



Volunteer of the Month – AH feeding the hungry

Since the end of July, Asylum Hill Congregational Church has been offering a free dinner to any and all neighbors in need, and they added in Thanksgiving with a traditional turkey dinner despite the rain.

Grace Lutheran Church has continued their nine-year tradition of Friday night dinners, now distributed to go, to 100 plus people each week.

Loaves & Fishes, Foodshare, Wheeler Clinic and Saint Joseph Cathedral among others continue their programs of providing food to those in need.

On the day before Thanksgiving there was a table with bags of onions and a box with Butternut squash and a hand-written sign that just said “free” in front of the Boys & Girls Club.

The newest entry into the effort to provide nutrition to Asylum Hill residents in need, is a partnership between UConn Health and the Urban League of Greater Hartford. Dr. Helen Wu is an associate professor at UConn Health, and a social epidemiologist; that is to say she is trying to understand the social causes of poor nutrition, and how to reduce them. To do this she is working with ULGH and their program called JUMP, which stands for “Just Us Moving Program”. She has managed to acquire 12 aeroponic tower gardens, chosen because they can produce quality fresh greens in 4-6 weeks year round. They’re in a second story, formerly unused storage room at ULGH, which is becoming not only a source for fresh leafy greens for the neighborhood, but a hub to explore and improve attitudes about nutritious fresh foods. Put simply, first we need quality, healthy fresh foods available; and then those foods need to be valued by the people who need them most. To do that, Dr. Wu wants to understand what is preventing it, and how to change that.

The partnership with the Urban League on Woodland Street was nearly ideal. They are very connected to the Asylum Hill neighborhood, which is largely considered to be a food desert.

Food stores there are selling mostly processed foods that value shelf life over nutrition. They’re only in the business of selling what sells easiest, not what’s most nutritious. In order to change this dynamic there needs to be a significant population

that values healthy foods, knows how to prepare them and would support local stores that supply them.

Asylum Hill has tried this in the past, for example when the Green Apple first opened. They stocked a great deal of produce, but weren't able to maintain either the quality or the quantity long enough to catch on. Eventually they reverted to what sells, lotto tickets instead of fresh fruits and vegetables. Hopefully this time, these partnerships can be sustained long enough to make it economically viable.

For information on how to participate contact Kyrinda Richardson at the Urban League, krinda@ulgh.org or Michelle Slavinsky at UConn Health at slavinsky@uchc.edu or (860) 919-8962

For more photos go to: <https://bit.ly/ulghuconn>