



June 2021



DHC Announces Our New Executive Director

Doctors for Healthy Communities is proud to announce that Debbie Harper, a DHC Board Member and frequent volunteer, has agreed to serve as our Executive Director. Debbie is a retired nurse with years of experience in the fields of geriatrics and rehabilitation. To share her vision for DHC going forward, Debbie sat down for an interview with Communications Director Aaron Burch. We are excited to share her interview below.

AB: You were already involved with Doctors for Healthy Communities when I joined the organization in 2018. Could you tell me when you first began to collaborate with DHC?

DH: I met Dr. Babar probably 15 or 16 years ago actually. At the time, I was a rehab nurse manager at Parkway Nursing Center. I got a call one day asking if we had room for eight new patients. A unit at St. Mary and Elizabeth had flooded, and they had to transfer the affected patients. Dr. Babar followed them to my facility and oversaw their care after the fact.

We struck up a friendship. That's not hard to do with Dr. Babar. He pulls people into his community. Next thing you know, when he asks you to do something, you jump. I care so much about him as a human that I fell right in, and I've been working with him ever since. If you work with Dr. Babar for very long, you just end up believing in what he believes in, because he's a fine humanitarian and a gentle soul. You don't always find that in health care, so it was a refreshing change.

My 35 years in nursing have primarily been spent in geriatrics. When Dr. Babar began telling me about DHC, the focus was more on children. He asked me if I'd be interested in helping out, and of course I accepted. It has been enlightening and rewarding to help kids in the community.

I recently met with Dr. Babar and Dr. Saleem, and we had a free-flowing conversation about what we want DHC to do going forward. In all aspects, the idea is to help the community. They know my expertise and wheelhouse. My experience is with older adults, so one goal I have is to branch out and assist middle aged residents or seniors in the community. We hope to have a positive impact on people of all ages.

Are there any community partnerships that you're interested in building through DHC?

I'm working on two projects right now. The first is a health fair at Louisville's Americana World Community Center. This is a large community with people of all nationalities. Although we may not speak the same language, a touch and a smile are universal.

The campus has a health fair during the first week of October. We're going to partner to provide a good experience, a good education and some fun events for the kids who live nearby.

For the second project, I was speaking with a few teachers at JCPS about what DHC could do for students. We're providing physicals, and we start very soon. Two JCPS teachers said to me, "Debbie, I wish you could figure out a way to get beds because some of my students are sleeping on the floor of their home. Then they're tired all day and they aren't learning."

I was reading about an organization based in Utah, Sleep in Heavenly Peace. They help get beds for kids, and that includes the mattresses, the bedding, the whole nine yards. Different organizations are building these beds and delivering them to children through Sleep in Heavenly Peace. I've already spoken to a representative from the Louisville chapter. We're moving forward with the process, and more information will be coming soon.

We're also putting together a school supply drive, not just for students but for teachers as well. My daughters-in-law are teachers. They buy cart loads of supplies for kids. We're starting to put the word out on that as well. School starts in mid-August, so we aren't far away.

What else should our audience know?

If you're interested in volunteering, you should know that you can do anything. You can pick up supplies or assist at an event. You can give one hour or three hours or a day a month. We know how life gets, but we want to meet people where they are. DHC can be very flexible with people's time. If you're able to help in any capacity, we're happy to have you.

We want people to know that they count. It doesn't matter where you're born, your socio-economic status, your education, gender, or color. Every person matters, and DHC is just trying to help people who need our help.
