

Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living: Local Food Hub

For more than a century, Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital has worked to improve the health of friends and neighbors in our community, providing compassionate care for all who walk through our doors and reaching outward to work for greater health equity in our community.

Every three years, Sentara Martha Jefferson partners with colleagues at UVA Health and the Blue Ridge Health District to create a comprehensive study of the most pressing health issues in our community (see story on page 24). The most recent Community Health Needs Assessment identified four priority areas:

- Reduce health disparities and improve access to care.
- Promote healthy eating and active living.
- Address mental health and substance abuse.
- Foster a healthy and connected community for all ages.

Through the support of the Martha Jefferson Hospital Foundation, our Community Benefits team closely collaborates with community healthcare partners to address these urgent needs. Over the next year, we will highlight a few of the partners and programs we support and work with to improve the health of our community.



The Local Food Hub creates opportunity for local farmers and more equitable access to nourishing food for the community.

Food with dignity—that is the vision of the Local Food Hub, a Charlottesville-based organization committed to getting healthy, delicious produce from local and regional farms into the hands of those who need it most.

For more than a decade, the Local Food Hub has brought America's flourishing local food movement home to Charlottesville, fostering more equitable access to nourishing





Some 750 people received bags of healthy food every week during the pandemic thanks to the Local Food Hub.

food, more opportunity for local farmers and more environmental sustainability in our food system.

Their services are urgently needed, given that many as one-third of Charlottesville’s residents live below the poverty line. The cost of fresh produce, coupled with the challenges of “food deserts” in certain neighborhoods and rural communities, puts the ability to secure healthy food at risk. Many of these individuals suffer from diet-related illnesses, such as diabetes, obesity and hypertension, and must make hard choices about how to care for themselves and their families.

“We know that mothers will sacrifice the quality of their own nutrition to help their children and families,” says Anna Fife, Local Food Hub interim executive director. “While this situation isn’t new, the pandemic exposed these gaps and showed us how close so many people are to facing food shortages.”

Compelled by this urgent need, the Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital Community Health Department partnered with the Local Food Hub in 2015 to launch their Fresh Farmacy: Fruit and Veggie Prescription Program. Based out of the Sentara Starr Hill Health Center, the Community Health team provides personalized wellness support free of charge for community members. By the time the pandemic hit in 2019, the team had plenty of first-hand evidence that the Fresh Farmacy program was filling a crucial gap for their clients and yielding measurable health benefits, from weight loss to reduced need for medication.

In response to the pandemic, the Community Health team joined a coalition of local organizations and funders partnering with the Local Food Hub team to help them ramp up quickly. “People were super generous in giving back to our community during the pandemic,” says Fife, noting an outpouring of

funding, new partnerships, and tremendous enthusiasm from small farmers—who wanted to help and were grateful for the market as their other sales outlets dried up. “We came up with a lot of novel, community-oriented solutions to get people quick access to food.”

At the height of the pandemic, the Local Food Hub was delivering bags of food to 750 participants weekly. Thanks to a partnership with the Yellow Top cab company, many recipients received food deliveries directly to their homes. Safe pickup sites were also established outside the Sentara Starr Hill office in the Jefferson School and at the nearby Crescent Hall senior housing community, where volunteers provided contactless delivery to 75 of their neighbors. Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital staff also received Local Food Hub deliveries weekly during the summer of 2020 on a “pay what you can” basis, ultimately amounting to 2,000 bags of fresh, healthy food for staff during the height of the pandemic.

Since then, innovations like year-round food deliveries and home drop-offs have endured, as has the spirit of creativity and collaboration. This summer, the Community Health team is partnering with the Local Food Hub on a series of pop-up markets to expand the program and bring fresh produce to children and families in rural Louisa and Greene counties.

“Not everyone feels comfortable going to a farmer’s market, or has the means to do so,” says Seirra Winn, Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital community health worker. “We are taking the food to them and eliminating barriers. Food insecurity is real, and it takes the collaboration of community partners to fill this most basic of needs and help ensure that families in our community stay well.”

Sentara Cares

Our mission to improve health every day drives everything we do to help keep individuals, families and the community we serve healthy. We do this by establishing partnerships that create a positive impact in our communities.

Through the support of the Martha Jefferson Hospital Foundation and the Sentara Healthier Community Fund, Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital provides grant funding to community health partners like the Local Food Hub located in the Blue Ridge Health District and surrounding counties. Find out more at sentaracares.com.