

# HeartSmarts

## **Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center Cardiovascular Health Education Program Summary 2011-2017 *Education . Empowerment . Action***



2012 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2013 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2014 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2015 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2015 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2016 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



# EDUCATION

We **CARE** (Cardiac Awareness Research & Education)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. The HeartSmarts program aims to eliminate health disparities through education, action, and empowerment.

Disparities can be found in both health status and health care with members of disadvantaged populations having worse health outcomes and often receiving substandard treatment. An example of a chronic disease that demonstrates a health disparity is heart disease. Although heart disease is the leading cause of death and disability in the United States, it disproportionately impacts members of racial and ethnic groups who have higher rates of cardiovascular disease and its risk factors. Heart disease knows no boundaries and cuts across all socio-economic groups.

The HeartSmarts Cardiovascular Health Education Program created by Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey, MPH, MBA aims to reduce the incidence and increase awareness of cardiovascular disease in underserved communities. The goal is to educate individuals, families, and communities about heart disease and its prevention. Through HeartSmarts the hope is to establish a coalition that will partner with educators, clinicians, and researchers in developing and implementing cardiovascular health outreach programs.

## **HeartSmarts Participant Feedback**

*(Below is feedback based on program evaluations from participants taught by HeartSmarts ambassadors)*

“Excellent program. It taught me a lot of things I didn’t know that can cause a heart attack and heart disease”

“We must not abuse our body temple. This class made me more cognizant of how to take care of my health.”

“The HeartSmarts program is a very good class. If I did not take this class I would not know half of the things about the heart and heart disease right now.”

“The HeartSmarts classes was worth the sacrifices I have made to attend each one. The value obtained is priceless because of the benefits I derived from the simple changes I have made. I would not change the format of the presentation in the text used because of its simplicity in getting the content across in understanding such complex health disciplines.”

“The class lectures are very informative for me, happy for this program, wish it could continue because learning is wisdom, and I would like other people who I know to get on this program and be healthier. The way they lectured was excellent”

“The lecture was presented excellently, the lecturer was on time, always prepared, and answered questions with clarity.”

“My knowledge changed because at the end of the ten weeks I know if your heart is smart your heart will also be happy”

“I am now living a healthier lifestyle and as a result have lost weight and am thrilled about it. I exercise and am more health conscious”

# **HeartSmarts Program Highlights**

The HeartSmarts program began in 2011 with the hopes of educating communities about cardiovascular health in a unique way. In 2012, nineteen HeartSmarts Ambassadors of Health completed the HeartSmarts training and successfully implemented the program in their churches and communities. A total of 199 people representing 14 churches throughout the five boroughs completed the HeartSmarts program in 2012. At the beginning of the program, these individuals had a variety of health conditions including hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. For the 199 participants, there was significant improvement in knowledge about heart disease and its prevention.

More than half of the participants improved their blood pressure, lost weight, decreased waist circumference, and decreased BMI. In addition to this, all participants provided positive program feedback and made statements such as, "I now feel empowered about my health." In 2013, eighteen HeartSmarts ambassadors of health representing 14 churches completed the training with an additional 200 participants completing the HeartSmarts program. To date 130 ambassadors have been trained, and over 1000 participants have attended a HeartSmarts class or seminar, with consistent program results.

HeartSmarts has been recognized as a model for community based health promotion. A major accomplishment for HeartSmarts in 2016 was having the first research paper from the program titled, *"It's Like Backing up Science with Scripture": Perceptions of HeartSmarts, a Faith-based Cardiovascular Health Education Program*, published in the Journal of Religion and Health. HeartSmarts has also been presented at national conferences including, The American Public Health Association annual meeting, The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Health Disparities Conference, The National Wellness Conference, and the Association of Black Psychologists annual meeting. In addition to this, partnerships have been formed with community organizations including The NAACP, The Bowery Mission, The Northeastern Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, and The New American Chamber of Commerce.

As we celebrate this five-year milestone, the hope is to continue to expand the program and reach new communities. The work of the HeartSmarts ambassadors is much needed and we are grateful for your dedication.

Naa-Solo Tettey, EdD, MPH  
Creator and Director of the HeartSmarts Program

## **HeartSmarts in the News**

**HeartSmarts has been recognized as a model for community based health promotion by The New York Daily News, The New York Times, The New York Post, The Harlem Times, and DNA Info. In addition to this, the HeartSmarts program has been featured on many local community radio stations and was also filmed by ABC News-New York.**

## For Underserved Communities, Faith-Based Health Lesson

By [Paul DeBenedetto](#) on May 16, 2012



Eighteen people graduated from the "HeartSmarts" program on May 15, 2012.

New York-Presbyterian

MANHATTAN — Norma Wesley was sitting at the computer in her East Elmhurst home when half her body went numb. Years ago, Wesley's mother died of a stroke, so she knew the signs.

She picked up the phone and dialed 911. When Wesley was done, she called the women she was supposed to pick up, and informed them she couldn't take them to a church meeting.

"I had a stroke, and I'm on the way to the hospital," she said calmly.

Almost seven years later, Wesley, now 71, has turned her life around: she's 45 pounds lighter, eats right, exercises, and now, she's able to teach others in her church about heart disease.

Wesley and 17 other representatives from parishes in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island graduated Tuesday from a new program at Perelman Heart Institute at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Program.

The program, entitled “HeartSmarts: A Faith-Based Cardiovascular Health Education Program,” works with the parishes to teach about heart disease prevention while using biblical scripture as a teaching tool.

After her stroke, Norma Wesley was confined to a wheelchair. With the help of physical therapy, she was able to move on to a cane. She now walks with a limp. And after Tuesday’s graduation, located at the New York Academy of Medicine, she’s looking forward to imparting the lessons she’s learned throughout her long life.

“That limp to me is my humbleness,” Wesley said. “It reminds me of how far I’ve come from that wheelchair to today.”

The program was the brainchild of Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey, who, after being hired by New York-Presbyterian in July of 2011, was charged with implementing a community health outreach program. She decided that working with churches was a good way to help underserved communities.

“I hadn’t seen any programs that incorporated actual scriptural text, used the Bible as a teaching tool,” Tettey said.

So she took actual lines from the Bible and used them to teach secular health lessons.

“If your body is ‘an instrument of righteousness,’ than you should take care of it,” she said, referencing Romans 6:19. “For people that are faith-based, that would mean more than a doctor saying ‘eat well and exercise.’”

The recent graduates agree. The Rev. Dr. Rose Ellington Murray, 69, of Harlem’s Trinity AME church, thought she was going to learn basic health lessons. But by adding in biblical lessons, she said, she’s now also able to relate those lessons more easily to her congregation.

“When you cite something or make something relevant through scripture, it becomes more beneficial, and they become more apt to learn,” she said.

Eva Barrett, another graduate, certainly found it easier to learn. The 64-year-old Bedford-Stuyvesant resident is looking forward to bringing the lessons she learned back to her congregation, Crossover Baptist Church.

“It was a beautiful experience,” Barrett said. “Your body is a temple, your body is clean and you should do whatever you can to keep it that way.”

# The New York Times

## In Church, Using the Bible as a Guide for Healthy Living

By [ERIC P. NEWCOMER](#)

August 17, 2012



At Mt. Olivet Gospel Church in Corona, Queens, church members participated in a class focusing on healthy habits.

Inside Mt. Olivet Gospel Church in Corona, Queens, about a dozen older African-American women, some of them overweight, were perched in the pews reading intently. But they were not focused on the Bible. Instead, it was information on maintaining a healthy heart.

Then they prayed, calling on God to grant their group the power to apply what they learned. “Father, help us to use it in a good way and to share it with someone else,” said Margaret McHenry, a member of the congregation who helped lead the class.

Similar gatherings are being held this summer in churches throughout New York City, part of a new strategy aimed at blacks and Latinos who have high rates of heart ailments caused by being overweight.

Organized by the [Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute](#) at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, the program brings together science and religion. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The program seeks to use faith and lessons from the Bible to persuade minority congregants to embrace healthier lifestyles.

Brenda Marshall-Stewart, a congregant who led the class at Mt. Olivet Gospel Church, said that the Bible might be a more effective motivator for members who take their faith seriously. And because congregants tend to trust their pastors or fellow congregants, they

might be more willing to heed their advice than the words of doctors they see only periodically.

“We have more of a responsibility to our community than just taking care of people who are sick,” said Dr. Holly Andersen, the director of education and outreach at the Heart Institute. “We have a huge responsibility of educating our community of how not to end up in the hospital.”

During the 10-week course, participants learn about desirable cholesterol levels and heart rates and set specific goals that they review at every meeting.

For Viola Thom, 68, who attends meetings at [Flatbush Seventh-day Adventist Church](#) in Brooklyn, the program has made her a closer reader of labels at the grocery store. She has eliminated a lot of cheeses from her diet and is eating more fruits and vegetables.

“I don’t like it, but I’m doing it because it’s good for my heart,” Ms. Thom said. The Bible has played a key role, she said. “It reinforces it very much because if it’s in the book we want to do it.”

Alema Ashley-Love, 56, works at a nursing home and attends the classes at Mt. Olivet in Corona. She takes pills for diabetes and has high blood pressure, she said. One session included a review of a chart depicting healthy weight ranges.

“I didn’t think I was fat until I looked at that chart,” she said.

That helped motivate her. “I want to live longer,” she said. And, she added, Jesus didn’t die so that she could live an unhealthy life.

The classes have been held in about 18 churches throughout the city. They are led by church members and pastors who first go through an extensive training regimen run by Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey. The training includes the same curriculum covered in the classes, including Bible verses to be used – though ministers are free to add their own. By the end of the training, the instructors are armed with an arsenal of data, quotes and religious wisdom.

While the curriculum is currently designed around Christian scriptures, Dr. Tettey said she hoped that the program could expand beyond Christian denominations when new classes start in the fall. The Heart Institute plans to assess whether the program yields tangible health benefits among participants.

At the Flatbush Seventh-day Adventist Church, classes are run by the Rev. Richard Calhoun. One participant, Beverly Henry, 59, said the program had coaxed her into walking more.

She has also replaced white bread with whole wheat bread and is reducing the amount of salt in her diet. It has been an adjustment, she acknowledged. “I know that it’s helping a

lot,” she said. “I’m getting into it.” The Bible has been a source of inspiration, Ms. Henry added. “It goes hand and hand. What the Bible is saying is true.”

Mr. Calhoun said many of his congregants could not wait until the fall classes start.

“I think that it’s an eye-opener,” he said, “that this is part of my Christian experience.”

# DAILY NEWS

## **Uptown Talk: New York Presbyterian HeartSmarts classes preach benefits of heart-healthy lifestyle**

### **Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey created a curriculum that uses Scriptures to bring heart-healthy messages to local church congregations**

Thursday, April 25, 2013

By [Clem Richardson](#)



**Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey teaches a class of HeartSmarts, the faith-based cardiovascular health education program created by Tettey and Dr. Holly Andersen at the hospital's Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute**

Dr. Holly Andersen got the bucks. Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey wrote the manual.

Which is why 22 black and Hispanic men and women gathered at New York Presbyterian Hospital's Weill Medical Center stood and chanted Philippians 4:13 in unison — “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”

The verse was the theme of that night's HeartSmarts class, the faith-based cardiovascular health education program which Andersen and Tettey created at the hospital's Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute just over two years ago.

It was the last night of the ten-week program, which uses holy scripture to educate trainers how to teach church members the benefits of living a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Andersen, Perelman's director of education and outreach, said she came up with the idea three years ago after testifying before the City Council about heart disease among the city's female population.

“Most of the Councilmen there were from underserved neighborhoods,” Andersen said. “One man said his church had a fish fry every Friday night, and he always had fried chicken after church on Sunday.

“I was thinking, if we could teach them how to make fish and fry chicken in a healthy way, that's how you change generations.” Andersen said.

Andersen said she had read small studies documenting the effectiveness of faith-based teaching to reach underserved — lessons cloaked in scripture — in reaching underserved populations she would normally only see “when they end up here with heart attacks.”

“It really is about prevention, and teaching them to live healthier,” Andersen said. “And not just teaching, but motivating. If you have congregations already devoted to God, and you look at your heart, your health, your life as a gift that should be treated well and taken care of because that’s what God wants you to do, it’s a much more motivating message.”

Andersen secured a Fridolin Charitable Trust grant to fund the program, then turned to Tetey to create the manual they would use to train trainers, who would return to their religious institutions to teach congregation members.

Tetey, Perelman’s Cardiovascular Health Education and Community Outreach Coordinator, found out early in her research that “most of these programs were faith-placed and not faith-based, meaning they were happening in the churches but not incorporating the belief systems, scriptures or anything like that.

“I thought it would be interesting to actually incorporate the scriptures and utilize church culture as a way of educating church members,” she said. “The church sets the standard for certain practices in people’s lives. We want them to create a culture of health.”

The medical base of the instruction manual is taken from “Every Heartbeat is Life” curriculum created by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, a book already in the public domain.

It took her three months to find the Biblical verses to combine with the manual herself.

“I would research passages that had to do with health, then choose the ones that resonated the most with me,” Tetey said. “Going through the Bible, I picked the ones I thought were the best.”

The result is straightforward and inspiring. Lesson 1, for example, about knowing your risk for heart disease, quotes 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 — “Do you not know that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, who you have received from God?...Therefore, honor God with your body.”

The curriculum has proven popular at Perelman and at churches throughout the five boroughs. Linda Thompson, leader of Health Ministries at Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church, said congregation members were already signing up for the program. “They can’t wait for me to finish here,” Thompson said. Class member Monica Walsh, from Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York in St. Albans, Queens, said she had lost more than 15 pounds during the course by following the manual.

The HeartSmart program is part of a study that will document the results.



## The Harlem Times

### **Faith-Based Cardiovascular Education Program Helps Congregations Become Heart Smart**

By: Yasmein James  
February 18, 2015

Before Reverend Dr. Rose Ellington Murray became a HeartSmarts Ambassador, she wasn't practicing what she was preaching when it came to her health.

As a health care professional, she knew the importance of taking care of her body, but it wasn't until she began teaching the HeartSmarts curriculum to her congregation in Harlem that she began actually doing it.

"Sometimes when you are in the health profession, you think you know a lot," said Murray. "We tell people to do things we are not doing. I now do what I tell people to do." That means drinking more water, which she originally found unbearable until she began putting lemon slices in it. That also means not just buying anything because she is in a rush and checking food labels for things such as sodium. If it's too high, she looks for a low-sodium alternative.

Those are lessons she learned from HeartSmarts, a twelve-week faith-based cardiovascular health education program, which aims to educate high-risk communities about heart disease and its prevention. In addition to heart disease, the class focuses on high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stress, diabetes, nutrition and the importance of including physical activity into your daily routine.

It is sponsored by the Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at the New York Presbyterian Hospital\Weill Cornell Medical Center. It was created by Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey in conjunction with Dr. Holly Andersen and Dr. Carla Boutin-Foster.

"I noticed initially that there were programs that were in the churches, but usually they were created by other organizations," said Tettey. "While it had a health purpose, it did not incorporate the faith system of the church itself." To help participants immediately see how health is directly linked to the word, the first chapter of the curriculum is entitled "Your Body Is a Temple – Know Your Risk for Heart Disease."

For Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Murray is the pastor, the inclusion of scriptures was key in helping the congregation become healthier.

This was especially true for the older congregants who have become more flexible about taking control of their health because they are able to see it in the scripture. “With scripture for the people, they can identify that the spiritual is not detached from the physical and that the physical is not detached from the emotional,” said Murray.

Because of it, her congregation has made an active decision to dilute juices, serve more vegetables than meat at gatherings as well as serve more wholesome snacks like bran muffins for programs. They are also practicing portion control, which Murray drives home by retelling the story of the two fish and five loaves. The story discusses when Christ was on the mountain and was able to feed 5,000 people with what appeared to be not enough food.

For Marie Lucette Momplaisir, a 20-year member of Our Lady Refuge Church in Brooklyn, the program couldn’t have come at a better time.

When she began participating in the program, she was having difficulty getting up the stairs. She was also concerned about her heart and her sugar. Though she is also in the health profession, she believes that she has learned so much with each class that she taught. She views the program as a way to continue education and she plans on doing it for a long time.

“Even me, when I finished with the twelve sessions it’s not enough,” said Momplaisir. “You have to continue doing it. You eat for today, but you have to eat for tomorrow.” Her congregation will graduate from the program on February 22.

For 44-year-old Barry Braxton, the reason to participate was a personal one. He lost his mother and one of his aunts to strokes. While he had participated in other health-related programs, Braxton was looking forward to participating in this program because of the inclusion of scripture. He is a deacon at the DRC Fellowship Inc. in Queens and knew his knowledge of the word and health would ensure his success in the program.

During the course of the program, Braxton lost two inches from his waist and dropped 10 pounds by limiting things that were not good for his healthy lifestyle choice such as pork, fried food, eggs, milk and cheese.

He said maintaining a healthy lifestyle has always been a main concern at his church, but now they have the information to help them achieve their goals.

“When it comes down to information as far as science is concerned, we didn’t have the information,” he said. “Now that we have the numbers and what it means, we can take it to the next level of being a real healthy church.”

Jennifer Thompson, 44, has always been passionate about health and teaching others. That is one of the main reasons she became a HeartSmarts ambassador. The other reason is to set an example for her two young girls. Thompson, a nurse by profession, loves that the program teaches the importance of eating well. It's one of the things she hopes her girls will retain while they grow older.

Though it's harder to get them on-board especially seeing their classmates eating donuts, chips and bagels, she explains that eating well will help them become who they want to be when they get older. "A healthy breakfast will really boost your mind power and your capabilities," she said. "All of these things will play an important role if you don't want to be sick or go to the hospital." For her, participating in the program is about putting you and your health first.

"It's not being selfish, it's about being good to yourself" said Thompson. "It's loving who you are and saying to yourself I am going to do what it takes to make sure that I am well whether it's physically, spiritually or emotionally." She went on to say that we have to retrain our brains to know that putting ourselves first is about recognizing self-worth and importance.

Thompson is the health coordinator for the Flatbush Seventh Day Adventist Church in Brooklyn. She became an ambassador in 2012.



## Through community outreach, students and faculty tackle health disparities among poor and minority New Yorkers

By Heather Salerno

The [HeartSmarts](#) program at the Perelman Institute highlights the important role that religion can play in disease-prevention efforts in underserved communities. Created by Naa-Solo Tettey, EdD, the Institute's cardiovascular health education and community outreach coordinator, HeartSmarts uses the Bible to teach minority churchgoers about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle. "I saw a lot of programs that were faith-based, meaning that they were in the churches but they weren't actually utilizing the church culture or the Bible," says Tettey. "They were just programs people had created and given to the churches. So I thought it would be interesting to combine the science with actual scripture."

For example, during a lesson about understanding one's risk of heart disease, Tettey quotes from I Corinthians: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. . . . Therefore honor God with your bodies." She incorporates other key passages when talking about the importance of physical activity, portion control, and optimal heart rates and cholesterol levels.

Since 2012, Tettey has trained about eighty "ambassadors" from the Flatbush Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, the Presbyterian Church of St. Albans in Queens, and dozens of other ministries throughout New York City and Long Island. Those representatives then educate fellow congregants who sign up for a ten-week HeartSmarts course. In the first year alone, more than half the participants reduced their blood pressure and waist circumference. The message, however, has spread beyond those who attend class. "Now, after church services, they're not serving fried chicken anymore. They're serving baked chicken and vegetables," says Tettey. "So even if every person in the church doesn't take the class, they're impacted in some way by having that ambassador there."



*Through a variety of programs, Weill Cornell is reaching out to socioeconomically disadvantaged New Yorkers.*

***Faith-Based Program Is an Effective Tool for Cardiovascular Disease Education, Study Finds***

**HeartSmarts, an education program developed at the Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, celebrates its fifth anniversary**

Newswise — **NEW YORK (September 14, 2016)** -- HeartSmarts, a faith-based community education and outreach program, is an effective method for teaching underserved communities about heart health in New York City, according to a study published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*. Based at the Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, the program marks its fifth year of collaborating with local churches to improve understanding of cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Led by Dr. Holly Andersen, director of education and outreach at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center and clinical associate professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine, and Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey, coordinator of cardiovascular health education and community outreach at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center, HeartSmarts aims to reduce cardiovascular disease in the New York metropolitan area's underserved communities by developing a coalition of faith-based and community partners. The program uses a unique, faith-based curriculum that references biblical scripture in covering topics such as major risk factors for heart disease. Representatives are recruited from churches and other organizations to teach them about heart health. The graduates of the program become health ambassadors who take the lessons they have learned back to their congregations and pass on their knowledge to their respective communities in a formal instructional environment. According to the study, 199 participants from 14 church sites completed the ambassador-led sessions, with 137 providing detailed feedback via an open-ended survey developed by NewYork-Presbyterian and Weill Cornell Medicine researchers. One of the researchers' primary goals was to assess the use of scripture to educate participants about cardiovascular health. Responses to the survey suggest this approach was well received. One participant wrote: "[The approach is] ideal, and points the way to taking care of our bodies — it is like using scripture to backup science." "While our message has a strong spiritual component, it is important to note that most participants said that what they learned most was how to live a heart healthy lifestyle," said Dr. Tettey, the lead author of the study. "The responses we have received suggest that this innovative approach is seen favorably by the people we are trying to reach." Although this program focused on participants who attend religious services, there is also potential to reach their social networks which includes individuals who do not attend formal church services. In addition, the course is modified each year based on feedback from participants to ensure that it remains relevant to its constituents. "In the five years since we began this program, we have received so much positive feedback and seen so many success stories," Dr. Anderson said. "We hope to continue to develop these innovative approaches that reach patients directly in their communities by collaborating with people and institutions they trust most."

## **Ambassador Spotlight**

### **A Survivor's Story: Beverly Bruin**



On the sunny afternoon of Monday, September 28, 2015, at approximately high noon, while alone, I casually strolled to my car after a routine follow up visit with my neurologist regarding my knee and lower back. As I stuck the car key into the door, I was instantly struck in my chest with a stabbing pain like never before, coupled with my back and chest seeming to be racing to meet each other while squeezing my insides together. I clearly recall saying out loud, "Oh my God! What was that? I better not be having a heart attack". Though I said this, I really didn't believe that I was truly having an attack.

I proceeded to get into my car, paused for a moment and figured if I were having a heart attack I would probably start to feel some sort of numbness, tingling or pain going down my shoulders and arms. When that didn't happen, I immediately dismissed the reality that a heart attack was inevitably taking place. The pain however DID NOT subside. As a matter of fact, it intensified as if it was having a race of its own. I remember thinking that something however must be wrong because the pain came out of nowhere, was excruciating, and not letting up. Because I had three quick personal errands to run, I thought it not robbery to quickly proceed to get them done so I could go home and lay down.

I remember holding my chest while I drove an additional 25 minutes to my neighborhood. I attempted to get out the car after reaching my first stop, the supermarket. I could now barely get out the car because the pain had started to cripple me. I began to really get worried, but again thought, let me hurry up and quickly get these few groceries. As I pushed the shopping cart, I realized I needed it to literally hold me up. Fear began to race through my body even more so. I got back in the car moving extremely slowly and said...."let me just try to make it to the post office". I drove an additional two minutes down the road and literally felt like I was crawling out of my car.

I dropped the mail inside the postal box and crept back to my car. As I held on to the back of my car trunk, still clenching my chest, my eyes were now filled with tears. There was NO QUESTION that something terrible was wrong. Still no pain in my arms or anywhere else, I thought it might not make sense to go to the hospital just because my chest was hurting so I thought laying down for a while was probably best. I was convinced that this was the worst indigestion I ever felt and couldn't understand why I would be experiencing heartburn or indigestion, especially after having such a healthy and nutritious breakfast, which I pretty much do daily. As I continued to get into the car I said to myself...."Lord, please help me to get home safely".

Home was three minutes away and the Lord answered that prayer, however the pain was sticking as close to me as glue. I made it into my house, immediately put on a pot of hot water to make lemon water, took off my clothes, put on a bathrobe, decided to lay down while the water boiled and the pain went psycho. I jumped up, sitting at the side of my bed, frightened and in tears, and said out loud while continuing to now hold my chest with both hands...."oh my God, this must really be a heart attack. I gotta call 911!". I instantly started to get weaker, my breathing became impaired, and my legs felt limpness as I walked to turn off the tea pot. I managed to somehow step into my clothing, because now I couldn't lift my arms. I became increasingly fragile and afraid of passing out in the house before an ambulance could arrive because I was alone at the time. Strangely enough, I remembered that my neighbor's car was in his driveway as I was coming in. I thought it best to go to his house and have him call 911 so I wouldn't be alone in the process.

As I literally took baby steps to walk directly across the street, I only managed to reach the foot of his steps where I collapsed. Fortunately, the beautiful weather caused him to have his screen door open and he was able to hear me moaning as I lay on his steps. He was astonished, to say the least, when he came to the door because of the strange sound he was hearing, to find me laying there. He screamed...."oh my God what's wrong?". I muscled...."I think I'm having a heart attack, call 911". And so he did!

In the brief moments that lied ahead, while awaiting the ambulance, I felt my life swiftly slipping away. I could tell I was dying. I will never forget, with tears running down my cheeks, as I write this reflection, how petrified I felt realizing that I was actually dying. I didn't make God any promises, as we often hear people say takes place at a near death experience. My faith in God however, somehow stood up like a giant inside of me and I started to declare out of my mouth aloud, though weak and faintly....."I shall live and not die." This was a very intimate and personal moment between my God and I. I kept repeating it over and over and over again. My cell phone was in my hand. I was losing focus but God steadied my hand and enabled me to hit the speed dial button that connected me to my spiritual mentor, Pastor Connie Brooks. Why? I realized that no one knew what was happening to me. That thought petrified me! Though I was praying in my spirit and speaking positive words of affirmation over myself, I felt like I was soon to pass out and needed desperately to know that someone with spiritual authority would be praying for me. All I could say when she answered, faintly was..."please pray....I'm having a heart attack". She replied, "call 911". Softly I said, "they're on the way."

She immediately began to pray a powerful brief prayer and hung up. Before she hung up she did say..."I have to go because I have to keep praying."

The ambulance arrived swiftly and whisked me off to the hospital. The symptoms that were not apparent earlier on were now manifesting themselves with a vengeance. Pain began racing up and down my arms, the little bit of life I had remaining was going faster, my head was hurting, the pain in my chest and back felt as though they were crushing me to death, sweat was now pouring off my forehead like a river and I began to vomit profusely. I continued to say in the midst of all of this..."I shall live and not die sayeth the Lord." I remember the look of panic that was in the eyes of the paramedic that was caring for me while he administered a variety of tests (EKG and so forth). At one point he said back to me with intensity..."you just try to hold on....". I replied..." I don't want to die"...he responded with anxiety in his eyes..."we're trying our best, you hold on". Simultaneously I was gripped with even more fear when I listened to the sound of the siren from the ambulance, felt the recklessness of the ambulance driver, though necessary, and never to forget his voice of panic as he yelled over the mega phone at the cars on the road..."get out of the way."

To myself I wept. "I shall live and not die," just as violently as my body was being challenged. We made it to the hospital. The team at the emergency room was ready and eagerly awaiting my arrival. The million and one questions being repeated for clarity towards me, the poking, the jostling to try and keep me awake as I was passing out, the intensified fear that gripped me when the doctor looked at me and said..."your heart seems strong but you are definitely having a heart attack and you are in the right place." The scissors that followed cutting me out of my clothing frightened me to death. I resided at this point that I was in God's hands and the emergency team. I woke up in ICU to my family pouring in with facial expressions of sheer disbelief, yet filled with tears and hearts of gratitude that I was alive.

Early the following morning the surgeon came to see me. He stood at the foot of my bed and said..."I need you to know that you didn't just have a heart attack but you had a massive heart attack. Your main artery collapsed. I went in and repaired the damage and you now have one stent. I don't know what made you decide to come to the hospital when you did but you almost didn't make it. You are a walking miracle and one lucky lady." Needless to say I was crying, overwhelmed, filled with gratitude and thanked him from the depths of my soul for all he did for me. He was extremely perplexed because of the condition of the collapsed artery and the fact that I had absolutely no symptoms the day prior. I see this to be the angel of God that we pray about and take for granted sometimes, that actually was covering me.

It is at this very moment that my current journey began. When you experience a genuine life threatening journey as I have, one of two things will follow. You might take being alive for granted and your life returns to "business as usual." The only other recourse is to embrace a spirit of humility, which is what I have chosen to do. This "spirit of humility" as I call it, causes you to reflect and recognize that life can NO LONGER EVER BE THE SAME. This experience has caused me to bow to the fact that God almighty has chosen

to spare my life. From a medical standpoint, I almost died. This transition from "ALMOST "....to "NOT DYING," has given my life new meaning and new destiny. Yes, for the record, heart condition does run in my family on my mother's side, but understanding what has truly happened to me, how it happened, what signs were there along the way, though maybe not the day prior to my attack, what significant life-long changes do I need to make to remain in good health, is a decision first, followed by a personal commitment to do the work to get these questions answered.

While taking care of some business to set up some workshops for the senior's ministry from my church, the passion that I expressed concerning my desire to help my seniors become more informed, led someone to share with me briefly about the HeartSmarts Program, make a recommendation concerning me to its director, Dr. Tettey, thereby asking me to consider becoming a part of this amazing crusade, as I call it. I was presently praying and searching for the ultimate way, or ways, I could begin educating myself about heart conditions, the health challenges that lead you there, the preventive measures, and the ongoing day to day care for myself that is now a mandate.

As I sat in the HeartSmarts class for the first night I was overwhelmed with finally making a connection to the ultimate answer to all my questions and concerns. Not only did the class answer my questions but it related directly to what I had just experienced by having my recent heart attack, and the pertinent additional information opened my eyes to statistics and facts about my cultural background, African Americans. To know that we are leading in the statistics that pertain to heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes is not just shocking, but deadly.

You don't know the value of what you have until you put it to use! Right now the most valuable gift I have is the gift of life. If I intend to value this reality, then I must do everything in my power to take better care of myself. Through the HeartSmarts program, I have discovered and learned how I can not only take care of myself but I can be a role model, not because I'm better than anyone else, but because I care enough about my brothers and sisters to want to share the knowledge and good news about how we can take better care of ourselves as we educate, empower ourselves and become active participants in the necessary changes to be healed and possess greater health. Moreover, we are known to be a culture who not only believes in God but professes our faith in God through practicing the word of God which is activated by our faith in God. I am so amazed and grateful to see in this century, medical science and faith in the word of God come together to salute being in better health, particularly as it pertains to heart condition and African Americans. Our belief in God goes a step further. The scriptures have clearly outlined the God we claim to serve and the expectations of us to be in nothing less than good health. It is my personal desire first, to manifest as I am currently doing, hands on changes, that are impacting my life to be in better health, set the example that it can be done, and try to further reach through the teaching of the HeartSmarts program as an ambassador, the power we do have as strong African Americans to be empowered to live according to the word of God that we profess.

It is true. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, therefore we must learn what it means when it instructs us how to eat in due season. If we take better care of ourselves we will want to guard our hearts. We can and must come into agreement with the word of God to focus on eating vegetables and drinking lots of water so that our hearts can be at peace. We have been mandated by the word of God to present our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God. This is because our bodies are an instrument of righteousness. Our God wants us to prosper in All things, not some things. Being in the best of health is primary. This theory will lend to us having joyful hearts as a people which is the best medicine we can ask for. Every tribulation we go through in life if embraced properly is connected to the plan and purpose of our destiny.

My experience after having this massive heart attack, coupled with a new and miraculous lease on life has propelled me to attach myself to the reality that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. ALL means ALL. So yes.....I choose life.....I choose to live....I choose empowerment.....I choose to be in good health.....I choose to embrace change.... I choose to manifest it daily....I choose to share the good news with my brothers and sisters....Together we must choose to keep our bodies healthy and take care of it. Our hearts are the energy and life force of our bodies. Without it we are nothing.!!

The scale recently revealed that I am 35 pounds lighter, not because of a diet but because I choose to make the necessary changes to be in better health on a day to day basis. Is it easy? Of course not, but my faith in God and the word of God which says I can, we can, do ALL things through Christ who strengthens us is a daily empowerment. I'm proving this to be true in my personal life one day at a time.

As an African American Woman at age 57, committed to making daily choices to improve my health and my heart, it is my prayer, my hope and my desire, that the hand of God, and the platform and guideline set forth to teaching the HeartSmarts program, will empower me to be an ambassador that will have something life changing to say, that will help others to make changes to do better with their health, as I walk through this great and effective door to serve.

With a Grateful Heart,  
2016 HeartSmarts Ambassador Beverly Bruin



## **Ambassador Spotlight**

### **Cheryl Cameron: A Survivor's Story**



When I tell people that I have had cardiac problems they find it difficult to believe it because I do not look like I should have heart problems. I am not overweight, I eat healthy, and I exercise every day. However, in July of 2002 I suffered a heart attack. I had taken my son to his orientation weekend at college. During the middle of the night I was awakened with the feeling of heaviness on my chest. The pain had gotten progressively worse and felt like gas. It felt as if I could just burp it would feel better. I got up, walked around looking for some ginger ale but the feeling did not go away.

Eventually the nurse in me decided it was more than gas and I called security and was transported to the hospital where an echocardiogram revealed blockages to my left anterior descending artery, even though my cholesterol levels were good. Immediately I was taken to the OR and had two stents placed. I never had any clues that I was experiencing problems with my heart. But in retrospect I realize there were times that I would be doing the simplest things like washing dishes and would have to stop for a minute and catch my breath. There is a history of hypertension and stroke in my family and this experience has made me realize how important it is to be aware of family history. Through being a HeartSmarts ambassador, I hope to continue to share my story and use the tools that I have been provided through the training to educate others about cardiovascular health.

Cheryl Cameron  
2014 HeartSmarts Ambassador

## **Ambassador Spotlight**

### **HeartSmarts: A Family Affair**



The Lewis-Laldee Family

When my mom, a retired teacher and practicing holistic health coach, first approached my step-dad and I about the opportunity to serve the community as HeartSmarts Ambassadors, my first thought was, “wellness education with Biblical texts...interesting, but where will I find the time...” For decades, my commitment has been to empower those I serve to “understand and honor their design” through my work as a chemistry and biology educator, and Preconception Doula.

The motivation which inspired us to make the weekly trek from Brooklyn to become HeartSmarts Ambassadors, was experiencing the devastating effects of illness, as a family member struggled with the autoimmune disease lupus, and others died from the complications of cancer and diabetes. We recognized that being ill was not only financially and physically devastating, but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually costly as well. However, we also knew that simply avoiding illness was not enough.

We are proud to be graduating Ambassadors of the HeartSmarts program. My mother, step-father, and I are all excited and confident to go out into the community and use the science, spiritual training and resources we have been provided, to help others take ownership of their heart and overall health. There are many people seeking spiritual healing and strength, and we just want to do our part to help those who are willing to hear and act, to have a healthy body-vehicle to do God’s work.

Janiele Lewis  
2016 HeartSmarts Ambassador

## HeartSmarts 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



2012 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2013 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2014 HeartSmarts Ambassadors

## HeartSmarts 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



2015 HeartSmarts Ambassadors



2015 HeartSmarts Ambassadors

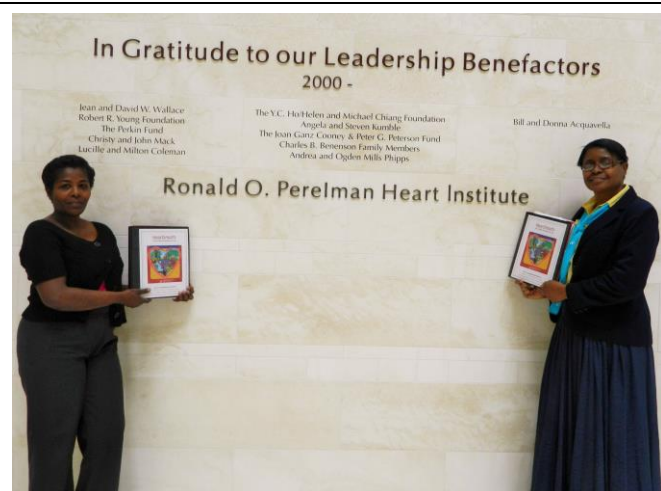


2016 HeartSmarts Ambassadors

# **HeartSmarts 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



**Week 1: “Your Body is a Temple”-  
Know Your Risk for Heart Disease**



**Week 2: “Your Body is an  
Instrument of Righteousness”-  
Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs**



**Week 3: “Guard Your Heart”-  
Get Energized and Say YES to  
Physical Activity**



**Week 4: “Prosper in All  
Things and Be in Health”-  
Control Your High Blood  
Pressure**

**Week 5: "Eat in Due Season,  
for Strength"-Keep Your  
Cholesterol in Check**

# **HeartSmarts 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



**Week 7: “Present Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice”- Aim for a Healthy Weight**

**Week 6: “Let Us Be Given Vegetables to Eat and Water to Drink”- Healthy Eating Everyday**



**Week 8: “A Heart at Peace”- Take Good Care of Your Diabetes for Life**



**Week 9: “A Joyful Heart is Good Medicine”- Stress, Depression, and Heart Disease**



**Week 10: “I Can Do All Things”- Review and Evaluation**

## HeartSmarts 2011-2016 Program Highlights



Dr. Tettey and Dr. Andersen

"HeartSmarts", the faith-based health promotion program at The Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute was developed by Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey, in partnership with Holly Andersen, MD. The HeartSmarts program began with the aim of increasing awareness about cardiovascular health in high-risk, underserved groups. To accomplish this, the plan was to partner with congregations in these communities and train "ambassadors of health," or health coaches.

Our intention was to train them to teach their congregation about heart disease and inspire them to practice prevention. Since 2011, we have successfully trained 130 ambassadors of health. These ambassadors are comprised of wellness ministers and pastors from churches throughout the five boroughs of New York City and Long Island.

To become a HeartSmarts ambassador, participants traveled to the Weill Cornell campus and completed 12 weeks of training, 3 hours per week. Upon completion of the training, the HeartSmarts ambassadors then offered the HeartSmarts program in their churches. In 2012 a total of 199 people representing 13 churches throughout the five boroughs of New York City completed the

HeartSmarts program.

These individuals had a variety of health conditions including hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. Participants attended classes for two hours a week, for 10 weeks in their churches. As a result of participating in the program, participants significantly increased their knowledge about heart disease and its prevention. Specifically, participants were given pre and post assessments to determine their



Dr. Tettey facilitates a HeartSmarts ambassador training





Bottom left: Ambassador Claudette Singleton

knowledge of cardiovascular health. These assessments were comprised of both open ended questions and multiple choice questions. For the open ended questions, participants were asked to explain concepts such as cholesterol, hypertension, diabetes, and triglycerides. In addition to this, participants had to explain how these items were related to heart disease. For example, one question was: What is HDL cholesterol? What is the desired number for HDL cholesterol? The

results of these assessments demonstrated that the participants learned and internalized this information. Some participants had pre- test assessments that were mostly blank and post-test assessments that thoroughly answered each question correctly. Many members stated throughout the program, “I never knew this” or “I wish I had known this information sooner.”

Participants also described their nutrition, exercise, and stress management behaviors in these assessments. Prior to the HeartSmarts class, some participants were eating a very unhealthy diet and not exercising. By the end of the HeartSmarts program, participants made improvements to these health behaviors by at least increasing their exercise to 3 days a week for 30 minutes, increasing water intake to at least 6 cups per day, and also eating at least 3 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Some participants were consuming no fruits and vegetables at the beginning of the program.



Dr. Andersen speaks to HeartSmarts ambassadors

In addition to these assessments, participants also received measurements for blood pressure, weight, and waist circumference before and after the program. As a result of the HeartSmarts program more than half of the participants decreased blood pressure, lost weight, lowered BMI, and decreased their waist circumference. One aspect of the program was the addition of physical activity before or after the class, as well as the demonstration of healthy food preparation and healthy snack choices.

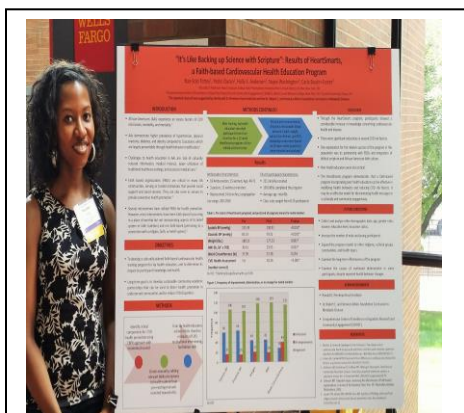
Participants completed a qualitative program evaluation upon completion. The feedback showed that the participants felt empowered about their health after completing the program. Some participants mentioned feeling confident to ask their doctors specific questions about their numbers (cholesterol and blood pressure), and could even discuss HDL and LDL levels with understanding. Furthermore, the faith-based component of the program made the information more personal to the participants. Knowing that there are so many biblical scriptures that educate about health made them want to learn more, and also made them feel that these instructions are from a higher source and must be followed.

Overall, the first year of the HeartSmarts program was successful. The trained ambassadors have become community resources for cardiovascular health education and can be found educating community members at health programs including health fairs. Also, the program has changed the culture of many of the churches that participated and created more of a focus on health. The HeartSmarts participants and ambassadors share the information that they have learned with fellow church members, family, friends, and co-workers.



Pastor Calhoun and Dr. Tettey at Flatbush SDA Church

In 2013, an additional 200 participants completed the HeartSmarts program. The results showed similar outcomes to 2012. Participants continue to improve their knowledge of heart disease and its prevention as well as improve their blood pressure, weight, and lifestyle behaviors.



Dr. Tettey presents HeartSmarts program results at the National Wellness Conference

The 2014 HeartSmarts graduating was the largest to date with 40 ambassadors of health completing the 12-week training. The 2014 class expanded the training to include representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Bowery Mission, one of the largest shelter systems in New York City. In 2015, we partnered with The New American Chamber of Commerce. To date there have been six ambassador classes.

HeartSmarts has been recognized as a model for community based health promotion by The New York Daily News, The New York Times, The New York Post, and DNA Info. A major accomplishment for HeartSmarts is the completion of two research papers. The first paper titled *“It's Like Backing up Science with Scripture”: Perceptions of HeartSmarts, a Faith-based Cardiovascular Health Education Program*, was published in The Journal of Religion and Health. The second, *Evaluation of HeartSmarts, a Faith-based Cardiovascular Health Education Program*, has been submitted for publication. In addition to this, the research resulting from the HeartSmarts program has also been accepted for presentation at local, regional, and national conferences including, The Annual Health Disparities Conference at Columbia University, The American Heart Association Health Equity Summit, Caribbean Health Conference, The American Public Health Association Conference, and the National Wellness Conference where it received acknowledgement for outstanding research and poster presentation.

The HeartSmarts program continues to grow and positively impact the communities it aims to serve. The HeartSmarts Ambassadors of Health have shown great dedication to the program. The goal moving forward is to expand the program to new communities and offer it in more formats. This program has proven that knowledge truly is power.

Naa-Solo Tettey, EdD, MPH  
Creator and Director of the HeartSmarts Program

## *HeartSmarts Community Partnerships*



At The Bowery Mission, we have been helping New Yorkers to help the homeless since 1879, meeting the specific needs of each man, woman, and child who walks through our doors. First, we help the homeless by meeting immediate needs: food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. In our residential recovery programs, we address deeper needs for spiritual wholeness, life and job skills training, and addiction recovery. We measure our progress against five criteria, which indicate to us that a life has been transformed from homelessness to hope: connection to faith, connection to family, commitment to sobriety, a job and a place to live, and a plan for the future.

Founded in 1879, The Bowery Mission's purpose and goal have been to provide help and hope to the homeless and impoverished in New York for 130 years. The Bowery Mission is called to minister in New York City to men, women, and children caught in the cycles of poverty, hopelessness and dependencies of many kinds, and to see their lives transformed to hope, joy, lasting productivity and eternal life through the power of Jesus Christ.

The Bowery Mission has been a faith-based organization, long before “faith-based” became a popular term. Our services are provided to all people in need, regardless of their beliefs. Our donors and volunteers are people of all different faiths, or no faith at all. Our work consistently presents Jesus Christ and his teachings, believing them to be essential for the positive life transformations that are the ultimate outcome of our work.

Our work is holistic, addressing the needs of the whole person, including spiritual needs. As our President, Ed Morgan, writes: “Recovery is an affair of the heart. We look at recovery of the heart as well as the body and the mind. When the heart is changed, the recovery is permanent.”

## **Bowery Mission Ambassador Testimonial**



My experience and journey through the HeartSmarts program was a unique and life altering journey. I felt the urge to attend the HeartSmarts Ambassador training program when I first learned about in 2014 while working as a counselor at The Bowery Mission Women's Center. What motivated me to attend was the fact that my father suffered a massive heart attack and subsequently passed away in the summer of 2012. I saw this opportunity as a wakeup call and an intervention to help me to make better choices to have a healthier heart. That is exactly what I was able to learn from this program. I learned the value of eating a well-balanced and healthy diet along with daily exercises to combat cardiovascular disease. I learned about some of the major risk factors for heart disease and how that related to my family history, culture and lifestyle. I really valued and appreciated the incorporation of a faith

based component to this training and the fact that I could utilize biblical scriptures along with this great information to empower myself and others to see change as not only a hope but a real possibility.

Upon completing the Heartsmarts Ambassador training, I was able to teach this incredible 10-week program to the students residing at the Bowery Mission Women's Center residential recovery program. The students were able to receive this information in the form of a booklet that they were able to read, review and begin to implement this information into their daily lives. As we went through the program I could begin to see small but noticeable changes in the women from week 1 to week 10. Some of the women lost 2 or more dress sizes, many reduced their sugar and salt intake, and some chose to quit drinking coffee and soda, while others chose to incorporate more daily exercises into their normal routine. Some of the challenges faced by the students were the fact that many were restricted to the food provided to them by the program which was not always a well-balanced/healthy diet so their food options were somewhat limited. Other challenges included having enough time and access to incorporating daily exercises into their class schedules. It's hard to say just how many changes were made collectively as many of the women have moved on from the program but they were able to take this valuable knowledge and information with them.

I personally have lost over 50 pounds since starting this program and continue to make strides towards a healthier lifestyle for myself and my family. With the incorporation of a healthier balanced diet and increased exercise my LDL levels have been lowered, my HDL has increased, my blood pressure has lowered and my overall heart health is much better. The HeartSmarts Program has had a profound impact on my life personally and professionally. I hope that this life saving information continues to be shared and taught to people around this nation to help in combating the fight against heart disease.

Tanesha Hutton, MSW, CASAC-T

## *HeartSmarts Community Partnerships*

### **The Northeastern Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists**

The Northeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is a religious non-profit organization of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist that administers 176 churches and 15 parochial schools within the states of Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The 176 churches, located primarily within the urban centers of the cities within the Conference territory, comprise a membership totaling 48,981 with a congregational demographic make-up of Afro-American/Caribbean, Hispanic, Haitian, Portuguese, Ghanaian and Nigerian members.

In addition to the churches and schools, the Northeastern Conference owns and operates a 98 acre camp located in Hyde Park, New York, and throughout its storied history, has and does operate an annual summer camp program for boys and girls ages 8 through 15.

#### **OUR MISSION**

The mission of the Northeastern Conference is “to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to transform all people within its territory and prepare them for His imminent return”. The ministries of the Conference consist of evangelism, leadership training and varied community outreach programs; and are carried out through its churches and schools.

## *A Sample of HeartSmarts Participants*



## *HeartSmarts Community Partnerships*

### **The New American Chamber of Commerce**



*Advancing, Promoting and Facilitating  
the Success of New American Businesses*

The NACC is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2005 to advance, promote, and facilitate the success of New American businesses. The backbone of the NACC is the diversity of its member entrepreneurs and small business owners.

The NACC mission is accomplished by the following:

Implementing and strengthening local and national programs that assist the economic development of New American firms;

Increasing business relationships and partnerships between the corporate sector and New American-owned businesses;

Promoting international trade between New American businesses in the United States and Immigrant Countries;

Monitoring legislation, policies and programs that affect the New American business community;

Providing technical, networking and other assistance to our member entrepreneurs, small business owners, business associations and professionals.

## *New American Chamber of Commerce Ambassador Testimonial*



Claude Leach Ambassador  
New American Chamber of  
Commerce

The longer I sat and listened to Mr. Brian Figieroux of The New American Chamber of Industry and Commerce (NACC), the more I realized that he is a man of vision and one who would help all people and especially people of color to accomplish their dreams wherever he can. It was in one of his lectures in paralegal studies that he made mention of the HeartSmarts program and Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey. What was this all about? Well, I learned that the Ronald O. Perelman Heart Institute at New York- Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center had introduced this program that brings together science and religion. It was one that recognized that Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and Dr. Holly Andersen and Dr. Naa-Solo

Tettey had come together to create a unique program. I needed more information but wanted to be counted in, after all I am an educator and especially trained in Special Education with a major in science.

I signed up for the 10-week Certificate Program where I was soon paying good attention to Philippians 4: 13. -I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me- one of the themes of a lecture. Yes, the program uses holy scripture to educate trainers how to teach church members the benefit of living a heart-healthy lifestyle and as Dr. Andersen has stated, "It really is about prevention, and teaching them to live healthier."

Dr. Tettey has used the program to work with churches as a good way to help underserved communities. She has taken actual lines from the bible and used them to teach secular health lessons- "if your body is an instrument of righteousness, then you should take care of it."

I completed the 10 week course and am delighted that I did. The course has caused me to truly recognize that the greatest asset that one can have in the world is one's health. It is necessary to guard your heart with physical activity, stress management, and healthy diet, which is good for the heart and your overall health. I am proud to be a HeartSmarts Ambassador. I would like to be able to introduce this course in the West Indies/Caribbean and help individuals there who are of strong faith to become healthier. As a HeartSmarts ambassador I conducted a class recently. They expressed their joy and contentment in having the opportunity to complete the course. I look forward to continuing as HeartSmarts ambassador and be able to help others in the process.

Claude Leach  
HeartSmarts Ambassador/New American Chamber of Commerce

## *HeartSmarts Community Partnerships*



### **National Association for Advancement of Colored People**

Founded in 1909, by a multiracial group of progressive thinkers, the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** is a non-profit organization established with the objective of insuring the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority groups. The **NAACP** has as its mission the goal of eliminating race prejudice and removing all barriers of racial discrimination through democratic processes.

### **NAACP-New York City Housing Authority**

The New York City Housing Authority Branch traces its origin to April 1969. An ethnically diverse group of Housing Authority employees committed to the mission and goals of the NAACP commenced the process to establish a NAACP Branch. It was largely through the efforts of Simeon Golar, a NYCHA Board Member appointed by Mayor John V. Lindsay that the NYCHA Branch of NAACP was formed. Currently the branch has extended its efforts to provide workshops throughout the NYCHA developments. We host a weekly radio show “Let your voice be heard”, partnering with the Community Based Organizations we continue to focus on the NAACP Five Game Changers: **Civic Engagement** (voter registration drives and voter education workshops), **Criminal Justice** (Know your rights workshops, Civil Rights workshops and free courses for paralegal), **Economic Development** (Assist with the creation of the African American International Chamber of Commerce, awarded Financial Literacy grant to conduct workshops and youth entrepreneur program, provided labor jobs for young men), **Education** (in the process of adopting a school, and awarded \$200 scholarships for high school student, 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Author Award 2013 Just READ initiative), **Health** (Project MODEL health initiative for healthy living, and HIV workshops. This summer we will be sponsoring mental health screenings and HeartSmarts workshops).

## *HeartSmarts Success Story*



Helen Perry and  
Ambassador Carol Hylton

On July 23, 2015, Helen Perry took her usual shopping trip to downtown Brooklyn, but this trip would turn out to be different. As she exited the bus on her return home she felt a heaviness in the left side of her chest. When she arrived home she sat down hoping the heaviness would stop. However, the heaviness continued and then moved into her left arm. She laid down briefly, but there was still no improvement. At this point she knew it was time to call 911. The operator instructed her to take off any tight fitting garments and to chew an aspirin.

The ambulance arrived within five minutes and took her to Kings County Hospital. Upon admission the doctors believed that she had suffered a heart attack. However, a cardiac cauterization showed that her arteries were clear. Later she was taken in for a CAT scan and a clot was found in her right lung. She was treated for seven days with blood thinners. She was then discharged and

continued to receive treatment with blood thinners for six months.

Helen credited the HeartSmarts Class and her instructor HeartSmarts Ambassador Carol Hylton for her ability to act fast at this crucial time. She stated, "I found the HeartSmarts class to be a blessing. All of the symptoms I was experiencing were discussed in the class. I was able to follow everything that I learned such as calling 911, not driving myself to the hospital, and chewing an aspirin. Praise the Lord that I was able to take this class."

Carol Hylton  
HeartSmarts Ambassador

## *HeartSmarts Success Story*



Ambassador Carolyn J. Castelli

Little did I know that a NYPH Facebook post about the graduates of the HeartSmarts Ambassador Training Program would powerfully impact my life as well as those of many others. How did a NYPH-Westchester Division psychiatric nurse go from reading about a program to attending the ten-week HeartSmarts Ambassador Training program geared toward the prevention of heart disease in underserved, high-risk communities? There were times, as one of two Caucasian members in a class of 25 or so African American lay-people, I wondered that myself.

It might have been because my family history includes heart disease and diabetes. It might have been my borderline-high cholesterol levels, my “sweet tooth” leading to unhealthy food choices, and my struggle with exercise. It might have been my desire to integrate my nursing skills with my faith community. It might have been my curiosity about the effectiveness of a faith-based curriculum. It might have been my desire to learn more about the health issues of African and Hispanic populations. It might have been the belief that my faith community, while not underserved in terms of healthcare, could benefit from improving our behaviors related to cardiovascular health.

It was probably a combination of these personal and altruistic motives that led me to search for Dr. Naa-Solo Tettey whose name, as the creator of the program, was attached to the Facebook post. Dr. Tettey accepted me as the first NYPH nurse to take the program. Although it was a challenge logistically at times to travel the 45 minutes to NYC, I continued to do so because of the knowledge gained in the classes. One aspect of the course that really struck me was learning about the stresses related to being African-American and how this adversely impacts health. In addition to this, the curriculum was excellent and every session connected to a Biblical truth.

Once trained as an ambassador, I taught my own class at Harrison Presbyterian Church. It was powerful to walk alongside of the participants and learn about their health struggles as well as watch them make improvements. It was a joy to hear how the scriptures were impacting the participants (everyone had a slightly different take on the scripture and how it applied to Heart Health). The format of the program builds on social support and allowed us to encourage one another. As a result of the program I have learned to eat more fruits/vegetables, exercise every day, and my cholesterol levels are finally in healthy range! I have learned that it is about routines not resolutions. Most importantly, the spiritual aspect has proven to be the foundation that I need to be consistent and successful.

Carolyn J. Castelli- HeartSmarts Ambassador

## HeartSmarts Ambassadors



## HeartSmarts Ambassadors Attend TD Jakes Talk Show Taping



## HeartSmarts Ambassadors Veggiecation Certification Training



## Gaia Wellness Conference



## ABC News



## HeartSmarts at the United Nations



## Go Red for Women



*Above all else, guard  
your heart, for it is the  
wellspring of life.*