

Stamford wraps up door-to-door vaccination campaign as inoculation rates top 75%



STAMFORD — Beverly Reyes spoke with people outside Flamboyant Chicho Cocina in the Cove neighborhood of the city, holding a stack of flyers with information about nearby COVID-19 vaccine clinics.

Speaking in Spanish, she told them that she worked with Family Centers. Most said they had already been vaccinated, except for one man who took a look at a flyer, chatted with Reyes and told her he planned to go to one of the walk-up clinics.

Reyes — wearing a blue Family Centers T-shirt, a mask and sneakers — had spent the last hour and a half walking up and down a few of the streets in the area and knocking on doors. Nearly all of the residents who came to their doors said they were already vaccinated.

If no one answered, Reyes would leave a flyer wedged between a screen door or propped up against a door knob. The flyers noted that the vaccines were free and no insurance or identification was needed to get them. She made handwritten notes with messages like: “Sorry we missed you! Stay safe!”

Door-to-door canvassing by community health workers like Reyes began in May as part of the “Stamford Vaccine Equity Partnership,” an effort between Family Centers, the city, [Stamford Health](#) and Community Health Center. The partnership’s initiatives have been funded by grants from the state, the federal government and the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation.

The last day of the door-to-door campaign was Aug. 31. Jennifer Smith, the supervisor of Family Center's community health workers, said the outreach was focused on [neighborhoods considered more socially vulnerable](#) — which had some of the lowest vaccination rates in the city back in May.

For instance, in census tracts roughly corresponding to the West Side and the Cove, vaccination rates were about 60 percent or less. Now, they are [over 75 percent](#).

In other words, less privileged neighborhoods have “caught up to other neighborhoods that are more affluent and therefore have had more access and less hesitancy to start with,” Smith said, saying that much of the credit should go to the door-to-door canvassing efforts.

“I think the numbers really tell the success of this program this summer,” Smith said.

The goal, she said, was not only to provide information about where people could get the vaccine but also to help residents “talk through and think through the questions and hesitations that they have had about COVID and about the vaccines.

“Everyone brings their life experience to that decision, to that choice, and so for me and I think especially in talking with all the community health workers, every day was such an insight into just the range of opinions overall,” Smith said. Most people were “concerned about COVID, concerned about getting sick and were looking for that comfort in knowing where to go, that they could go get vaccinated, or to get those questions answered.”

On the last day of the program, Reyes struck up conversations with people who were outside during the early evening, whether they were standing in a driveway, sitting on a porch or in the street working on a car.

Some of the conversations with residents haven't been easy, said Reyes, who grew up in Stamford and recently graduated from Tufts University.

“I mean, there's definitely people who are totally against the vaccine for whatever reason,” she said. Some have told her that they don't trust the government or don't trust the science.

Others have been thankful. Information about local vaccine clinics is [available on the city government's website](#), but Reyes noted that some residents may not have access to the internet.

“It's nice when you are able to reach those people who definitely need the information,” she said.

Smith, the supervisor, said community health workers knocked on the doors of more than 14,000 households overall. The workers would keep track of the homes where no one answered and return on another day.

Dennis Torres, Family Centers' chief health officer, said the community health worker program started with the help of a [grant from the Connecticut Health Foundation](#). The focus at first was on [helping people who were quarantining](#).

In the spring, Family Centers brought on Smith for the vaccination effort.

“Her model included training for the community health workers not only on COVID but on canvassing, on engaging people in conversation, on what to do when people push back or how to have these hard conversations with perfect strangers,” Torres said.

Sometimes a person would want to speak with a medical professional about the vaccine, he said, so a community health worker would take down the person's number, and a doctor or nurse practitioner

from Family Centers would give him or her a call.

Another part of the program was known as “street heat.” Community health workers would walk down the streets surrounding a pop-up vaccination site, tell people the event was going on and offer to walk them there.

Community health workers have also participated in the Vaccine Equity Partnership’s [barbershop and salon initiative](#).

Smith said that it’s getting more and more difficult to find people who haven’t been vaccinated yet — “but it’s a good problem to have.”

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