

Julia Means Ends Hunger and Improves Health Outcomes in Milwaukee Through Community Nursing

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Julia Means' career as a caregiver began in 1974 as an intensive care and cardiac nurse. A Milwaukee native, Julia earned her associate degree from MATC and her bachelor's degree from Marian University. She also received a Parish Nursing Certification from Marquette University. Her extensive nursing education and deep commitment to her community laid the foundation for a transformative career that spans decades.

Julia's work as a community-based nurse is driven by a passion for health equity and accessibility. After witnessing the struggles of a chronically ill man who lacked the resources to care for himself, she felt a calling to bring her skills directly to those in need. "Ebenezer has always been my home church," she shares. "When parishioners learned I was a nurse, I became a go-to trusted resource for people in my community that didn't have health literacy or access to quality healthcare."

In 1996, Julia blended her hospital work with community health outreach – eventually leading to her role as the parish nurse. Her work focuses on serving mothers, seniors and

individuals managing chronic health conditions.

Julia manages Milwaukee's only diabetic-friendly food pantry, which is a vital resource for individuals managing diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Understanding the critical link between nutrition and health, Julia's team collaborates with Hunger Task Force to provide healthy foods aligned with MyPlate guidelines such as fresh produce and whole grains. Cooking demonstrations and health screenings – including blood pressure and blood sugar checks—are offered alongside Stockbox distributions to create a comprehensive care model for seniors.

“Food is medicine,” Julia emphasizes. “We help our clients use their resources to purchase healthy food, and Hunger Task Force helps us provide what they can’t afford.”

Recognizing the diverse needs of her community, Julia founded “Blanket of Love” to address Milwaukee's high infant mortality rates. The program provides expectant mothers with essential items like formula, car seats and safe sleep resources while teaching them how to prepare nutritious meals for their growing families.

Beyond her day-to-day work, Julia has played a pivotal role in systemic efforts to combat food insecurity. She advocated for hospitals to adopt **Hunger Task Force's Stockbox program** to ensure seniors across Milwaukee have access to nutritious foods. Julia also facilitated a WIC Roundtable Discussion in 2023 with Congresswoman Gwen Moore and other leaders that spotlighted the importance of supporting mothers and children through federal programs like **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**.

In 2024, Julia Means joined the Hunger Task Force Board of Directors, which further expands her role as a mentor and community advocate. She represents network partners and brings her firsthand experience working with underserved populations to inform the agency's decision-making. “I wanted to be the bridge between the Board and the community to give them insight into the pantry network and our organizations serving families,” Julia explains. Her efforts have not only amplified the voices of those in need but also emphasized the critical role of nutrition in public health to foster lasting change within the organization and the broader community.

With over 40 years of nursing experience, Julia Means continues to inspire and uplift her community. Her efforts have not only improved individual lives but have also strengthened