

Physical health, behavioral health, and built environment go hand in hand in ensuring well-being. That is at the core of Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center in Milwaukee and Waukesha.



Sixteenth Street reaches beyond the walls of their clinics to engage with people where they are at and offer programming that improves well-being at both the individual and community levels. "We walk alongside residents and meet people where they are at," said Delia Gast, Department of Environmental Health and Community Wellness Manager. "We recognize that how a person lives and the spaces where they spend their time directly impact their health and well-being."



Important work for decades

This understanding of social determinants of health has been part of Sixteenth Street's work since 1994 when they established a department to lead the work. Known today as the Department of Environmental Health and Community Wellness, the focus is all about positively influencing behaviors and transforming factors in the natural and built environment that impact health.

Families are the key

In their programming, the department aims to inspire lasting behavioral changes in communities and believes that is accomplished by working with families. Their approach is to equip families with the tools and confidence to take meaningful steps toward better health and wellness.

The Family Education Program is at the heart of the Department's work and focuses on families making healthier choices in their homes that are lasting and benefit the whole family. Families with children age four and older are invited to the nine-week hands-on program. Topics include healthy eating, cooking, and shopping and active living.

The programs also deliver key messages about behavioral health and how mental well-being can impact overall health. "Mental health is intertwined in all our work, and we stress the important role families hold in their children's mental health," Gast said. "The social connections our programs offer aid mental wellness. We are seeing a lot of loneliness, and our programs are helping to address that."

Most participants in their Family Education Program are referred by Sixteenth Street clinic doctors with concerns over high BMI of children. Sixteenth Street has 24 in-school clinics and five medical and behavioral health clinics throughout Milwaukee and Waukesha.

Results

With a 70-80% participant retention rate, Sixteenth Street's Family Education Program is on to something. Once they start, families want to attend the programs. Gast recalls one parent saying their child asked on a Monday, "is it nutrition day?" Unfortunately for the child, nutrition day wasn't until Wednesday.