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Health as a Priority

In an article titled “Seven Lessons I’ve Learned about Improving Health in America” by Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, one lesson that caught my attention immediately was lesson 1: Health is Everything. This lesson opened my mind to imagine a world where people aren’t driven by profits or notoriety but by knowing and comprehending that health is the way we learn, live, work and play. Mindsets would more than likely shift from what is in the best interest of personal and company gain to what is in the best interest of the people. The big question is, how do we get to that place where health becomes an outstanding, regular part of our culture?

Lavizzo-Mourey found that one contributor of good health is early childhood-development programs that focus on at-risk families. Darlington County First Steps can attest to this via the many family-oriented program services offered to the community. A program that I will highlight is Parents as Teachers (PAT). One essential requirement of PAT is Screenings and Referrals. This requires the PAT parent educator to document and complete developmental screenings to include vision and hearing, use of milestone checklists, dental checks, and use of age-appropriate developmental screening tools. Parent educators are to refer families to pediatric care and other community services when needed. PAT equips parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote school readiness, long-term success of preschool-aged children, and healthy development. PAT is a program that detects issues early and helps families reach success. PAT and other early childhood-development programs are a small, efficient piece of the health puzzle but are enough people buying into this system?

Where people live contributes to health outcomes as well. In some communities, residents are unaware of beneficial resources or are not able to access them. Neighborhoods with high levels of poverty do not always have fresh foods, clean water, access to medical attention, or opportunities to excel. Don’t you think instead of pushing issues related to poverty to the bottom of the list, it would be at the top for community and political leaders? Poverty is one of the greatest threats to health and is very prominent to this day. People living in poor conditions have shorter lifespans and are sick more often than people who are financially secure. Some may be curious as to why this occurs- it is because poorer people cannot buy the means to protect their health. Deprivation is the root of poverty. It is imperative that political and economic structures that sustain poverty change in order for poverty and poor health to be handled.

There are many other things that are considered when thinking of health such as healthcare and childcare but it all boils down to meeting people where they are and enforcing equity among all people. Chances of having good health should not depend on race, where you live, age, or income. Good health should be made possible no matter who you are. When we, at Darlington County First Steps, plan and deliver services in Darlington County, we think of health outcomes first. What about you?