

Helping Hands Community Health Promoter Program begins Sept. 9

A unique collaboration between Belmont Baptist Church, Roanoke Valley Baptist Association Faith Community Nurse Program, Jefferson College of Health Sciences, and New Horizons Healthcare, offers an opportunity for community members interested in learning more about staying healthy and helping their friends and neighbors.

The Community Health Promoter Program, trains volunteers to share health knowledge with people in their communities through special activities such as community health fairs and one-on-one assistance with finding and using information and community resources.

The free course, consisting of 30 hours spread over 10 weeks, is scheduled to take place from 5-8 p.m. Thursdays, from September 9 through November 11, at the Belmont Baptist Church Health

Management Center at 825 Stewart Avenue in Roanoke. All materials and supplies for the educational sessions are provided. The program is funded through a combination of individual donations and in-kind support from each of the organizations. The classes will be taught by faculty at Jefferson College of Health Sciences and health professionals from throughout the community.

"The Community Health Promoters will be working through churches and other organizations where they are able to reach people who are not routinely visiting a doctor's office or clinic, or who do not have a 'medical home' of their own," according to Eileen Lepro, executive director of New Horizons Healthcare. "Community health promoters can serve as 'connectors' between community members and health care services, in helping

them to access needed services and to practice healthy lifestyles."

The trainees aren't meant to be substitutes for doctors or nurses. Instead, they are uniquely qualified to help because they live in the communities in which they work, understand what is meaningful to those communities, and can recognize and incorporate cultural practices and beliefs to help community members cope with stress and promote good health outcomes.

Previous health care experience, or even formal education, isn't necessary to qualify for the training. The program is accepting 10-15 people, but they must register quickly to reserve a space. With at least 80 percent attendance, they can earn a certificate as a "Community Health Promoter."

To sign up, or for more information, call Melinda Hartley at 362-5158.

