Sox for Socks: Health care professionals and Red Sox Foundation collect thousands of socks for the homeless

Photo: Nathanael King

Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program partnered with the Red Sox Foundation to collect 5,100 pairs of socks and $2,100 in their Sox for Socks charity drive at Fenway on June 3-5.

BHCHP hands out clean socks to homeless patients in their 60 locations and on the street.

Many homeless people walk ten or more miles daily, according to Christy Xaysanasongkham, a nurse at the Barbara McInnis House, BHCHP’s medical respite facility. Their socks can...
become wet due to sweat or weather conditions. Unchanged wet socks put patients at risk for a number of medical conditions including trench foot, fungal infections, frostbite, and blisters which can lead to infection.

BHCHP invited attendees of the weekend’s three Red Sox games against the Toronto Blue Jays to bring new, white socks to booths just past the entrance of each of Fenway Park’s gates. BHCHP staff and their guests at the collection areas told spectators about the drive as they entered the park.

This was the collection’s eleventh year, and the sock count exceeded last year’s by six hundred pairs.

Street Team Outreach Coordinator Beckie Tachick said offering a change of socks to a person, in addition to preventing disease, can develop trust with people unfamiliar with BHCHP’s team.

“It’s a great way to start building caring relationships,” said Tachick.

Preexisting diseases like diabetes can mean that some patients are unable to feel their feet, and thus unable to notice warning signs for other conditions.

Xaysanasongkham recommends that homeless people check their feet daily for blisters and other complications, or have a friend check for them. Those without access to a clean change of socks should try to take off their shoes and socks to let them air out for a portion of the day.

Xaysanasongkham said a good portion of patients in the Barbara McInness House come in for a problem with their feet, many of which could be prevented with clean socks. A day doesn’t go by without at least one patient turning to medical respite for a foot problem.

The New England Sports Network aired public service announcements about the drive and interviewed BHCHP’s CEO, Barry Bock, on the field before Friday’s game, according to Linda Wood-O’Connor, BHCHP’s director of development.

The Red Sox Foundation primarily publicized the weekend drive largely through social media, said Assistant Director of Marketing and Development at the Foundation, Justin Trettyman.

“[BHCHP is] an amazing organization doing amazing work, helping an underserved population of people who for whatever reason are in a position where they could use some assistance,” Trettyman said.

The Red Sox Foundation has also made direct monetary donations to BHCHP.

BHCHP accepts sock donations year round from numerous corporate and community sponsors.

Gentle Giant Moving Company collected, briefly stored, and transported the socks as one of the services in their Charitable Foundation. Niles Kuronen, who works in Gentle Giant’s
marketing and the Charitable Foundation, said the company’s arrangement with Sox for Socks began in 2008.

The socks were permanently stored at St. Francis House and BHCHP’s main location.

The Red Sox lost their Friday and Sunday games, but won on Saturday.

*All photos: Nathanael King*