

## MEDICA FOUNDATION GRANT LAUNCHES

# Community Life Department



Photo courtesy of Michael Moschogianis.

Hammer's inaugural floor hockey team in the gym at St. Bart's.

By Julane Rose, Associate Director of Development, with special support from Emily Miller

In January 2014, Hammer received some great news. We were awarded a \$30,000 grant from the Medica Foundation to expand our Healthy Living Initiatives (HLI). A portion of the grant was dedicated to hiring a part-time coordinator to build on the successes of the initiatives introduced by Program Director, Sue Walker. In 2011, Walker identified opportunities – and activities – to more comprehensively address nutrition, fitness and personal wellness at Hammer homes. “We are thrilled to have more resources to further develop the initiatives we have been dreaming about,” says Walker.

Hammer leadership saw this as an opportunity to restructure the HLI into a Community Life department and hire Emily Miller as Coordinator. Miller has a complimentary part-time position as Volunteer Resources Manager, allowing her to collaborate between two departments. This past summer, Community Life intern Andrea Strand (who now works in our In-Home department) assisted with the roll-out of several new programs. Walker rounds out the team as Community Life Director while continuing her responsibilities as Program Director for several Hammer homes.

A first order of business was to create a user-friendly system to communicate, provide wellness resources and track participation in activities. “Hammer staff and the individuals we serve were invited to participate in a friendly competition tracking water intake, fruit and vegetable servings, exercise, sleep and relaxation time,” reports Miller. “Prizes like Twins Tickets, MN Zoo passes and ‘Ralph’ socks were awarded.” Since 2012, a cornerstone of the HLI has been the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in partnership with eQuality Farms located in Buffalo, MN. eQuality employs adults with developmental disabilities to work at the farm, including nine individuals served by Hammer. The Medica Foundation grant was instrumental in funding the expansion of the CSA program this year, now boasting 36 of our 46 homes participating. Each home received a “share” of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season.

Miller and Strand built a Pinterest site and emailed recipes based on the weekly CSA deliveries. “We wanted to help staff plan menus using all these great, but sometimes unfamiliar vegetables,” said Miller. To further build enthusiasm, they facilitated healthy meal contests too. The results for many of those we serve have been nothing short of remarkable.

## Community Life by the Numbers

- 164** individuals participated in Hammer's annual bowling league
- 150** volunteers actively encouraged social interaction, fitness and good nutrition
- 104** 57 staff and 47 individuals we serve participated in the Community Life Contest
- 75** individuals made pledges at the Family Picnic like "walk more, do yoga, no Coke!"
- 15-25** individuals participated in weekly yoga and Zumba classes last spring
- 20** participants attended a tomato potting event hosted by Hammer last spring
- 18** individuals participated in Hammer's new floor hockey team
- 4** individuals have gym memberships made possible by the Medica grant



| Keith Pope potting his own tomato plant.

Anthony Lott, who lives at Hammer's Broadmoor Apartments, was one who decided to make significant changes. "Anthony NEVER used to eat vegetables," remembers Program Manager Chelsea Clark. "But with staff encouragement, he tried different vegetables and researched healthy recipes. He also purchased a bicycle and started biking around Eden Prairie. He has come a long way. Now he enjoys healthy foods and exercising regularly. He is super proud of himself and so are we!"

Cathy Otto, who lives at our Sumac Home, has lost 27 pounds since June by using the Medifast weight loss program and says she "feels much healthier." More importantly, she has been able to lower her blood pressure medication dosage, a meaningful example of the kind of results we will report to Medica.

Exercising while having fun has always been a winning combination. The new Hammer Field Hockey Team was a big hit this past summer. "We teamed with St. Bartholomew Catholic School and volunteers to start a field hockey team," says Miller. "Everyone had fun trying it out and we are looking forward to starting again soon!"

On a sunny September Saturday, the ever-popular Hammer Family Picnic attracted more than 500 guests and provided another opportunity to spread the word about Community Life initiatives. "The Medica grant helped us serve healthy foods at the picnic," says Miller. "Guests were invited to dance, participate in Zumba and yoga demos and play yard games. For the perennial favorite cakewalk, we introduced fruit or vegetable cupcakes, and I didn't hear one complaint! I know lots of folks enjoyed painting the pots we provided and learning how to plant their own herbs." Peer support also provides inspiration to accomplish fitness goals. "Sarah Pink, who lives at Royal Oaks, has done a great job taking ownership of her health," says Derek Ehnert, Assistant Program Manager. "She is a regular at our Hammer walking groups and invites her friends to join her. She goes to the YMCA at least twice a week. Sarah now shops for healthy food and has made a big effort to cut down on soda."

"Ordinary changes in eating, shopping, socializing and exercising help develop inner motivation," believes John Estrem, CEO. "Hammer is dedicated to the continued success of the Community Life department and the culture of wellness it promotes. We want to encourage everyone to keep having fun while being healthy!"



| Volunteer, Kalli Barrett, and Deb Towey working on an art project together.