

## **Episode 65: Deanna's Story: "It Changed my Whole Way of Thinking."**

### **How Operation Change helped Deanna Find Pride and Purpose.**

Living in rural Kentucky has its challenges, and Deanna at 74 was feeling unhappy that she had constant back pain and her health seemed in decline. She felt powerless to change course. One year after Operation Change there has been a transformation. Deanna's doctors and family have been amazed by her newfound enthusiasm to quit soda, beat her Fitbit targets, and become more mobile. Hosted by Dr. Rose Gonzalez. Posted on September 23, 2020.

Dr. Gonzalez: Hello, and welcome to this edition of the Health Disparities Podcast.

I'm Dr. Rose Gonzalez, a nurse member of the executive steering committee of the Movement is Life Caucus. Movement is Life is a multi-disciplinary coalition seeking to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in muscle and joint health, by promoting physical mobility to improve the quality of life.

I will serve as your host for today's podcast. And today I had the good fortune of being joined by Deana, who was a participant of our Operation Change program in Hazard, Kentucky. Hi, Deana. How Are you?

Deanna: I'm fine, Rose. And, how are you?

Dr. Gonzalez: I'm doing well in spite of everything, the stress that we're going through with COVID-19, but I'm hanging in there. Resilience. You're hanging in there in Hazard?

Deanna: Yes, I am just barely.

Dr. Gonzalez: Just barely. Tell us a little bit about yourself as we get started on this podcast.

Deanna: Okay. I'll tell you this. I was the third oldest person in the Operation Change class. I'm 74 years old, very soon to be 75. I'm retired, I no longer work. I had two sons. I lost one just about 10 months ago. My other son is, Mayor of Hazard. I read a lot. I live alone.

Dr. Gonzalez: I'm sorry about the loss of your son. I hope you're doing better with that adjusting. It never goes away. Does it?

Deanna: I'm trying. No, it doesn't. It doesn't. But I just keep trying.

Dr. Gonzalez: You keep trying, keep trying to move on. I've met your son. I met your son at the graduation of Operation Change and Operation Change in Hazard, Kentucky had a beautiful ceremony for graduation. And before we get started with more questions, let me just share with the listeners, what Operation Change is.

So, Operation Change, which is a program that Deana joined and we're going to be talking about today, is a community-based behavioral change program targeted at women who are African American, Hispanic Latina, or live in rural communities who are obese and experiencing joint pain due to limited mobility. The Operation Change program includes structured physical activity, and it's focused on awareness and education to motivate sustained behavior change. So, Deana, when you first heard about, Operation Change and that it was coming to Hazard and Perry County, what did you think?

Deanna: Well, I thought what a wonderful thing it was, but I didn't think it was for me because, I'd just given up on exercise, just, all those things. I had just really didn't care if most people, my age around here felt or feel. And so, someone, Sandra, she said, "I'm going to put your name down anyway." I

missed the first session, but from there on out, I didn't miss a session. It was for me, it's for everybody.

Dr. Gonzalez: So, it's interesting that you said, you're 74 years young. You just didn't feel like a program was really for people who were slightly older. So, somebody signed you up. Were you mad at Sandra that she signed you up?

Deanna: I thank her all the time for doing it because it was the greatest thing that I have done in years. Actually, one of the best things I've ever done in my life, because my health was beginning to fail. My body, my joints, my bones were killing me. I could barely walk. I was having trouble getting in and out of cars. It was just really, bad. And this is a wonderful program. I can't even tell everybody unless you know what it is. It's the most wonderful thing that ever came to a rural area, but it helped. My bones are better. My body's better. My joints are better. Now the pandemic has slowed everybody down. We can't do anything except eat. You don't shop. You don't do anything. You eat, you cook and eat. You can still walk a little bit. So, it was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. Actually, I think it helped save my life. I have stage three renal failure. And so, I have been going to this doctor for years. And when I started this, when I started in this program, I asked him, I said, "Dr. Hamori, what do I do to keep from going to stage four?" He said, "Well, let me look at your labs." And he said, "Whatever, you're doing, keep it up." What I was doing was I was drinking water. Every time I turned around, I had water. Water is a lifeline. And I've continued to do that to this day. And right now, he says, my kidneys are almost normal because of what I learned and what I've practiced. It was, to me, it's been a lifesaver.

Dr. Gonzalez: That's so wonderful. I'm so happy to hear that. And one of the things that you mentioned about Operation Change is that, it did impact

you and it did improve your joint and muscle functioning, improved your mobility, which is what it aimed to do. So, that's incredible. Now, if you think back, you came, you started then on the second week. Did it feel awkward to you to have come in and they assigned you a group, right?

Deanna: They did. I was in the blue group.

Dr. Gonzalez: The blue zone.

Deanna: Yes. I was in the blue zone. I should have worn my shirt. I would have put it on, but no, I didn't feel awkward. I didn't. I felt at home. I felt like it was just wonderful. It was such a diverse group of ladies. We had teachers, I think we had lawyers, we had a mix of everything, nurses, but anyway, I felt at home. And like I said before, I was like the third oldest in the program, in that class. And I didn't even feel like I was the oldest. My body didn't move as good and it certainly didn't look as good as everybody else's, but I'll tell you what it worked.

Dr. Gonzalez: It worked. So, tell us about some of the things that you did during this program and what was meaningful about them?

Deanna: Every program, every day, every week was different. Every single week was different and it was just wonderful. You never really knew how you were going to feel or what you're going to do. We had a different person, a different speaker at every meeting. Sometimes we did belly dancing, which I wasn't very good at. I have big belly but didn't do much on the dancing. We were taught to eat correctly. We had people that showed us how to prepare our food, which we needed. Just a multitude, every week we had somebody that was different. We learned something new every week. And like I said, I've retained that knowledge. I think of it. There's not a day of my life that goes by that I don't think of something I learned in one

of those programs. One of those not programs, excuse me, one of those classes.

Dr. Gonzalez: Right.

Deanna: And I think it will stay with me my life. I don't know how much longer I'll live, but I know one thing, I think what I learned there will stay with me and I'll carry it through with me. It was something, it was unreal. And I'm sure the other people that were in the class feel the same as me. It was just unreal the way I carry that stuff with me. I think if I take a step, I want to look at my Fitbit. I want to see how many steps I've made today. And I'm so conscious now of what I need to do to be healthier.

Dr. Gonzalez: So, talk about those things, because you've already said that you are drinking much more water. What are some other changes that you've made in your life that are a result of attending the program? And for those of you listeners who don't understand, the program. It's a three-hour program every week. It has an hour of speakers talking about health, nutrition, mental health, physical health, how to access, the healthcare system. The second hour is usually spent on movement, different ways to actually move your body, to increase the mobility. And the third part is really our social support or motivational interviewing where the ladies come together, usually share what they've learned with the speaker and then talk about issues, related to their goals and what they want to change. So, talk to me a little bit about what else do you think you took away from Operation Change that has really stayed with you?

Deanna: The water is number one because I hated water. And number two is it just changed my mind. It was the mindset, my mind, it changed my whole way of thinking. It made me realize that if I'm going to continue to be productive or to be mobile or anything, I'm going to have to do what this program is

teaching me. We had a lot of togetherness there. We made friends. I feel like they're all my friends.

We started out with like 50 ladies and I think we only lost one. I actually think that's what the record was. Only one person dropped out and she was sick is, because she had to drop out. But I think we only lost one person. The greatest thing that I got from this was the way I think. It changed my way of thinking completely about what I do for my body, what I do to get through the day. Basically. That's what it did. It just changed my complete way of thinking.

Dr. Gonzalez: Well, I don't know if you're aware, but Hazard was our first rural program.

Deanna: It was. I wasn't aware of it. I was made aware of it. Yes, we are rural.

Dr. Gonzalez: Yes, you're in the mountains. Most of the other programs are more urban based. So, this was our first rural, attempt. And you ladies, really won the World Series is what I would say or the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Deanna: Thank you. We tried it. We certainly tried; we were so happy with it. We could have won any World Series. We could have done it.

Dr. Gonzalez: Now, did the other ladies share with you, why they felt like they wanted to come to the program or why you stuck together in the blue zone?

Deanna: Every week after everything, your group got together for a few minutes before we dismissed the class, and we would go over the things that we were getting out of it. And it was wonderful, everybody just shared their opinions of what was going on and what we could do and what we liked to

do. Believe it or not, I'm still in contact with a lot of those girls. We still talk about it, and what it's done for us.

Dr. Gonzalez: You talked about how you've changed and how it's changed your life. Do other people, like let's say your son, does he notice the change in you?

Deanna: Yes, he does. He loves it. He drives a truck. Before I started taking this course, this class, honestly, I could not get up in his truck. He would have a little stepping thing that we would all step on and get into his truck. And now, I can just pull myself up into his truck. Yes, he does. He was so sorry to see it end. And that's the one that you met. The one that passed away, he loved for me to go. He loved it because he said, "Mom, it has changed your personality. Don't you dare miss." And he said, "You need to go everyday, everytime it's there." He said, "You go." I took him to work and picked him up. And so, on that Thursday. I had to really run to get him and he said, "No, you go to your class. I can get home." Because we live like a half mile from it. He said, "I can make it to the house." Because he didn't have an automobile. Anyway, my children loved me in that class. They loved it.

Dr. Gonzalez: So, people saw the change. Your family saw the change in you, and you had a lot of support with them. And, and you also had the support of your team that you became close to.

Deanna: After getting involved in this and doing all these exercises and eating right and walking and drinking water, I had pride. I had pride in myself. And I think a lot of the girls did. We just felt, I mean that was it. It made you have pride in yourself.

Dr. Gonzalez: That's so wonderful. So, it helped you rediscover you and feel good about you.

Deanna: Right. Absolutely.

Dr. Gonzalez: That's a wonderful thing. So, when you were going through, the exercises or the movement sessions, which we like to call them, was there any session besides the belly dancing that you were trying to master that you really enjoyed and maybe tried to keep doing?

Deanna: I said the belly dancing, because it was fun. It was funny. Because not very many people are cut out to be belly dancers.

Dr. Gonzalez: That's true.

Deanna: None of us were, it was fun to watch. It was fun to try. We had dancing lessons. We learned to do, just steps and certain dances. You have to remember now I'm 74. It's been a few months. And I don't remember all that much, but yes, we did lots of things that were just good for us. And I can't really say one that I actually liked the best. I know the dancing lessons were really fun. And then we had a yoga session. That was, really major. You had a lot of stretching. I think the stretching exercises I did better than anything. I was the third oldest one in the class.

Dr. Gonzalez: You mentioned earlier about the Fitbit. So, did you learn anything about the Fitbit and how many steps you walked a day and when you started and when you ended?

Deanna: Listen. If I had a partner walking with me, they couldn't have been more, the Fitbit became a part of your body. It's what it does. I relied on it. Everybody did. I slept in it because it recorded your sleep. Every step you



made, it recorded that. Your heart rate. That Fitbit became a part of my body and I still use it. It's getting old, but I still use it.

Dr. Gonzalez: So, it made you aware of how your body was doing. Were you sleeping better?

Deanna: Yes, I was. And I am.

Dr. Gonzalez: So, you started moving more.

Deanna: Yes, I did.

Dr. Gonzalez: You started drinking more water. Do you think that, when your family said that your personality had changed a little bit, do you think, you let go of some of those old myths about I'm 74 and just should sit here? Because we create these scenarios in our heads sometimes. So, do you think that you were able to find, a more playful side of yourself or more willing to engage side of yourself?

Deanna: I learned that age is only a number. It's only a number. You can do whatever you try to do. If you work at it hard enough. I got a little bit of every something on everything we did. Certain things I didn't get very much out of it because my body didn't work that way, but I got something out of every exercise that we did. I know that I'm in better shape. I'm in better health. I look better. My personality changed. I was unhappy with myself and with everything. I was just unhappy. And, it just changes you when you start to take care of yourself and you decide, that you're a person, you want to do better. You want to live better. You will be healthier. And this program did that from the beginning in every aspect of life.

Dr. Gonzalez: Deana, what do you think was the magic potion or with the magic of the program? Can you pinpoint it? Because it sounds like it has such a dramatic impact on your life. You found more joy, your personality changed, you busted the myth that, I'm 74 and just have to sit here and can't do anything. Where, was that magic? What do you attribute that magic to?

Deanna: I can pinpoint one thing for sure that I saw that was magical were the people. This is not the people that was in the class. This is the people that helped with the class like you and Keisha and Betsy, you all made a difference with us. It was fun. You showed that we were human. You didn't care what we look like. You didn't care what shape we came in there as. But I'll tell you when we left, we were better people, but you all were wonderful the way you helped and encouraged us. And it was such well planned. It was probably the best plan thing that's ever come to Hazard. I've never seen anything like it. It was orchestrated. I'm telling you; it was the best thing that ever came to Hazard. We discussed this many times, some of the girls and I have. I've never seen anything like this, come here and succeed like you all did. And you girls the whole shebang. And Rose, we can't thank you enough. You and whoever it was that that did this because you did this for us all. And, it's just wonderful. That's a wonderful thing.

Dr. Gonzalez: You know, being part of this journey and your journey and Operation Change for us is very motivating. And for us, it just fills our heart with joy. And I remember the first day we arrived at Operation Change and everybody's feeling nervous and anxious, and I know nine weeks later I came back and oh, I felt like I was coming back home. And so, you, all of you were so grateful.

Deanna: We did. You were home.

Dr. Gonzalez: I was home. I was home and I was so grateful. So grateful to all of you for taking the chance, and giving the program a chance and then giving your all. Because the program wouldn't have been the program without you deciding I'm going to do this. And that was a big leap, Deana. It was a big leap.

Deanna: It was a big leap, but what was so wonderful was you all taking a chance on us bringing it to us and letting us do this. We didn't let you down. We did not because we worked hard at our little program and we had a wonderful graduation. And I mean, it was really a graduation.

Dr. Gonzalez: Yes.

Deanna: I even won an award.

Dr. Gonzalez: What was it, Deana?

Deanna: I was drinking 10 to 12 Diet Pepsi's a day. That's another thing I haven't told you, I don't drink Pepsi's anymore. I still haven't done it. And I was drinking 10 or 12 of those things a day.

Dr. Gonzalez: So that changed you and it changed your body. It changed your health?

Deanna: It did. It changed my habits. It did.

Dr. Gonzalez: And I'm sure that wasn't easy to do, Deana.

Deanna: There was nothing easy about it and there's nothing easy about it, but you did it and you did it joyfully. It was fun to change. It really was. The

changes we made were fun. Trust me, I'm still not good at all these exercises and stuff, but I can move. I can get in and out of the vehicle, my legs move. I told this at class, I was ashamed to come home in my car because my neighbor next door sits on her porch or in her garage. And I was ashamed for her to see me try to get out of my vehicle because it was a struggle. It's not a struggle now.

Dr. Gonzalez:        You really are a wonderful example of Operation Change program, taking the messages, using the learnings, the teachings, and then the support that you had from the team in the blue zone to change your life and come out better at the other end. So, if you were to wrap it up and, if you wanted to say some final words about Operation Change and your journey, what would they be, Deana?

Deanna:        Okay, this is how I feel about it. If you ever get a chance go. It changed my life. It changed my body. It changed my way of thinking. It was the best thing I've ever done. It's the best gift I ever gave myself. And I think anybody, I don't care how old you are, if you're fat and can just barely move a foot. At least when you're in this program, you're moving, you're going to move something. But it was the best gift that was ever brought to me. And that I participated in this rural area of Hazard, Kentucky, and we are in the mountains. I don't live in a holler, but I live in the mountains. And you don't see much of this. We have gyms and everything, but this is one of the better things. This was just for women. And it was for women, I don't know, it gave us a new outlook on life and we competed with each other. Friendly competition, but we still competed. I didn't want to be the last with my steps. I wanted to get in there with all the rest of them. No matter how old I was. No, I can't, I can't say enough good things about this program.

Dr. Gonzalez:        Well, Deana, I'm so glad we've had the chance.

Deanna: I'll be talking about this probably until the day I die.

Dr. Gonzalez: I'm so happy to hear that you were happy with the program. I'm so happy to hear that the program changed. Sometimes we spend a lot of money on healthcare and we invest a lot of money in things and medicines, and sometimes the answers can be so simple. The answers, that come from bonding together, finding joy, making commitments to each other, working together, being exposed to new information and knowledge. Then just the group alone, just encouraging each other to try to make a healthier self without judging anybody. Because that's the other thing I took away from your messages. Nobody was judging anybody. Everybody was there, they were going to do their thing, whatever their thing was that they needed to get done. And nobody judged them. Everybody was supporting everybody along the way.

Deanna: It was just wonderful. It was just wonderful. I miss it. I miss it. It would be wonderful to be able to do this every week of your life.

Dr. Gonzalez: We were hoping we could start up again. But COVID-19 has derailed us in some ways but keep doing what you're doing.

Deanna: We had a group of people ready to come. They were so anxious again. And then the COVID did it.

Dr. Gonzalez: Yeah, yeah. But thank the Lord that you're healthier, your blood work is better. You can move around better, and I'm so grateful that you joined us on the journey, with Operation Change. And I'm so glad that it has helped you. And, I only wish you all the best, Deana. And I want to thank you for talking with me today. I really do.

Deanna: It was so good to see you again today.

Dr. Gonzalez: Yes.

Deanna: We fell in love with you.

Dr. Gonzalez: All you ladies have a special place in my heart. That's my other home, Hazard. Again, I want to thank you for talking with me. I'm going to wrap this up and thank our listeners for joining us on this edition of the Health Disparities Podcast. I hope you find this thought provoking and maybe even inspiring from all of us at Movement is Life and the Health Disparities Podcast, stay safe, stay well. And join us again soon. Deana, I love you. I love you. I love Hazard.

Deanna: I love you too. Hazard loves you. Bye-bye, everybody.

(End of recording)