



SisterTalk Hartford Kicks-Off Plan to Expand Obesity Fight

SisterTalk Hartford Summit gathers African-American and Black Church leaders, health care advocates, academics, and philanthropies to bring evidence and faith-based weight loss program to more women in Greater Hartford

HARTFORD, CT (August 20, 2008) —Next month begins a new and exciting chapter for SisterTalk Hartford when leaders from Hartford-area Black and African-American churches will meet to expand this innovative and proven weight loss and health promotion program to more area churches and their members. The program began in 2003 with 12 Hartford-area African-American and Black churches, representing seven denominations, in partnership with researchers from the University of Connecticut Health Center and Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center. Over the past five years, using a medically-sound, faith-based approach, SisterTalk Hartford has helped many area women achieve and maintain healthy weight loss goals while instilling the skills and motivation to make healthy living choices on a daily basis.

The SisterTalk Hartford Summit will be held on September 2 from 8:30am -1:30 pm at the Hilton Garden Inn, in Windsor, CT. The Summit is free, and will feature inspirational talks and music, while providing church leaders with specific direction and insights for establishing the 12-week SisterTalk Hartford program at their churches. Planning and support for the Summit has been made possible through unprecedented collaboration between the Ethel Donaghue Center for Translating Research into Practice and Policy (TRIPP Center) at the UConn Health Center, the academic home of SisterTalk Hartford, the CT Department of Public Health, the Donaghue Foundation, and pastors and leaders from the Community Advisory Team that co-developed the original SisterTalk Hartford program.

“We’ve seen how effective SisterTalk Hartford is in assisting African-American and Black Christian women to achieve their weight loss and health lifestyle goals. As a pastor and health care practitioner who was very involved in the start-up research phase of SisterTalk Hartford, I’m excited to be part of the effort to expand the program into more churches in Greater Hartford,” said Rev. Dr. Barbara E. Headley, President of Selah Educational Ministries, former pastor of Faith Congregational Church, and a member of the Summit planning committee. “This outreach will not only help the women who enroll in the SisterTalk Hartford program at their church, but should help the broader church community gain the tools and skills to bring more healthy choices to their congregations.”

Speakers at the SisterTalk Hartford Summit include Dr. Kara Davis, a Chicago-based African-American physician and author of *Spiritual Secrets to Weight Loss*, who will provide the keynote address, as well as local church leaders, program volunteers and past participants who will provide testimonials and explain the SisterTalk Hartford program to invited church leaders.

“As someone who benefited from SisterTalk Hartford, the power, success and effect of this program has been phenomenal and I’m really looking forward to sharing my experience at the Summit and encouraging more area Pastors to bring SisterTalk to their churches” said Evangelist Mary Armstrong, SisterTalk Hartford Lead Volunteer from Mt. Olive Church Ministries, of Hartford.

Sponsorship of the one-day Summit has been provided by the planners and their organizations, the TRIPP Center, CT Department of Public Health, and the Donaghue Foundation who funded the research to develop and test SisterTalk’s effectiveness. “We’re pleased to be active in promoting SisterTalk Hartford” said Lisa Davis, Family Section Chief at CT DPH. “We have a strong commitment to addressing the problem of obesity and supporting approaches that can positively impact the African-American community for whom obesity has an even greater negative effect than the population in general”.

The Summit planning group is actively seeking area funders to underwrite the costs for each church that adopts SisterTalk Hartford — including the lead volunteer training by a community health educator, purchase of a medical scale and program DVDs and other materials. SisterTalk Hartford was recently awarded a grant from the Aetna Foundation to support community outreach for the program.

“Our goal is to be able to offer 24 SisterTalk Hartford programs at 12 churches in the next year and we’re grateful for the inaugural support from the Aetna Foundation, which will give SisterTalk Hartford a great start toward making this a reality,” said Dr. Judith Fifield, Director of the TRIPP Center and the principal investigator of SisterTalk Hartford. “We been talking to a number of other organizations about the need for funding and we’re gratified that the principles upon which SisterTalk Hartford is based – the union of faith, community and sisterhood to establish positive habits and lifestyle changes – is exciting such interest.” The unique coalition currently supporting SisterTalk Hartford continues to pursue funding to support its activities.

For more information on the SisterTalk Hartford Summit, or to provide sponsorship, please contact the SisterTalk Hartford Resource Center at (860) 679-6555 or sistertalk@uchc.edu.

###