

## **Got Sugar? Telehealth Class Helps Diabetics Manage Care**

**By Christopher Smith**

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Several students who attended the Got Sugar? free diabetes class at the Covington County Health Department said that the information they've learned diabetes has changed their lives.

The Alabama Health Action Coalition (ALHAC) partnered with the health department to do a study on the benefits of Telehealth. The six-week class taught lessons on diabetes and its risks, healthy eating, exercise, talking with a health care team and managing medications. "As of 2018, Alabama ranks 49th in the nation for people with diabetes," Shaina Berry from ALHAC said. "So it is one of our big health concerns for Alabama. At the health action coalition, we take on projects to drive the health rankings of Alabama upward and we are really passionate that we have to focus on diabetes because so many of our citizens are facing that."

Berry said that ALHAC is partnering with different health departments in the state to help provide education on diabetes. "A lot of people in rural parts of Alabama don't have access to diabetes education," Berry said. "We have a grant to hopefully prove that people are getting more educated by using Telehealth. Hopefully by using Telehealth we are giving people opportunities for education that they wouldn't otherwise have." Jessica Fountain, a certified diabetes instructor, teaches the classes from her home and the students in Covington County watch her through a computer screen at the Covington County Health Department. "We are able to do this through the grant that we have," Berry said. "The health department already had the equipment so we teach healthcare virtually. Jessica can be set up at her home in Brewton and be able to broadcast to multiple sites."

Cassandra Jones said that she has been a diabetic for 40 years and never been to a class. Now she said that she is seeing improvement after taking this course. "I have always heard what I'm supposed to do by watching T.V. or having somebody tell me what to do," Jones said. "But by actually being in this class, I have actually dropped weight and have been able to manage my diabetes a lot better than how I was. Even though I thought I was doing well, this class has given me so much more information than I knew and it has definitely made it better."

Bessie Marshall said that she is better at managing her medication after taking the course. "I am now handling the way I take my medicine a lot better," Marshall said. "This class helps me a whole lot in that perspective. I am taking it the correct way now after learning the information in this class and it has helped me so much. I would recommend anybody to take this class."

Cindy Bass found out about the class right after she was diagnosed with diabetes, a week before the first class. "I am really glad that I came," Bass said. "I just completely thought that diabetes was totally different. I thought that diabetes was for old people or fat people; I didn't know that anybody could get diabetes. This class has just taught me so much."

Marian Dorman said that the class is her support group for her diabetes. "In Covington County, there is no support group for diabetes, nothing to turn to," Dorman said. "This class has helped me because it is like a support place. It is educational, and you can't get enough education when it comes to diabetes. Here I feel like everyone is sharing the same thing and we can share the pros and cons of being a diabetic."

Susan Gantt, who directs the St. Vincent DePaul outreach at Christ the King Catholic Church, doesn't have diabetes, but found the course helpful for the people that she encounters every day. "I had no idea I would learn so much," Gantt said. "Anybody who is in this area, who is diagnosed with diabetes would benefit from this program. I myself feel like I would be a healthier person just from coming to the class. Diabetes is on the list of a lot of people that we serve with St. Vincent DePaul and I can't wait to tell them about this. I think this could change their lives."

Six of the students in the class "graduated" from the course and received certificates. The next class will begin Thurs., Jan. 17, from 6 p.m., until 7:30 p.m. The class is free of charge. For more information, contact Fountain at 205-233-1613.