



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

DIABETES SISTERS

A Grassroots Movement Driven by a Community of Peers

Mission

DiabetesSisters is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the health and quality of life of women with diabetes, and to advocate on their behalf.

Core Beliefs

DiabetesSisters believes that all women with diabetes should have access to a healthy support system that includes peers with diabetes. A healthy peer support system provides encouragement, empowerment, and education with the purpose of helping each woman reach her full potential in life.

Peer support is an invaluable resource to people with diabetes - especially women with diabetes. Often, it isn't until a person is diagnosed with a chronic illness that the value of peer support is realized. Over the last five years (since the founding of DiabetesSisters) my "Sisters" with diabetes have enriched my life with wisdom, advice, and insight far beyond what I received through the traditional medical system.

Brandy Barnes, MSW
Founder and CEO, DiabetesSisters

[DiabetesSisters](#) was founded in January 2008 by [Brandy Barnes](#), a woman who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as a teenager. In addition to being faced with many obstacles, including social isolation, she was amazed how little information about or services for women with diabetes were available and how the issue seemed invisible within the women's health community. Her high-risk pregnancy further illuminated the limited number of resources available to women with diabetes during important life stages, such as puberty, pregnancy, and menopause. This experience convinced Brandy of the need to develop unique resources and support programs for women with diabetes.

DiabetesSisters helps women of all ages with all types of diabetes live healthier, fuller lives. The organization is managed by women who are living with diabetes, giving them an insider perspective on the issues faced by this community. DiabetesSisters recognizes that emotional and peer support is vitally important to a woman's overall wellbeing. Through DiabetesSisters' education and support services, women form a special bond and can freely share information, helpful tips, and stories of hope.

Peer support interventions featured in previous Peers for Progress program spotlights have typically been organized and administered by clinical practices. In contrast, DiabetesSisters is the model of a grassroots movement that is driven by a community of peers.

DiabetesSisters Peer Support Resources

PODS Meetups

PODS (Part of DiabetesSisters) Meetups are a nationwide signature program of DiabetesSisters. Originally piloted in central North Carolina in 2010, they have now [spread to many cities](#) throughout the U.S. and Canada. There are currently 26 PODS locations in total and the goal is to reach 40 by the end of the year.

PODS monthly Meetups are held in a DiabetesSisters member's home or at a community location that provides privacy (such as a local church meeting room or a public library meeting room). The meetings are informal, held on a week night, and generally last for 1.5-2 hours. The purpose of PODS meetups is to provide a safe, nurturing environment for women with diabetes to take time away from others and truly focus on their health. In addition, PODS meeting participants have the opportunity to offer and receive informative and supportive advice from other women who are living with diabetes. PODS Meetups are open to women of all ages with all types of diabetes.

To jumpstart a PODS Meetup group, DiabetesSisters provides a training manual and online training for prospective group leaders. The leaders are provided 13

topic modules including educational handouts related to each topic. Before delving into health topics around diabetes, these groups spend a few meetings just getting to know each other. This structure acknowledges the importance of building rapport and trust between peers as a necessary first step to effective peer support.

Brandy Barnes understands that it's sometimes difficult to start up a PODS Meetup. Not every PODS Meetup is guaranteed to be successful. In some cases, providing training and resources to group leaders isn't enough. That's why in-person training sessions are offered at the annual conference for women that want to become PODS leaders. Getting women to join the groups can also be a challenge without adequate marketing and networking efforts.

Recently, the [UNC Center for Diabetes Translation Research to Reduce Health Disparities](#) has accepted a proposal to provide funding for a study to evaluate the effectiveness of PODS Meetups. Dr. Laura Young is the principal investigator of the study that is set to begin on April 1st.

[Read more](#) about PODS Meetups in the February–March 2013 issue of Diabetes Health Magazine.

SisterMatch

Developed by DiabetesSisters and [Ayogo](#), [SisterMatch](#) is the first matchmaking social game of its kind. By blending a comprehensive matchmaking algorithm with the fun and engagement of social games, SisterMatch aims to bring like-minded women together for support, mentorship and knowledge exchange.



Using SisterMatch, women earn quilt blocks by participating in knowledge tests and personality quizzes. Each woman's unique quilt is then woven into the intricate Community Quilt. SisterMatch's innovation lies in its matchmaking algorithm, which gathers information about members' attitudes, personalities and preferences, and then delivers each Sister her best "SisterMatches". Using this matchmaking process, women with diabetes will be able to build a list of compatible peer support friends, and begin new friendships while also learning helpful information about healthy living in a fun, interactive way.

SisterMatch was introduced to the DiabetesSisters community in November of 2011, during diabetes awareness month. The first 400 women to enter the system

completed 1,900 activities and wrote 2,500 stories to share with the community. As of August 2012, the SisterMatch community completed over 17,300 individual activity questions. Feedback from DiabetesSisters members indicates that they are enjoying and using the program, and that it is helping them find their best matches. SisterMatch has done a great deal to help women find Sisters online, but DiabetesSisters also encourages online Sisters to meet in person during its annual conferences.

[Read more](#) about Ayogo's process of designing the innovative software behind SisterMatch.

Annual Weekend for Women Conference

DiabetesSisters organizes annual [Weekend for Women Conferences](#) to educate, inspire, and transform women's view of their diabetes. Two conferences will be held this year.

Raleigh, NC
May 3-5, 2013
Raleigh Sheraton
[Full Conference Details](#)

San Francisco, CA
October 4-6, 2013
Embassy Suites
[Full Conference Details](#)

During the conference, participants will hear from diabetes experts and inspiring guest speakers. Women will get to experience peer support first hand and hopefully come to embrace this philosophy as a way of engagement and empowerment. Prospective PODS Meetup leaders will receive hands on training to help them launch peer support groups after they go back home. Conferences also offer the perfect opportunity for women connected through SisterMatch to meet in person. Special conference programming includes the signature Partner's Perspective Program, which educates partners about diabetes in order to help them better understand and support the women in their lives.

DiabetesSisters' Stories

Watch this short video to see the women that make DiabetesSisters such a great community:

