

CHOOSING COMMUNITY

BRINGING HEALTH & WELLNESS INITIATIVES TO ONE RURAL ALABAMA COMMUNITY

DR. SARA KAYLOR, DR. MICHAEL CALLIHAN AND DR. HALEY TOWNSEND

Born from a passion to improve the health of the people of Alabama, Drs. Michael Callihan, Sara Kaylor and Haley Townsend have forged a collaborative relationship with the rural community of Uniontown, Ala. Located 57 miles southwest of Tuscaloosa, Uniontown lies in the western section of Perry County known as the Canebrake, a portion of the Black Belt Prairie traditionally recognized as one of the richest farming areas in Alabama (Uniontown, 2006). The city has a total area of 1.3 square miles, with a population of 1,880 people, 720 households, and 530 families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Of the population, 19.9% are aged 5 to 17 years, 90.6% are Black or African American, and 59.5% live at or below 149% of the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The town has one

elementary school and one high school.

CCN collaborative partnerships exist with C.H.O.I.C.E. Inc. and R.C. Hatch School. Founded in 2009 by Emefa Butler, the C.H.O.I.C.E. Resource Center (Choosing to Help Others In our Community Excel) is a nonprofit organization that serves as Uniontown's community hub for charitable and education resources. The mission of C.H.O.I.C.E. is to create collaborative partnerships to ensure youth have access to resources that provide quality programs, activities, and services.

To meet this objective, resources offered through C.H.O.I.C.E. center on six key focus areas: workforce development, mentoring, education, cultural arts, health and wellness, and athletics and recreation.



Since 2018, Drs. Callihan, Kaylor, and Townsend have been in partnership with C.H.O.I.C.E. to develop several initiatives, including a community garden, an outdoor fitness park, multiple health and wellness fairs, menstrual education classes and lockers, COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy townhalls, and lastly, the annual Uniontown Color Run.

In their roles as faculty members, the team is equally passionate about promoting opportunities for undergraduate research, mentorship, and community-engaged learning among our nursing students, and they seek to include groups of undergraduate students in their Uniontown partnership and scholarly activities. At the heart of each planned initiative is the spirit of community-based collaboration (CBC). CBC focuses on including community members in the planning and implementation of events as well as focusing on the strengths of the community as a whole.

In addition to CBC, Drs. Callihan, Kaylor and Townsend value an emphasis on holistic health promotion and education which is highlighted in events such as the implementation of The Uniontown Color Run and training program, the installation of new fitness equipment at R.C. Hatch High School and the hosting of health education classes and screening fairs. In order to create an organized effort to meet the needs of Uniontown, these three faculty members created Project Wellness in Motion in the summer of 2021 with nursing student volunteers.

A holistic health-screening fair was held in July 2021 for Uniontown community members. Ten nursing students volunteered their time and screened approximately 55 participants for abnormal cholesterol and glucose values and vital signs. In addition, health screenings for stigmatized conditions such as HIV and sexually transmitted infections, as well as depression and anxiety were available for participants. Eight local community agencies were present for onsite health referral for any abnormalities found that day. Nursing students also offered health coaching and education informed by the results of the participants' screenings.

In March 2022, Dean Suzanne Prevost and Dr. Paige Johnson were instrumental in securing the mobile health clinic from The University of Alabama for nursing students and faculty to utilize for a second holistic health fair in Uniontown.

On May 21, 2022 the second annual Uniontown Color Run was held, which yielded over 110 participants among the three distances (5K, 10K, and 1-mile fun run), and another 100 participants who served as volunteers, spectators, and/or vendors for the concurrent health and wellness resource fair.

In the eight weeks leading up to the event, Dr. Kaylor and nursing student volunteers Daryl Deeter and Mason Aldridge also lead a 5K, 10K, and 5K-walking training program for race participants. This training program met weekly in Tuscaloosa on Monday afternoons, and in Uniontown on Thursday afternoons. At the beginning of the training program participants received a color-printed, spiral bound training notebook and journal. Each training week offered a fitness and running-related designated theme and participants received a weekly motivational email that summarized themed educational content and outlined the weekly training plan activities.

The training program yielded a total of 36 participants, ranging in age from 7 to 77 years. The Tuscaloosa training group averaged a total of six participants per week, whereas the Uniontown training group averaged 12 participants per week. The remaining 18 participants trained independently. Of these participants, six completed the 10K training program, 22 completed the 5K training program, and eight completed the 5K walking program.

While serving as a sustainable annual fundraising event for the C.H.O.I.C.E. Center, another overarching and long-term goal for the Uniontown Color Run project is to promote health and physical fitness among youth and adults of rural populations, addressing critical health trends.

From an economic perspective, hosting a running event has been a long time, tried-and-true method many nonprofit organizations use to fundraise and/or promote awareness of their cause. Unlike other giving experiences, an activity-driven event, such as a running event, attracts participation and support because people are drawn to the challenge of setting a goal and working hard to prepare for it, often by undergoing a physical and mental transformation to do so.

Hosting the Uniontown Color Run offers an added benefit of community exposure by drawing in people from out of town and providing an opportunity to showcase and rally support for the various charitable and resource-based projects offered by C.H.O.I.C.E. Potential donors can see first-hand where their resources are being utilized, and event participants are primed to go the distance for a cause they can see has a direct impact on the rural community.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Dr. Sara Kaylor, C.H.O.I.C.E. Representatives Travis Bell and Shirley Turner, CCN Students Elizabeth Barrett, Daryl Deeter, Kate McCarren, Sophia Mohabbat and Delaney Johnson, Dr. Haley Townsend, Dr. Jill Hobbs, and Dr. Mike Callihan.