



# COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

BLUE ZONES PROJECT FORT WORTH  
NORTH TEXAS HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**Spring 2022**

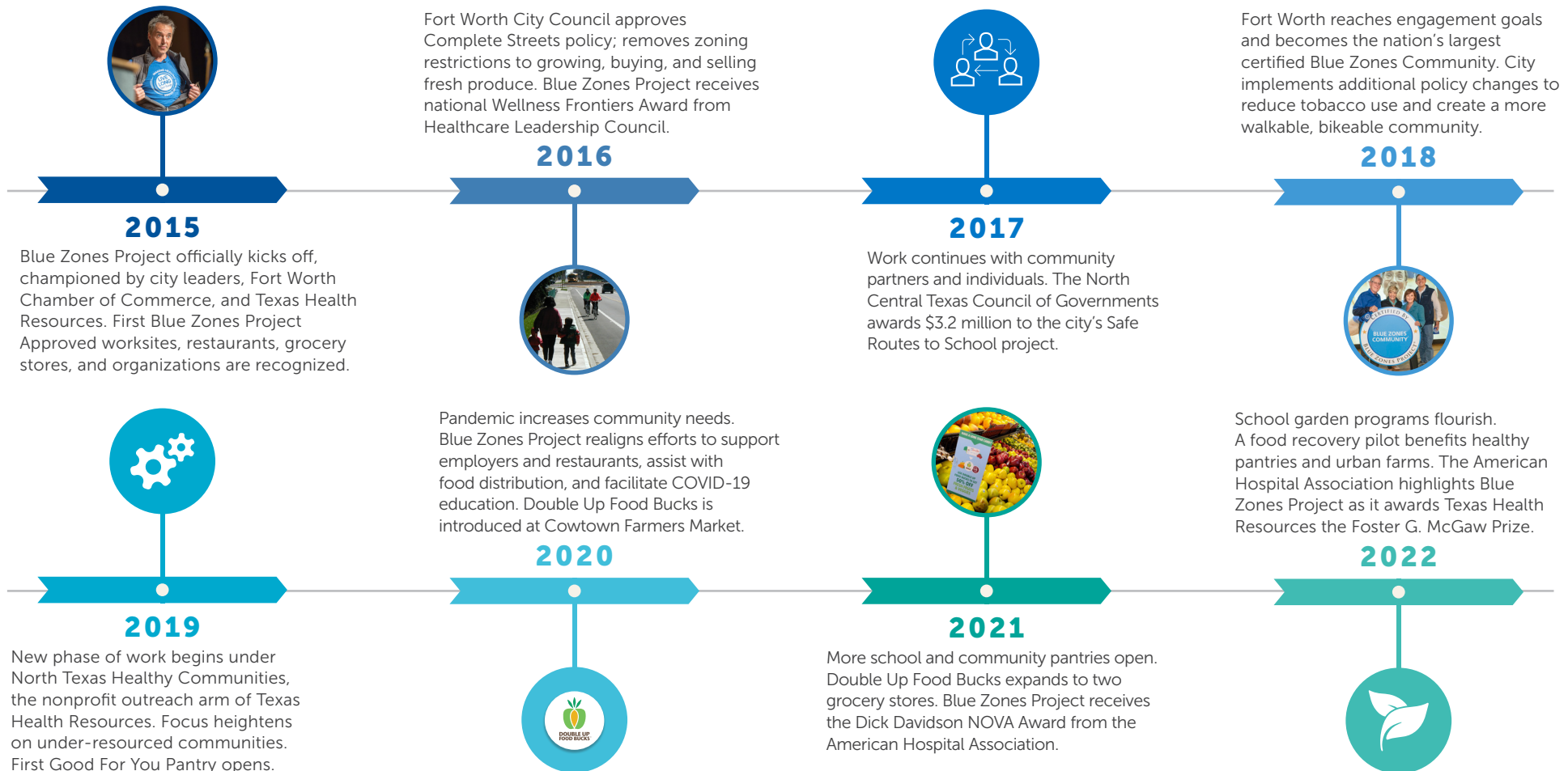


# THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT FORT WORTH JOURNEY

Blue Zones Project is a community-led well-being improvement initiative that partners with businesses, schools, community leaders, and residents to make healthy choices easier. More than 95,000 individuals and nearly 500 groups and organizations have joined forces to support well-being best practices that lead to longer, better lives.

“ Blue Zones Project Fort Worth is a testament to the power and effectiveness of collective impact. We have seen tremendous improvement in the health and well-being of our community and its residents and we look forward to continuing that journey with our community partners. ”

*Barclay Berdan, FACHE, Chief Executive Officer  
Texas Health Resources*

Dear Friends,

Fort Worth is a place where people work together to achieve great things. There is no better example of that than the tremendous progress our community has made to improve the well-being of those who live, work, and play here.

In 2014, Fort Worth ranked 185th out of 190 major metropolitan cities in the Gallup Well-Being Index. City and community leaders sought to change that by bringing in Blue Zones Project to implement best practices from areas of the world where people live the longest with less chronic disease.

In partnership with employers, schools, restaurants, neighborhood groups, community centers, faith-based communities, and individuals, we worked to make healthy choices easier. By 2018, Fort Worth's well-being ranking rose to 31st in the nation and our city became the nation's largest certified Blue Zones Community. We celebrated our successes and got back to work, focusing on under-resourced communities.

Blue Zones Project now operates under the umbrella of North Texas Healthy Communities, a nonprofit arm of Texas Health Resources, whose mission is to improve the health of the people in the communities it serves. Our work is guided by evidence-based practices and supported by partners throughout the community.

Together, we are focused on systems change to improve access to fresh food for all residents. We support nutrition education and school and community gardens, and we've delivered over 665,850 pounds of fruits and vegetables to communities in need. We piloted a successful program that diverts produce waste from landfills to benefit healthy food pantries and provide compost for urban farmers.

We introduced Mental Health First Aid training to give individuals and employers the tools to support mental wellness. We supported policy changes and established programs to make it easier to move naturally by walking, biking, and taking extra steps. And we continue to partner with hundreds of Blue Zones Project Approved organizations to support health and well-being.

I hope these stories will leave you feeling proud of the work we are doing together. With your support, we are creating real, sustainable change that will have a lasting impact on well-being for generations to come.



Matt Dufrene  
Vice President  
Texas Health Resources, Blue Zones Project



**368**

## **APPROVED AND PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS**

Hundreds of community partners have committed to better well-being by becoming Blue Zones Project Approved through implementation of Blue Zones Project programs and practices, including: 155 worksites, 51 schools, 66 restaurants, 20 grocery stores, and 16 faith-based organizations. An additional 60 neighborhood associations and businesses are Blue Zones Project Participating Organizations.

# MAKING FRESH PRODUCE MORE AFFORDABLE

The research is clear. More fruits and vegetables on our plates means less chronic disease and better well-being. The problem: many families lack access to fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables.

In 2020, Blue Zones Project brought in Double Up Food Bucks, which allows anyone eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to double their buying power when purchasing fresh produce at participating locations. Initial funding supported a pilot program at Cowtown Farmers Market. With support from G.E. Foodland, Inc., a North Texas area grocery retailer, the program expanded to two Foodland grocery stores and one Elrod's Cost Plus market.

The program allows anyone with a Lone Star Card to receive 50% off fresh produce, up to \$10 per day. Blue Zones Project also works with Tarrant Area Food Bank and other partners to support a Neighborhood Farmers Market initiative, expanding Double Up Food Bucks benefits across Tarrant County.

As grocery costs continue to rise, Double Up Food Bucks helps reach people where they already shop, and increase produce consumption by making it simple, convenient, and affordable.



## DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS: A Snapshot (May 2020 – May 2022)

**\$215,000** IN INCENTIVES FOR FRUIT & VEGETABLE PURCHASES

**32,000** TRANSACTIONS ACROSS FOUR LOCATIONS



“

We've seen a tremendous increase in produce sales thanks to Double Up Food Bucks, and it's great to know families are benefiting from this program. We've had to grow more crops to meet the need!



”

*Gregory Joel, Farm Manager  
Opal's Farm*



“

The Double Up Food Bucks initiative advances our supermarket's overall mission to feed families for life.



Don Benefield  
Executive Vice President  
G.E. Foodland, Inc.

”

# PAVING THE WAY TO BETTER NUTRITION

Schools and community centers are trusted neighborhood resources and ideal partners to get healthy foods into the hands of area residents. Two initiatives leverage those relationships to address longstanding issues of food equity and ensure that everyone has access to fresh produce.

## Good For You Pantry Program

To increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities introduced the first Good For You Pantry at Daggett Middle School in late 2019. More than just non-perishables, the pantry program provides families with no-cost produce and other healthy staples.

The pantry initiative was slated to expand but then COVID-19 shut the door. In response, Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities began supporting drive-up food distribution.

Today, Good For You Pantry locations are back in business with nine participating schools and one community-based site. Each pantry serves 70 to 100 families and offers a small-scale shopping experience, much like a traditional market. Nearly 50% of the stock is fresh produce. The rest is healthy staples, culturally appropriate for the community each pantry serves. Blue Zones Project provides recipe cards, cooking utensils, and access to virtual cooking demonstrations.

**GOOD** for you  
**PANTRY** 

**DESPENSA DE ALIMENTOS** 

“

Just seeing the parents shop, smile, and the excitement on their faces is rewarding enough.

*Marletta Watkins  
Pantry Coordinator  
Carter Park Elementary*

”



**649,500**

**TOTAL POUNDS OF PRODUCE**

Distributed through Good For You Pantry and Fresh Access programs (through May 2022)



# GOOD FOR YOU PANTRY/ FRESH ACCESS LOCATIONS (MAY 2022)

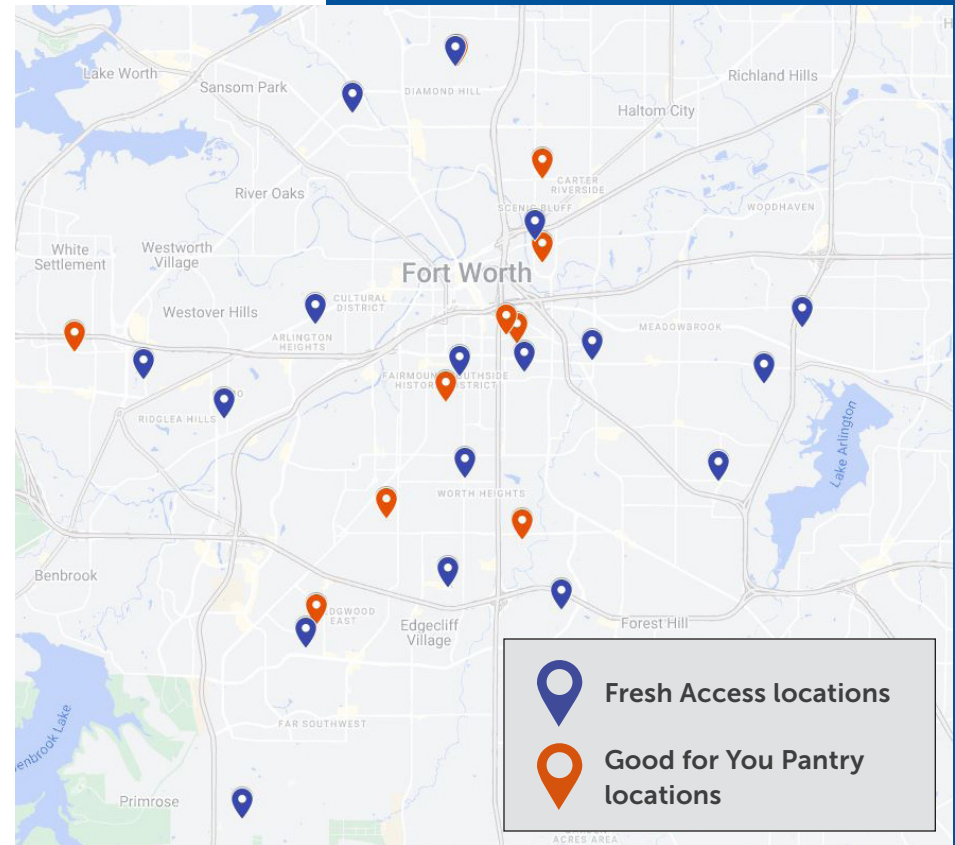
## Fresh Access Initiative

A parallel effort is taking place in 17 Fort Worth community centers with the Fresh Access program. Produce is offered to youth, families, and seniors who take part in center programs. Fruits and vegetables are also available to residents in surrounding neighborhoods.



Depending on need, community centers distribute fruits and vegetables once or twice a month. Produce is shared during center activities, often accompanied with recipe cards and other resources. The Fresh Access program also includes cooking demonstrations and nutrition education, as well as information on mental health, communicating with health care providers, and the importance of reading to children.

The Good For You Pantry and Fresh Access programs rely on parents, community volunteers, and staff. Fidelity Investments and other community partners help support this important work. Blue Zones Project hopes to expand both programs with additional community support and funding.



## WHY WE DO IT:

**22%**

of Tarrant County households have no vehicle and live more than a mile from a grocery store or supermarket.

**24.3%**

of Tarrant County residents eat at fast food restaurants two or more times per week.

**66%**

of Tarrant County adults are overweight or obese.

**63%**

of Fort Worth adults suffer from a diet-related chronic disease, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.

“

The healthy tips and information we put in their produce bags have helped (families) create healthier meals and be more knowledgeable about nutrition facts in general.

Isaiah Gibson  
Recreation Programmer  
Greenbriar Community Center



”

# TURNING PRODUCE WASTE INTO SOMETHING FRUITFUL

Food waste, overtaxed landfills, and food insecurity are complex issues. Solutions come with vision, partnership, and passion.

About 30% of Fort Worth's garbage comes from commercial and residential food waste, and landfills are nearing critical capacity. In 2020, Blue Zones Project piloted the Culled Produce Recovery Project, an innovative effort to give food waste new life. The goal? Keep produce out of the landfills and get it into the hands of urban farmers and local families.

G.E. Foodland, Inc., a locally owned grocery chain, supports the program by culling unsold produce at two Foodland Markets and one Elrod's Cost Plus Supermarket location. Compost Carpool, a company dedicated to transporting compostable materials, conducts a weekly pick up. Produce beyond its prime goes to area farms to create rich soil. Produce that is still viable is distributed to Blue Zone Project's Good For You Pantry locations.

The result is a sustainable, full-circle food ecosystem that reduces waste, supports urban agriculture, and increases access to fresh produce in under-resourced communities.



## CULLED PRODUCE RECOVERY PILOT: A Snapshot (January-April 2022)

**35,000**

POUNDS  
GATHERED

**2,700**

POUNDS DONATED  
TO LOCAL PANTRIES

**32,300**

POUNDS PROVIDED  
TO URBAN FARMS



“

This program is a huge benefit to our farm and our community. Produce waste is being diverted from the landfill to provide rich compost for crops. It's helping to feed the soil, which in turn helps feed the community.

”



*Ursula & Steven Nunez  
Owners  
Mind Your Garden  
urban farm*



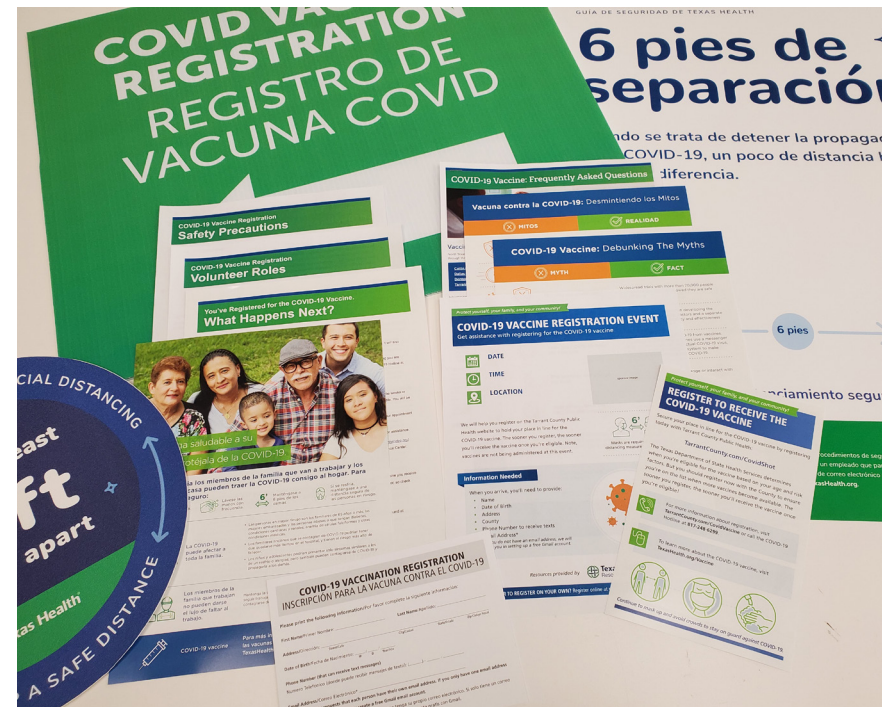
# REDEPLOYING RESOURCES TO MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS

The COVID-19 pandemic put a sharp point on food insecurity and other pressing needs that have long existed in areas of our community. New realities required a heightened focus by organizations citywide. For Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities, that meant shifting gears, from education and policy to a boots-on-the-ground response.

The first priority: creating access to healthy food. That meant connecting community groups to outreach and support opportunities, assisting in food distribution with a focus on fresh produce, and offering financial assistance and in-kind contributions. Working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Double Up Food Bucks efforts at Cowtown Farmers Market were expanded to three grocery stores, making fresh produce more affordable at more locations.

Blue Zones Project social media platforms reinforced the work of other partners, providing community updates on emergency resources. Educational programming expanded to virtual formats, featuring yoga, mindfulness activities, and cooking demonstrations. Restaurant partners forced to close dining facilities were provided complimentary “curbside” and “take-out” banners.

Community relationships were leveraged to reinforce Texas Health’s COVID-19 information and vaccination response. That included supporting the Texas Health/UT Southwestern seroprevalence study; creating and launching community-based vaccine registration events; coordinating vaccine efforts for school districts, community organizations, and businesses; distributing “back to work” information and onsite materials; and assisting in Texas Health vaccine clinics.



## BY THE NUMBERS:

**541,945**

Pounds of fresh produce and emergency food delivered through Good For You Pantry locations, Fresh Access community centers, and other community resources

**\$6,500**

Financial support for 2,000 meals/1,200 families to the Boys and Girls Club

**\$3,723**

Expedited commercial refrigerator purchased to support emergency food distribution at LVTRise

**\$26,000**

Mobilization and financial support for healthy food grocery bag distribution

# PLANTING SEEDS FOR BETTER WELL-BEING

Fort Worth area schools are becoming healthier, greener, and more fruitful places for learning, thanks to creative efforts taking place at more than 50 Blue Zones Project Approved and participating campuses. That's important because learning healthy habits at a young age can carry lifetime benefits.

## Learning Gardens

Studies show school gardens encourage students to eat more fruits and vegetables and are linked to happier moods, lower rates of obesity, and healthier habits lasting into adulthood.

Blue Zones Project and community partners are digging in to help new gardens take root at area campuses. Companies like Aramark and Alcon assist with funding and volunteers, and parents and community partners help plant, weed, water, and keep the gardens growing. Blue Zones Project also supports a gardening consultant, who assists with planning, crop selection, planting, cultivation, and integration of garden activities into school curriculum.

GARDENING IMPACT:		
<b>27</b>	<b>\$90,000</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
school learning gardens	in grants	in in-kind donations



## Wellness Innovation Grants

Getting students engaged in their own well-being is the goal of Blue Zones Project's Wellness Innovation Grants, underwritten by the R4 Foundation.

Now in its third year, the competition attracts teams of students from all grade levels who develop creative ways to enhance well-being on their campuses. Winning concepts range from outdoor garden learning centers to "chill zones" designed to help students manage emotions and reduce conflict. Entries are presented in songs, skits, and group presentations, with winners selected by a panel of judges.

WELLNESS INNOVATION GRANTS:	
<b>18</b>	Wellness projects funded
<b>\$75,000</b>	in grants awarded since 2020

“

This is much more than a grant. These projects support student wellness, school and community pride, and leadership skills.

*Bret Helmer, President and CEO  
R4 Foundation*

”



## Virtual Family Summit

The family that learns together creates better health together. Launched in 2017 as an onsite Student Summit, Blue Zones Project's now Virtual Family Summit is a multi-generational experience that features interactive videos in English and Spanish. The summit presents advice from local experts on nutritious cooking, yoga, gardening, downshifting, and other good-for-you activities, and is designed to show that healthy choices can be fun and easy.

### 2022 FAMILY SUMMIT ENGAGEMENT:

<b>28</b>	SCHOOLS REPRESENTED ACROSS THREE DISTRICTS
<b>10,000 +</b>	STUDENTS ENGAGED
<b>16,000 +</b>	VIDEO VIEWS

## Literacy Efforts

Opening a book can open the door to healthy outcomes for students and their families. Studies show literacy and education can lower incidence of depression, and increase the likelihood of high school graduation, employment, preventive care, and longer life.

Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities teamed up with Scholastic Book Fairs to provide hundreds of free books to area schools. Students were able to choose from a variety of topics related to nutrition, gardening, physical activity, and mindfulness. Scholastic donates half the funds contributed by Blue Zones Project back to the schools in the form of more books and learning supplies. Blue Zones Project also provides free books to Read Fort Worth, farmers markets, local coffee shops, and select grocery stores.

### LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS:

BOOKS DONATED THROUGH BOOK FAIRS AND READ FORT WORTH:	<b>8,145</b>
FUNDING FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:	<b>\$20,760</b>

“

The children's eyes lit up as they scanned the hundreds of books they would get to choose from, and they were so proud to walk out with their very own book. It was the best day ever—their words, not mine.

”

*Keyan Brady, Instructional Specialist  
Leadership Academy at Como Elementary*



# REIMAGINING THE WORKPLACE WELL-BEING NEEDS OF TODAY

Studies show that supporting employee well-being leads to higher job performance, fewer missed days of work, and less chronic disease. Blue Zones Project has helped more than 150 companies become Blue Zones Project Approved worksites by making healthy choices easier for almost 80,000 employees.

Initially that meant promoting healthy choices in worksite cafeterias and creating walking paths and areas for employees to downshift. Then, the pandemic upended the way people work. Blue Zones Project responded with a variety of virtual offerings and resources to connect with employees wherever they might be.



## Virtual Worksite Symposium

Employees benefited from best practices on topics ranging from working virtually to staying safe while returning to the office.



## WorkZones Newsletter

To further support local employers, Blue Zones Project offers a monthly e-newsletter with ongoing resources and tips for enhancing employee health. New initiatives focus on mental health and additional well-being resources for organizations of varying sizes.



## Purpose Workshops

Interactive, facilitated events help employees learn how to identify individual purpose, a core component of well-being and longer, better life. While in-person workshops have resumed in some locations, virtual workshops remain popular with many businesses as employees continue to work remotely or in hybrid arrangements.



## Mental Health Series

A three-part virtual mental health series discussed employee mental health, children's mental health, and community well-being.

## FORT WORTH CITY HALL CHAMPIONS WELL-BEING

**The City of Fort Worth, one of the area's largest employers, was one of the first Blue Zones Project Approved worksites in 2016 and remains committed to making healthy choices easier. The diverse workforce of more than 6,200 employees and 508 job classifications across 100+ city-run facilities benefits from wellness tips, virtual mental health seminars, Purpose Workshops, and seminars on stress management.**



# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY EFFORTS THROUGH GRASSROOTS SUPPORT

A connection exists between the places where a person lives, plays, and prays and their overall health and well-being. Earning trust in those spaces has been the cornerstone for many of Blue Zones Project’s most important well-being achievements.

Relationships with neighborhoods, community centers, and faith-based organizations have helped address food insecurity, deliver critical education about COVID-19, and support vaccination efforts. Churches, schools, and community groups have been vital in launching healthy food pantries and championing produce distribution.

During the height of the pandemic, outreach focused on combatting isolation, loneliness, and idleness by ensuring safe social connections. Blue Zones Project hosted outdoor activities to reconnect communities and get people moving. Faith-based organizations supported distribution of fruits and vegetables, emergency food response information, and COVID-19 resources. The formation of neighborhood Think Tanks helped shape strategy and gain community support.

With their fingers on the pulse of the neighborhoods they serve, Fort Worth community centers supported Blue Zones Project with senior walking groups, summer camp programming, back-to-school supply drives, and other well-being events.

That led to the development of a Community Center Wellness Committee, made up of center staff who serve as wellness champions for their neighborhoods. Committee members partner with Blue Zones Project to promote social connections, healthy habits, and nutrition education. They are essential to the success of the Fresh Access program, which provides fresh produce bi-monthly to center participants.



## NEIGHBORHOOD ENGAGEMENT

<b>60+</b>	Blue Zones Project Participating organizations
<b>16</b>	Blue Zones Project Participating faith-based organizations
<b>10</b>	Blue Zones Project Participating neighborhood associations

## FORT WORTH COMMUNITY CENTERS

<b>19</b>	Blue Zones Project Approved worksites
<b>17</b>	Fresh Access locations

## DIAMOND HILL

Diamond Hill is a diverse neighborhood on Fort Worth’s north side and home to six Blue Zones Project Approved schools. Diamond Hill Community Center was the first center to achieve Blue Zones Project Approved worksite status by organizing walking groups, providing downshifting areas, and serving healthier snacks. Diamond Hill Northside Youth Association also encourages healthy options by providing fruit and water for athletes and establishing walking groups for parents. Three area faith communities also support Blue Zones Project activities.

# ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING AWAY FROM HOME

The Fort Worth food scene is experiencing a cultural shift as diners look for more plant-based options. Blue Zones Project supports plant-forward efforts at restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, and onsite cafes.

## Restaurants & Coffee Shops

Featuring over 20 diverse restaurants, Blue Zones Project's Restaurant Week kicked off in 2020, showcasing healthy, plant-based menu items. When the pandemic meant closing dining facilities, Blue Zones Project supported restaurant partners with complimentary "curbside" and "take-out" banners. That support continued in 2021 with 22 restaurants participating in the 2nd Annual Restaurant Week, plus a new promotion called Roll or Stroll in partnership with Fort Worth Bike Sharing. People were encouraged to walk or cycle to participating locations to enjoy delicious plant-forward menu items and receive a free high-quality giveaway. Roll or Stroll returned in June 2022, driving business to almost 35 partner locations.

## Grocery Stores & Onsite Cafes

Blue Zones Project Approved grocery stores continue to offer checkout lanes that replace candy bars and chips with nuts and fruit for impulse purchases. A program piloted at Texas Health's Café Presby in Dallas also highlights healthy choices with signage that encourages diners to eat a colorful array of fruits and vegetables, choose fruits and nuts as snacks, and stay hydrated with water.



“

We were one of the first Blue Zones Project Approved restaurants in 2015, and that relationship has grown over the years. When we were forced to close our dining facilities in 2020, Blue Zones Project supported us with signage for pickup and carryout business. And they continue to come up with special promotions to drive business and support their restaurant partners.

*Vicki Cisneros, President  
Los Vaqueros Restaurant*

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# BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Mental and physical well-being are inextricably tied. A community that supports both is stronger and healthier.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five U.S. adults experience mental illness each year. Not surprisingly, a 2021 study found more than half of Americans reported COVID-19 having a negative impact on their mental health.

In 2021, Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities invested in a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) train-the-trainer program offered by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. Trainers are certified to conduct full-day sessions on how to recognize and offer support to anyone demonstrating mental health or substance-abuse symptoms, using a step-by-step action plan. Courses are offered virtually each month, allowing individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and organizations to participate and become Mental Health First Aiders.

While it does not replace professional intervention, MHFA training is designed to build a community that understands how to respond to someone in crisis with understanding, empathy, and encouragement. Blue Zones Project is especially focused on supporting faith and community leaders who often encounter individuals in crisis. The goal is to build a stronger, more resilient community.

“

The training has equipped and empowered me to recognize people experiencing a mental health crisis and how to properly respond to ensure they get the assistance that's needed. I was able to use the strategies right away.

Tracy Lane, Librarian  
LVTRise Library Branch








”



To date, more than  
**150 INDIVIDUALS**  
from across our community have  
become Mental Health First Aiders.



## ALGEE: THE ACTION PLAN

-  **ASSESS** for risk of suicide or harm.
-  **LISTEN** non-judgmentally.
-  **GIVE** re-assurance and information.
-  **ENCOURAGE** appropriate professional help.
-  **ENCOURAGE** self-help and other support strategies.

# THE JOURNEY CONTINUES. JOIN US.

**Partner With Us.** Support Blue Zones Project and North Texas Healthy Communities as we expand our efforts with school gardens, Good For You Pantry locations, Fresh Access, Double Up Food Bucks, and many other important community initiatives.

*\*Contributions are tax-deductible through the Texas Health Resources Foundation.*

**Connect with Blue Zones Project.** Find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube and learn simple lifestyle changes that can improve your well-being.

**Volunteer.** Support a community or school garden. Host a supply drive for a Good For You Pantry. Donate books, school supplies, or P.E. equipment to your local school.

**Become a Mental Health First Aider.** Learn how to respond to someone in crisis.

**Become Blue Zones Project Approved.** Enhance the well-being of your business, school, faith-based organization, or neighborhood group by adopting Blue Zones best practices.

