c.

We all come from various walks of life, different economic backgrounds and how we are infected but we are joined and bonded by a disease. A disease that now is curable.

Keep sharing the importance of Getting TESTED, Getting TREATED, Getting CURED !

“Not without a Fight!~HCV~(c)”

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