Black People Are Surviving COVID-19 in Wyandotte County

By Bonita Gooch, The Community Voice
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Kansas City community activist Broderick Crawford

While Kansas City, KS, may be the hub of COVID-19 in Kansas, community activist Broderick Crawford wants to make it crystal clear: of the 906 confirmed cases in Wyandotte County, only 65 have died. That means 804 have survived, and most likely many more have contracted the disease, survived and done so without knowing that they had it.

Crawford, who serves on Wyandotte County's COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force, says it's time to flip the messaging.

No, he's not trying to convince people COVID isn't a disease you should take seriously. What he wants to change is the African-American community's attitude about or possible "fear" of the disease.

"We actually have people that are walking around who don't want to be labeled with having COVID. It's just like people that are refusing to find out if they have cancer or not," said Crawford. "They don't want to know until they don't have any other choice, that they have this particular disease. What they're afraid of is that if they test positive, it's a death sentence.

"All we (people in the community) are talking about is the ones that didn't make it. We're not promoting the people who have tested positive and recovered," he stressed.

Crawford and five members of his family are COVID-19 survivors, including his 77-year-old mother. In addition to her age, his mother has diabetes, high cholesterol and she's "weight-challenged," all of which are underlying health conditions that have been identified as negatively impacting an

individual's survival rate if they contract COVID-19.

New Message #1

What Crawford wants to see happen, is for more people – Black, White, Brown or other – to get tested, but particularly Black people who are showing up at testing sites in too few numbers. Testing helps in several ways. First, if you test positive, you can get the treatment you need earlier, and increase your potential for surviving. Second, if you know you have the disease, you can self-quarantine and not spread the disease to others.

To help encourage testing, the task force is taking testing to the community. In addition to daily walk-up testing at the Wyandotte County Health Department, they're scheduling pop-up testing in different parts of the county. A large number of the testing sites are at churches, a place where many people in the African-American community have a close personal connection or at minimum feel a level of comfort and trust.

New Message #2

In addition to testing, it's important to get the message out about what it takes to survive the disease. That includes the importance of wearing a mask and of social distancing. Some of the changes we need to make are cultural, said Crawford, pointing out how Black people like to hug.

There's a whole lot of hugging going on in Black churches, that's why Crawford applauds Wyandotte County pastors for the position they're taking to help educate their members and others about COVID-19.

Disproportionate Impact

With that message, Crawford and other members of the Health Equity Task Force hope they can help drive a positive change in the COVID-19 statistics in Wyandotte County's African-American community. Of the 65 deaths in the county, 33 – just over 50% – of them have been African American even though African Americans are just 23% of the county's population.

Still there are those underlying health issues that need to be addressed," said Crawford, who's worked in Wyandotte County for years to improve many of the "social determinants of health" that are negatively impacting Wyandotte County's African-American community.

There are health issues in Wyandotte County's African-American community that existed before COVID-19 that will still need to be addressed after it's gone. But, hopefully, ahead of the next pandemic.