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Detroit2Nepal bringing model to improve health care to Detroit neighborhoods

By Sherri Welch

A foundation that spurred greater health care access for villagers in Eastern Nepal is planning to bring that same model to Detroiters.

Detroit2Nepal's goal is to improve health care access and uptake in the city, something that's lacking for a variety of reasons — from transportation barriers to past discrimination, mistrust and lack of awareness about available care, said founder Richard Keidan, a surgical oncologist at Beaumont Health.

To help remove barriers, Detroit2Nepal is teaming with fellow nonprofit Brilliant Detroit to identify a trusted woman volunteer in target Detroit neighborhoods and train her to provide health education and referrals to available resources.

It's tapping graduate students at Wayne State University to help develop training for the women in each neighborhood and the Michigan Healthcare Professionals physicians group, which has formal agreements to mentor WSU medical students in that community health work.

The neighborhood workers will be the first line for medical education and referrals, just like the women volunteers in Nepal, Keidan said.

In the remote Himalayan villages in the country, those women volunteers have helped culturally integrate western medicine with the traditional medicine of shamans, prayers and herbs in a culturally sensitive way, he said.

"The key is they're trusted members of the community," Keidan said.

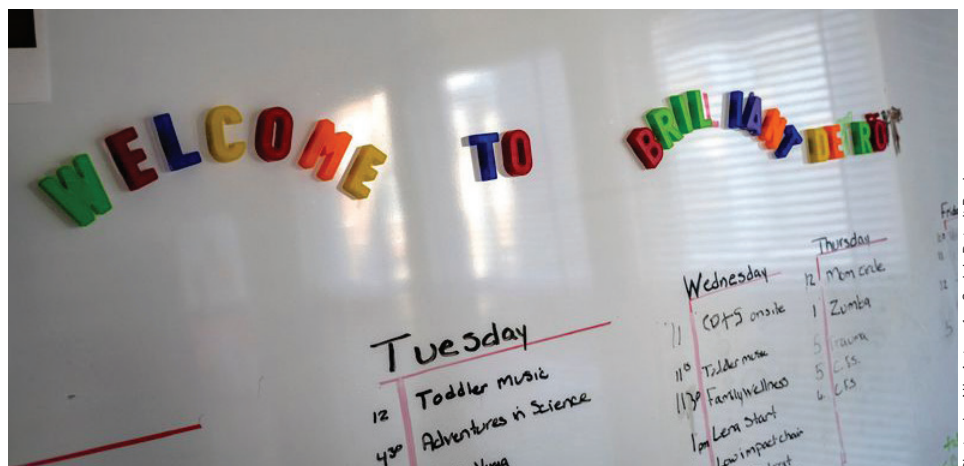
Finding a model

Keidan founded Detroit2Nepal in 2010 after seeing a need for it first-hand while on a hiking and climbing trip in the country the year before. Among other support functions, it has built a dozen or more schools, medical clinics and birthing centers in the South Asian nation.

Detroit2Nepal, a "mom and pop organization" for which Keidan does fundraising and grant writing and his wife handles administrative needs, operates on a budget of between \$200,000 and \$250,000 each year with a skeleton crew in Nepal and plenty of volunteers.



Detroit2Nepal Foundation Founder and Director Richard Keidan (left) and Brilliant Detroit CEO Cindy Eggleton at Brilliant Detroit's Fitzgerald house in Detroit.



A schedule board at Brilliant Detroit's Fitzgerald house in Detroit.

A decade ago, Keidan, a Crain's Health Care Hero in 2019, and his wife Betsy created a local arm of the charity and teamed with the SAY Detroit Family Health Clinic to set up free gynecology, podiatry and other specialty clinics for homeless women, among other supports.

But people aren't accessing the health services available at the SAY Detroit clinic and other health clinics in the city, Keidan said.

The majority of Detroit residents have health insurance. Only 8.7 percent lack insurance, but many still face barriers to accessing

health care, according to a 2018 survey conducted by the University of Michigan's Detroit Metro Area Communities Study.

Among other findings, the survey of more than 1,200 Detroiters noted that while most are able to access the type of medical care sought, unmet demand for dental care is high. And the city's African-American residents and residents of a lower socioeconomic status report lower levels of health than other residents and are significantly more likely to use emergency rooms as primary care.

If you're a single mom in Detroit, holding down two jobs and have a sick grandmother and kids at home, preventative care is not high on your list, Keidan said. "You're just trying to get through day to day," he said.

A local trusted woman in each community, trained to provide health education and referrals to available health resources, will help convince more people in Detroit neighborhoods to seek medical treatment, mental health services and preventative care, he believes. He's lined up a list of collaborators to help with the project.

Brilliant Detroit was invited into the neighborhoods and already has residents' trust, Keidan said. It will host listening sessions with local residents, Keidan, an interdisciplinary team of graduate students from Wayne State University and the Michigan Healthcare Professionals physicians group.

The university has agreed to put the project on the 2022 curriculum for its medical, public health and social work graduate students, he said.

The WSU School of Medicine confirmed it will provide graduate students for the interdisciplinary team, but the WSU School of Social Work said it is still in talks with Detroit2Nepal.

MHP has formal arrangements with Wayne State to mentor its medical students, and working with Detroit2Nepal and Brilliant Detroit to improve access to health care will be one of their activities, said Keidan, who is chief of surgery of the group, assistant professor at WSU Medical School and associate professor of surgery at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

The Detroit2Nepal model of having somebody within the community who is well-respected and has the ear and trust of residents was very effective in Nepal and could be in Detroit, Pontiac and other areas where it's hard for people to access health care and think of preventative care, MHP CFO Lynda Glasser said.

MHP is working with Keidan and Wayne State to create a curriculum for community health in the neighborhoods, she said. "If Richard needs



House Coordinator Larry Charleston III works at Brilliant Detroit's Fitzgerald house in Detroit.



Detroit2Nepal Foundation Founder and Director Richard Keidan poses for a portrait at Brilliant Detroit's Fitzgerald house in Detroit on Jan. 21, 2022.

mentors in this area, we have 450 providers we can ... approach with that. It's a great thing we are getting involved in," Glasser said.

The interdisciplinary team will seek community feedback on needs and issues and use it to create a guidebook and training for the female neighborhood health workers to deliver health education and help residents access the available resources they need.

"We want to go in and listen to the local community. If they can identify their priorities, then they will be apt to address (them)," Keidan said.

Brilliant Detroit already has a foothold in 12 Detroit neighborhoods.

The two nonprofits share a common approach, said Brilliant Detroit co-founder and CEO Cindy Eggleton.

Brilliant Detroit is focused on education, health and family support to help mitigate poverty in the neighborhoods. As part of that, it's provided exercise and nutrition education and helped to connect residents to preventative resources. The two had been watching each other's work for the past few years and recognized they could do more together, Eggleton said.

"The best solutions come from those (who) are needing the solutions, not from somebody else," she said. "We can do that at scale and in a way that fits our model. Trust is very central to the relationship."

The listening sessions will likely be in Cody-Rouge and two other neighborhoods under consideration, Eggleton said. "But we have to talk to the neighborhoods first," he said.