

Vanessa Briggs, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Brandywine Health Foundation

Kristen Stenson 26 March 2019

For more than 15 years, the Brandywine Health Foundation located in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, works to improve the health and well-being of people. The foundation provides program grants and fosters community partnerships in an effort to develop sustainable solutions that will promote civic engagement within communities. The foundation's guiding principles: stewardship, equity, wellness, collaboration, and leadership -- which is the focus of the current leadership of the foundation.

Vanessa Briggs is a native to Philadelphia, and a renowned leader in the field of public health. Ms. Briggs applies her expertise to working with communities to solve complex problems through multi-sectoral strategic partnerships, community engagement, health promotion and education, and disease management interventions. Prior to joining Brandywine Health Foundation, Ms. Briggs served as Vice President of Community Health in Maryland and Executive Director for Health Promotion

Council -- which is an affiliate of Public Health Management Corporation -- for 15 years. During her time at the Health Promotion Council, Briggs led a team and enhanced the organization's budget three-fold, while developing and leading several large-scale regional and national childhood health equity initiatives. Briggs' prowess optimizes the capacity of nonprofit organizations by building multi-sector partnerships between health providers, policymakers, and community members.

The Briggs Leadership Model

As a female leader Briggs speaks highly of her male mentors, appreciating when they pushed her to be assertive, over-prepared, and confident. She believes to be successful you must work twice as hard as the next person, and women must work three times as hard as men. Briggs is passionate, authentic, and driven to affect social change. The racism Briggs faces daily motivates her to stay true to herself, and only enforces her drive to be successful. She authentically engages with each person, whether it be a board, community, or staff member, because she acknowledges the power of human connection.

Ms. Briggs believes that as a leader, it is critical to establish strong relationships with all board members, ensuring they feel of value, and to keep them informed, engaged, and competent on the work of the organization. She aims to keep her foundation diverse, placing

significance on maintaining mutual respect and valuing diverse experiences. Briggs leads the culture of the organization with her values of stewardship, diversity/inclusion, and authentic engagement. The Brandywine Health Foundation's mission and Brigg's values align enabling her to effectively drive a culture of civic responsibility and engagement.

What Briggs Brings to the Brandywine Health Foundation

Briggs is approaching her two-year anniversary of serving as the CEO and President of the Brandywine Health Foundation (BHF). As she was acclimating herself to the organization and getting to know the community, she was simultaneously thinking of areas where the Foundation can be strengthened, and its vision fortified. In terms of revenue, Briggs believes it is incumbent for BHF to diversify alliances and partnerships that relate to different sectors. It is in BHF's best interest to view grantees as partners, while also seeking strategic partnerships with their respective governance to leverage additional support.

Briggs sees health not as one aspect, but as an interdisciplinary necessity. With that perspective, she envisions BHF to look beyond just improving access to health, while identifying and addressing the causes of health disparities. For example, the "Greening Coatesville Initiative" is a strategic plan that views parks and

recreation as an investment, rather than a cost. To improve physical activity, BHF explored current systems and concluded that there was a need for a space to make social cohesion, fitness, and nature accessible for all residents. BHF saw the importance of the “Greening Coatesville Initiative” to be developed, and uplifted the voices of target constituencies, residents and local leaders.

Briggs has a new vision for BHF; implementing a multisector approach to address the quality of life experienced by the Coatesville community. The approach centers on the need for equity and engages constituents in the planning process. Through cross sector partnerships, food accessibility, parks and recreation, and advocating for quality health promotion and health care; Briggs’ progressive vision is creating an optimistic and resilient future for the community of Coatesville and the Brandywine Health Foundation.

Author bio

Kristen Stenson is a second-year student pursuing dual master’s degrees in social work and non-profit leadership and management at The University of Pennsylvania, where she also works as a Social Media Assistant at The Wharton School.