Breast Cancer in Eleuthera
+ 300-500 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed each year in the Bahamas.
+ Average age of diagnosis in the Bahamas: 42.
+ Many Bahamian women only catch the disease when it is in later, harder to treat stages.
+ Past research suggests Bahamian women are at an increased risk for breast cancer because of a genetic predisposition and the increasing Westernization of the Bahamian lifestyle.
+ Eleutheran women face the added burden of having to travel to Nassau for screening.
+ Cost, inconvenience, fear, and cultural barriers create an environment where women are not actively taking care of their breast health.

Project Overview
+ Community needs assessment carried out over the course of six weeks.
+ Research team included graduate students from Emory University along with the Community Outreach Coordinator (COC) from The One Eleuthera Foundation.
+ Sample included a total of 180 women representing each settlement on Eleuthera, Spanish Wells, and Harbour Island.
+ Surveys were used to identify any gaps in or barriers to breast cancer knowledge.
+ Post-surveying, the team gave a short presentation about breast cancer, breast health, and the services available via the Cancer Society of Eleuthera (ie: Family Island Mammogram Screening, FIMS).
+ Project Goal: to provide data that can inform recommendations for the COC’s work.

Findings
The island is not homogenous. Depending on where on the island women live their education, needs, concerns, and access to resources will vary.

Trusted messengers are an essential means of spreading information on the island. This includes doctors and nurses for health information and friends and family for events and activities on the island.

Women want to be a part of the CSE and learn from it, but need to be met where they are, especially in areas where resources are scarce.

FIMS participants reported positive experiences in being a part of the program. They felt it was a supportive environment that encouraged bonding.

In general, there is a lack of awareness and a minimal sense of urgency about breast health. There are also misconceptions about the risk factors for breast cancer.

69% of the women surveyed said they could pay up to $100 of their own money for a mammogram.

Fear and misconception are powerful forces keeping women from actively getting mammograms.

Nurses on the island have good knowledge of breast cancer and the CSE.

Recommendations
For education and community engagement programs, divide the island into three regions (North, Central, and South) and create tailored programming.

Create and empower trusted messengers by investing in the ongoing health education of the COC and developing a network of women to represent the CSE in their own settlements.

Establish quarterly meetings or events in each region that bring education to the women. Quarterly meetings allow more planning time for all and would keep the COC’s workload manageable.

Foster a sense of community and bonding whenever possible when creating and running educational events.

Use the quarterly meetings to improve women’s awareness of breast health issues. Learn from existing programs doing breast health education in low- and middle-resource areas.

Explore having women contribute to the cost of their mammograms/travel and possibly increase the number of women who can participate in the FIMS program.

Create programs that encourage women to support each other and debunk any myths about breast cancer and the screening process.

Continue to foster positive relationships and open communication with nurses and clinic workers to keep them up to date on research and CSE services.