

# United Way Collaborative Improves Seniors' Health



***Liz Taylor, right, Berks Visiting Nurses Association, monitors Oakbrook seniors' health conditions.***

Receiving adequate healthcare is a major concern, especially for Latino seniors residing in Oakbrook, a southwest Reading community. Many of these older individuals cope with severe medical problems, isolation and language and cultural barriers.

During the past year, United Way of Berks County collaborated with several other organizations to establish the Oakbrook Wellness Center, The Berks County Office of Aging leads the work and partners with Berks Counseling Center, Berks Visiting Nurses Association, BCTV, Centro Hispano and the Reading Housing Authority to implement strategies focusing on these issues. Through a three-year grant from United Way, the collaborative established the center to provide preventative care and low-cost intervention programs to the medically underserved Latino senior residents. In addition, meals and activities are offered. "This senior center is unique because our work is focused on preventative health care, with the meals and social activities as supportive elements," explains Dan McGuire, program manager.

The Oakbrook Wellness Center is located in an actual unit in the Oakbrook Housing Development, making it convenient and easily accessible for residents above the age of 50.

The two major health issues that the center responds to are diabetes and hypertension. According to McGuire, more than half of the participants have both of these health conditions. By focusing on preventative care, the goal is to reduce greater health concerns and costs in the future.

Liz Taylor of Berks Visiting Nurses Association is the primary nurse at the wellness center. She regularly monitors their blood pressure, weight and various health conditions. "The neighborhood seniors are isolated in many ways, which impacts their health and well being." She shared that the center recently helped one gentleman that came to the Center complaining of "floaters" in his eyes. Taylor immediately referred him to a doctor, who discovered a detached retina. Following an appointment with an ophthalmologist, the individual had surgery, which helped partially save his eyesight. "We made a true difference in his situation," said Taylor.

The center's work is rooted in the principle that preventative care costs less than expensive major medical interventions, as well as benefits the individual's long-term health.

The participants of the neighborhood wellness center are grateful that they have a local place that provides them with medical service, as well as a few social activities.

Ada, a 35 year resident of Oakbrook and recent retiree explains, "Here, they check my blood pressure everyday and make sure that I am taking the right medicine for my diabetes." She shared that she's seen changes in the neighborhood since the center's opening in October 2008. "It's nice because [before] there was no place to go." She said it's important for her generation to have a place like the Oakbrook Wellness Center so they can receive medical help, receive balanced meals and socialize with others. "Here, they help me stay healthy."



***The Oakbrook Wellness Center provides nutritious meals each weekday for neighborhood seniors.***

