The Power Is In You
American Red Cross Minority Recruitment

Greetings from the Executive Director

Your local American Red Cross is embarking on an important mission to increase minority blood donations in the metro Atlanta area and beyond. To be successful, we need your help.

Last year in Georgia, less than 1 percent of the 1.2 million African Americans who are eligible to give blood actually donated. That’s something we hope to change by increasing education and awareness. We will promote the importance of minority blood donations – whether it be for the sickle cell patient who might avoid transfusion reactions by receiving blood from a fellow minority or for a trauma victim who desperately needs Type O blood.

With help from an advisory board of local minority business and community leaders, we hope to collect 8,000 pints of blood at minority blood drives, particularly at historically black colleges and at minority churches and businesses.

We hope you will join us in our effort to increase minority donations in the metro Atlanta area and beyond. We know that with support from each of you, we can reach our goals and touch thousands of lives.

Together, we can save a life.

J. Chris Hrouda
Executive Director
Southern Region

Red Cross Begins Recruitment Effort

With the help and support of Atlanta’s African-American leaders, the American Red Cross Blood Services Southern Region kicked off its new minority recruitment initiative in February.

The event brought together Red Cross officials and about 100 of Atlanta’s most influential minority leaders. Community support will be vital to the minority recruitment campaign, which is aimed at increasing minority blood donations by 8,000 in the next year – primarily at African-American colleges, churches and businesses.

Luncheon participants received greetings from the staffs of Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes and Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin. Red Cross National diversity officials also attended the event.

The minority initiative is part of a national American Red Cross effort begun in 1998 to be inclusive and reach more minority donors. National leaders called the Atlanta initiative “the right people at the right place at the right time” to make a difference in patients’ lives.

“We must build teams and partnerships … to ensure a better life to and for those who live with the pain of sickle cell anemia in their everyday lives. We must tell their story. Together, we can save a life,” said Judith Ostronic, National Chairman, Biomedical Services.

Participants met 8-year-old Zari Holley, who has sickle cell disease. Zari’s mother, Benita Jones, challenged African-American leaders to sponsor blood drives and help Zari and other patients.

“Giving blood is the most important step you will make for a sickle cell child. Blood transfusions have saved her life,” Benita said. “We all know it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to save their lives.”

In support for the initiative, staff from Mayor Franklin’s office vowed to plan a blood drive.

In closing, advisory board members urged minority leaders to serve as ambassadors for the Red Cross to help increase minority blood donation in the metro Atlanta area.

“We know you have the power to help us to reach the goal. You always think someone else will make it happen, but we need to make it happen,” said Minority Advisory Board Co-Chair Leona Barr-Davenport.
Diversity & the Red Cross ... A Proud History

The American Red Cross has a proud history of diversity beginning with founder Clara Barton, who encouraged minorities and women to take part in early Red Cross organizational efforts despite societal pressures and prejudices.

Celebrated abolitionist Frederick Douglass was among the first members of the American Red Cross and helped Barton win American acceptance into the International Red Cross movement.

The Red Cross hired its first African-American nurse – Frances Elliott Davis – in 1917 and shortly thereafter trained about 1,800 African American nurses for duty with the military in World War I.

The distinguished scientist Charles Drew served as the first medical director of a Red Cross blood bank. Dr. Drew’s pioneering research in the field of blood plasma preservation and storage saved the lives of countless servicemen during World War II.

In 1942, the American Red Cross began working to more actively involve African Americans in its war work and invited representatives of 13 organizations to participate in extensive talks on how blacks could best help the Red Cross meet the nation’s needs. The activities were a great success and led to the breaking down of racial barriers within the organization.

Throughout the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the American Red Cross continues its efforts to include and serve members of the diverse communities that make up our nation. This commitment is seen through a diversity grant program that supports the development of innovative programs that promote diversity outreach efforts in areas where there is an identified gap in participation levels.

With continual commitment and the support of the community at large, the American Red Cross and the Southern Region will continue to strive to meet its goal of total diversity in people, programs and services.

Red Cross National Officers Lend Support

In support for the local Red Cross minority recruitment initiative, American Red Cross national diversity officers attended the kickoff celebration. In photo above left, (L to R) Southern Region Diversity Consultant Edith Millsaps, Red Cross Biomedical Services Diversity Officer Merle Schneider, National Chair of Biomedical Services Judith Ostronic, Recruitment Operations Supervisor Cynthia Smith and Red Cross Board of Governors member E.R. Mitchell Jr. of Atlanta pose at the kickoff event. In photo above middle, Cynthia Smith, Advisory Board member James Holmes talk with Red Cross Chief Diversity Officer Tony Polk. In photo above right, Polk addresses luncheon participants.
Benita Jones knew something was wrong when her normally happy 7-year-old started to complain of intense headaches one day. She rushed her daughter, Zari, to the hospital, where she found Zari had suffered a stroke.

Zari miraculously recovered from the stroke with few side effects, but years of fighting sickle cell anemia have left her lungs filled with scar tissue. Zari has fought pneumonia seven times in two years. She now needs blood transfusions once a month to stay healthy and in school.

Blood donors are the only source of life-saving blood for patients like Zari.

“I gave blood in high school, but I never understood the impact until Zari started needing blood,” her mother Benita says.

Sickle cell anemia causes serious health complications including strokes, pain, infections and bone damage. The disease is most common in African Americans: one in 600 African Americans has sickle cell disease and one in 12 carry the genetic trait for it, which means they can pass it on to their children.

Like many African Americans who have sickle cell disease, Zari has unique blood traits. Blood from donors of similar ethnic origin is more likely to match Zari’s and is less likely to be rejected or cause additional complications.

Because lifesaving blood can only come from people, patients like Zari need donors like you.

“I want people just to realize that for people like Zari, it’s a life or death situation,” Benita says. “Your blood could save a life.”

In celebration of the new minority recruitment initiative, the recruitment advisory board commissioned a special Power Is In You painting. The 30-by-40 inch oil painting, designed and painted by prominent African-American artist Kennith Humphrey, was unveiled at the kickoff in February.

The inspiration for the painting came from Minority Recruitment Advisory Board Co-Chair Bernice Franklin, as a way to raise awareness of the need to donate blood in the minority community.

“We wanted to show people all with the same goal and the same focus and the same togetherness. United, we can do this,” said Ms. Franklin, president and CEO of the Harwen Group Insurance Brokers. “This shows that people in all walks of life in our community can give and that’s the least we can do.”

Ms. Franklin turned to her friend and client Harvey Newton, president and CEO of Dove Mailing. Within minutes, Newton – a Red Cross supporter and blood donor - agreed to underwrite the cost of the painting.

Ms. Franklin’s friend Louise Todd, who runs the art gallery Fine Arts by Todd, helped select Humphrey as the artist and worked on the concept.

Special prints were given to Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, Governor Roy Barnes and East Point Mayor Patsy Jo Hilliard.

“We wanted to create something people could keep and enjoy. This is sort of like a call to action. The whole community is moving in this piece,” Ms. Todd said.

Did You Know?

- More than 1,200 blood donors are needed each weekday to supply the needs of more than 140 hospitals and health care facilities in Georgia.
- Most healthy people who are at least 17 and weigh at least 110 pounds can donate blood.
- The need for blood is constant. Blood lasts only 42 days. Platelets, which help blood to clot, last only five days.
- You can donate blood every 56 days – or up to six times per year. You can donate platelets every two weeks.
- Giving blood is safe and sterile. The process takes about an hour.
- In the United States, someone needs blood every two seconds.
You’re Important!

- African-American donors provide the best chance of survival for black patients with rare blood types or those who need repeated transfusions for sickle cell anemia, heart disease, kidney disease or trauma. Blood that closely matches a patient’s is less likely to be rejected.

- Of the 5 percent of eligible Americans who donate blood nationally, less than 1 percent are African American.

- Increasing minority donations is vital because blood types O and B – the types of about 70 percent of African Americans – are the blood types most in demand. Those types are also the first to run out during a blood shortage.

- Some African-American patients have rare blood types like U-Negative or Duffy-Negative. Because these types are rarely found in other ethnic groups, these patients depend on other African Americans to supply this rare blood.

- One in 12 African Americans carry the trait for sickle cell disease and one in 652 African Americans have sickle cell anemia. African Americans are also at greater risk than whites for cancer, heart disease and birth complications – all of which often require blood transfusions.

- You can donate blood even if you have:
  - High blood pressure controlled with medication (if blood pressure is within guidelines on donation day)
  - Diabetes controlled with medication
  - Sickle cell trait

- Reasons some people don’t give blood include:
  - Not asked
  - Don’t have time
  - Not eligible to give
  - Don’t know there is a need

The Power Is In You to make a difference in the lives of many in your community!