



WALLA WALLA VALLEY, WA

The first certified Blue Zones Community® in the state invests in well-being for a more livable, vibrant, and healthy future.

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY





CONGRATS, WALLA WALLA VALLEY, FOR PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP!

You deserve a round of applause.
And maybe even a standing ovation.
Because together we made it happen.

In the Walla Walla Valley, we are seizing every opportunity to move well-being in the right direction. Since launching Blue Zones Project® in our community, we've seen thousands of individuals take steps to improve their well-being. City leaders, business owners, teachers, and volunteers are coming together to transform our environments into places where optimal health ensues and a culture of well-being flourishes.

Our community's well-being transformation is happening. The Walla Walla Valley has always been a great place to live, work, learn, and play—and it's only getting better.

We did this together. By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone. Here's to making the Walla Walla Valley one of the healthiest regions in Washington, where residents are living better, together.

THE JOURNEY TO BECOME A BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blue Zones Project® helps communities implement the longevity and happiness lessons learned from the world's extraordinary people and cultures to measurably improve well-being and create enhanced community vitality. The method of work is to drive community-led semi-permanent and permanent change in man-made surroundings. This approach is designed to make healthier choices easier, more ubiquitous, and sustainable. The effect: people moving more naturally, taking more time to downshift daily, discovering the power of purpose, eating wisely, and deepening their connections with friends, family, and their faith. Over time, these collective choices compound to sustainably improve well-being. In 2021, a broad base of Walla Walla Valley's leadership set a three-year course to do just that.

The value of Blue Zones Project is measured by the engagement of its citizens; the number, type, and scope of semi-permanent and permanent changes implemented; the prevalence and incidence rates of lifestyle risks and disease; and measurable improvements in well-being; all of which ultimately lead to lower medical costs, better workforce productivity, and a strengthened regional economy.

Since 2021, the Walla Walla Valley has undergone its own community transformation, exceeding targets set to engage individuals and organizations, and to implement community-wide policy changes.

A broad coalition has supported the Walla Walla Valley's efforts to adopt 47 policies, plans, and initiatives like Complete Streets, the Walla Walla Streatery Pilot Project, School Gardens, Produce Rx, tobacco-free city events, and the development of Walawála Plaza that contribute to an even more vibrant and active community. This work was bolstered by more than \$9.8 million in funding for well-being projects secured with the support of Blue Zones Project.

The semi-permanent and permanent changes already made will continue to compound over time to produce an even bigger future return for the Walla Walla Valley. The return on investment can be measured in myriad ways, as the value captured is unique to each citizen, family, and organization. In this way, Walla Walla Valley has been enriched as a community where more people and businesses choose to be.

With sustained momentum, continued implementation of city policy and plans, and advancement of the project's work in key areas, the Walla Walla Valley stands to drive even

greater improvements to community well-being in the future.

When Blue Zones Project first engaged Walla Walla Valley leadership in 2018, we established an ambitious plan together for the community to become Washington's first Blue Zones Community®. Today, Walla Walla Valley stands as a new model across the state and country for what bold leaders can achieve when they invest in the health and well-being of their citizens. Congratulations for creating an even better Walla Walla Valley!



THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT STORY

What do Ikaria, Greece; Loma Linda, California; Sardinia, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; and Nicoya, Costa Rica, have in common? Their citizens lead vibrant, healthy, and amazingly long lives. These places are known as blue zones longevity hot spots, where people live measurably longer, with lower incidences of chronic disease and a higher quality of life.



More than 86 percent₁ of the nearly \$3 trillion in annual U.S. healthcare costs are spent on chronic disease₁. Yet much of this disease can be prevented and reduced in impact through lifestyle changes.

According to a long-term population study of Danish twins, 80 percent of a person's lifespan is determined by lifestyle choices, environmental factors, and access to care. Only 20 percent is genetic.₂ Unfortunately, in most places, our environment encourages unhealthy choices. Americans are bombarded daily with messages for unhealthy products and surrounded by modern "conveniences" that make us more sedentary and isolated.

DISCOVERING BLUE ZONES

In 2004, Dan Buettner teamed up with National Geographic, the National Institute on Aging, and the world's best longevity researchers to identify pockets around the world where people lived measurably better, longer. In the five original blue zones regions, they found that people reached age 100 at rates ten times greater than the U.S. average, with lower rates of chronic disease. These original blue zones areas are in vastly different parts of the world, from Sardinia, Italy and Ikaria, Greece to Okinawa, Japan, Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula, and stateside in Loma Linda, California. Studying the factors that influenced health and longevity in these places, researchers found that residents share nine specific traits. Dan Buettner captured these insights in his New York Times best-selling books, *The Blue Zones* and *The Blue Zones Solution*.



BLUE ZONES POWER 9

The secrets to well-being and longevity are found in the Power 9®—nine common principles from the world’s blue zones longevity hot spots. They can be grouped into four categories. These principles are the basis for how Blue Zones Project impacts communities to make healthy choices easier:

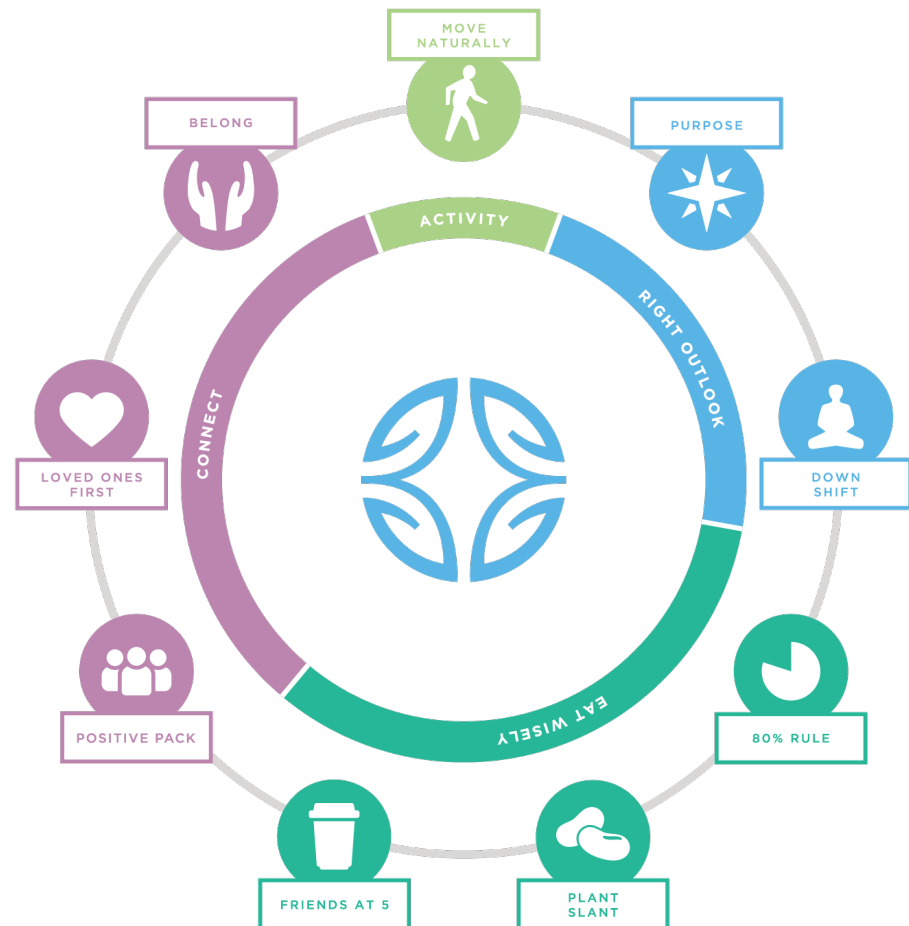
Move Naturally. Homes, communities, and workplaces are designed to nudge people into physical activity. Focus should be given to favorite activities, as individuals are more likely to practice them regularly. For example: gardening, walking, or biking to run errands, and playing with one’s family are great ways to incorporate natural movement into the day.

Right Outlook. Individuals know and can articulate their sense of purpose. They also take time to downshift, ensuring their day is punctuated with periods of calm.

Eat Wisely. In most cases, fad diets do not provide sustainable results. Individuals and families can use time-honored strategies for healthier eating habits, including:

- Using verbal reminders or smaller plates to eat less at meals
- Adopting a diet with a plant slant

Connect. Research indicates it is exceedingly important that individuals surround themselves with the “right” people—those who make them happy and support healthy behaviors. Put loved ones first by spending quality time with family and friends, and by participating in a faith-based community.



BLUE ZONES PROJECT LIFE RADIUS

Blue Zones Project takes a unique, systematic approach to improving well-being by focusing on our life radius.

Blue Zones Project is based upon Dan Buettner's discoveries and additional well-being research. A community-led well-being improvement initiative, Blue Zones Project is designed to make healthy choices easier through permanent changes to a community's environment, policy, and social networks. More than 75 communities have joined the movement since the first pilot project in 2009. Walla Walla Valley is the first community in the state to make the commitment to transform well-being with Blue Zones Project.

Because healthier environments naturally nudge people toward healthier choices, Blue Zones Project focuses on influencing the Life Radius®, the area close to home in which people spend the majority of their lives. Blue Zones Project best practices use policy, places, and people as levers to transform those surroundings. Our communities have populations with greater well-being, improved health outcomes, reduced costs, stronger resiliency, and increased civic pride, all of which support healthy economic development.





SHARECARE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING INDEX

The world's most definitive measurement of well-being

Based on over 4M surveys and over 600 elements of social determinants of health data, Sharecare's Community Well-Being Index serves as the definitive measure of community well-being across and within populations. Measuring well-being gives policy, community, and business leaders the data to benchmark populations, understand gaps and opportunities, and then prioritize interventions to measurably improve well-being. Improving well-being has been shown to lower health care costs and increase worker productivity, in turn, enhancing organizational and community competitiveness.



MEASURING THE IMPACT

Change requires action. It isn't enough to do something one time; lasting change, which is a central tenet of Blue Zones Project, must be created from permanent and semi-permanent changes and alterations to the environment, policies, programs, and social networks. These actions allow healthy choices to become easy choices today and for many years to come.

When Blue Zones Project launched in the Walla Walla Valley, overall community well-being sat at 66.8 points out of 100 according to Sharecare Community Well-Being Index (CWBI) data. More than 15 percent of area residents engaged with the Project, and the impact shows. **Today, overall well-being in the Walla Walla Valley among residents engaged with Blue Zones Project is 75.6 points.** Each point increase in well-being score leads to an approximate 2 percent reduction in emergency room (ER) visits and hospital utilization, and an approximate 1 percent reduction in total healthcare costs.

This improvement highlights the intentional efforts to improve the health of Walla Walla Valley's residents.

Well-Being in Walla Walla Valley

	2021 baseline	2024 engaged*	Point Change
Overall Well-Being Score	66.8	75.6	8.8
Purpose Well-Being	64.8	76.6	11.8
Social Well-Being	67.2	80.2	13
Financial Well-Being	64.3	66.6	2.3
Community Well-Being	65.8	75.3	9.5
Physical Well-Being	67.3	74.3	7

** Indicates respondents who self-identify as having been engaged with Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley.*





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IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGHER WELL-BEING, WE HAVE FOUND THAT PEOPLE LIVE LONGER, HAPPIER LIVES AND BUSINESS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES FLOURISH. A RELIABLE WELL-BEING METRIC PROVIDES COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS WITH THE DATA AND INSIGHTS THEY NEED TO HELP MAKE SUSTAINED TRANSFORMATION A REALITY. AFTER ALL, IF YOU CAN'T MEASURE IT, YOU CAN'T MANAGE IT.

Dan Buettner
New York Times best-selling author
National Geographic Fellow
Blue Zones founder



PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP IN THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY

As a pioneer in innovation, Walla Walla Valley is the first community in Washington to embark on its journey to transform well-being with Blue Zones Project.

Walla Walla Valley is prioritizing the health of its neighbors and investing in policies and programs to improve health equity for those who need it most. Our neighbors, employers, teachers, and community leaders have made tremendous strides in optimizing the places where we all live, work, learn, and play.

Ours is a community to be proud of, and our well-being transformation is only just beginning.



IT'S GREAT TO PARTNER WITH BLUE ZONES PROJECT WALLA WALLA VALLEY AS THEY HELP THE CITY ACHIEVE ITS GOALS OF COMMUNITY LIVABILITY AND ALSO COMMUNITY HEALTH.

Mike Rizzitiello
City Administrator, City of College Place

A COMMUNITY IN ACTION

The landscape for well-being in America cannot be improved without committed partnerships. That's why leaders across many sectors joined forces to take action and positively impact our residential and business communities. This broad, holistic approach is making healthy choices easier.

A vital part of Walla Walla Valley's well-being improvement initiative, Blue Zones Project encourages changes to our community that lead to healthier options. When our entire community participates—from our worksites and schools to our restaurants and grocery stores—the small changes contribute to huge benefits for all of us: lowered healthcare costs, improved productivity, and ultimately, a higher quality of life.

Local businesses, organizations, residents, and community leaders came together to make incremental changes that caused a ripple effect, improving well-being across the community and bringing individuals together to create lasting change.

More than 6,700 community members of all ages and backgrounds participated in Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley. Many attended free cooking demonstrations and Purpose Workshops. Hundreds donated their time toward volunteer opportunities and joined a supportive Moai for connecting and walking or connecting and eating healthier in small groups. Many residents also supported Blue Zones Project planning and implementation by serving on committees.

A critical mass of places optimized their environments for healthy living. **More than 80 organizations participated in Blue Zones Project.** Worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, and community groups made changes that produced new gardens, brought attention to healthier foods, created safer walking routes, offered space to de-stress, and energized employees, members, and residents with new connections and purpose.



From a policy and community planning standpoint, Walla Walla Valley is creating, supporting, and implementing:

- The establishment of Walawála Plaza, which converted 1st Avenue into a pedestrian gathering spot. The plaza received an Excellence on Main Award, a top accolade that recognizes outstanding projects and people that reflect an attitude of perseverance and dedication to community revitalization in Washington.
- Vision Zero policies adopted in both Walla Walla and College Place with the goal of zero traffic related fatalities or serious injuries by 2032.
- A six-month Produce Rx pilot program in partnership with Providence St. Mary Medical Center and the Walla Walla Food Hub that supported patients at risk or in treatment for a diet-related chronic disease. Thanks to the successful pilot, the program is transitioning to the hospital system.

- College Place passed ordinances for city-permitted events to be smoke, vape, and tobacco-free.

Working together with partners across Walla Walla Valley, **more than \$9.8 million in funding has been secured to help support well-being projects and policy initiatives across the community.**



THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley has attracted local and national recognition, with more than 296 media mentions to date.

Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley has been heralded for innovative approaches to population health management in various publications, including those noted below.

BLUE ZONES PROJECT WALLA WALLA VALLEY IN THE NEWS

296

Total Mentions

195 Million

Total Reach

\$366,000

Total Publicity Value*

**Publicity value calculated using Cision Media Monitoring service.*

WALLA WALLA Union-Bulletin



WHITMAN WIRE





POLICY

Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley worked with city leaders to implement evidence-based practices to impact food policy, tobacco policy, and the built environment.

By improving community infrastructure and public policies, Blue Zones Project maximizes the ability of our community's residents to move naturally, connect socially, access healthy food, and improve quality of life.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Walkable and bikeable communities are safer and more profitable, yet only 1.2 percent of metropolitan land area is considered walkable.³

The world's longest-lived people reside in places where than can walk to the store, a friend's house, or places of worship. Their houses have stairs. They have gardens in their yards. It's not just about moving; it's about moving naturally.

The built environment can support—or discourage—moving naturally. Built environment policies help communities move away from automobile-centric development to better accommodate all users and modes of transportation.

Why It Matters

Transforming our surroundings holds the key to a healthier, safer, and more prosperous future. Imagine a world where neighborhoods are designed to encourage walking, where streets are vibrant and safe, and where economic growth

goes hand in hand with environmental sustainability.

In suburban areas dominated by cars, obesity rates soar as people drive more, walk less, and bear the burden of excess weight. The statistics are alarming—a mere hour spent behind the wheel each day increases the risk of obesity by 6 percent. And in areas devoid of sidewalks, the danger escalates, with pedestrians more than twice as likely to fall victim to vehicular accidents.⁴

But transformation is always possible. Initiatives like Complete Street projects not only revitalize communities but also create 11 to 14 jobs per \$1 million spent—far surpassing the employment opportunities of traditional automobile infrastructure projects (seven jobs per \$1 million spent).⁵ Picture the impact: a return to the walking and biking levels of 1969 could slash 3.2 billion vehicle miles, curbing carbon emissions by 1.5 million tons and other pollutants by 89,000 tons—equivalent to removing a quarter of a million cars from the roads annually.⁴

The solution lies in forward-thinking policies that prioritize safe, active living. By fostering environments conducive to

natural movement, we can rewrite the narrative of more sedentary lifestyles and pave the way for vibrant, thriving communities.

Together with local partners, Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley supported the development, adoption, or implementation of 20 built environment initiatives. Work to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety was furthered by Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Vision Zero policies. New community place-making spaces like Walawála Plaza create accessible opportunities for residents to gather. And the local Blue Zones Project team supported capacity building for important efforts like affordable housing and the Regional Active Transportation Plan.

Going forward, the Walkability Action Institute group comprised of the Cities of Walla Walla and College Place, the County, WSDOT, the MPO, and local advocates will continue to meet monthly to pursue improved multi-modal transportation infrastructure throughout the community.



IMPACT OF COMMUNITY DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

- City planners, Public Works teams, schools, worksites, and organizations across our community have come together to create environments and support programs that help Walla Walla Valley residents move naturally.
- Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley partnered with local initiatives and leaders to create Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) demonstration projects to educate the community and provide more opportunities to walk and bike safely.



Creating Space for Better Well-Being

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Walla Walla temporarily closed 1st Avenue downtown to create a public outdoor gathering space. City leadership decided they wanted the transition of the 1st Ave Plaza to become a permanent community gathering space, inviting Blue Zones Project to support the effort as one of its marquee projects. The goal? To create a space that facilitates community connection, brings more people downtown, and prioritizes pedestrians over cars. The City also wanted the plaza to celebrate the legacy of 1st Avenue, which was a traditional gathering space for area Tribal Nations.

The City of Walla Walla, the **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)**, **Downtown Walla Walla**, Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley, and other community partners came together to complete this project: Walawála Plaza.

Key Actions and Innovations

- The City of Walla Walla applied

for several grants and used federal funding to pay for the plaza construction.

- Blue Zones Project conducted a community-wide survey to understand how the community wanted to use the space and helped the City determine the plaza's final design elements.
- Blue Zones Project helped track bike, pedestrian, and transit use at the plaza to help understand the benefits of the public space transformation.

Input from 345 survey respondents was overwhelmingly in support of permanently closing the street to vehicular traffic and developing a new public plaza. Since its completion, Walawála Plaza has been highly used by residents and visitors alike. During peak hours, 37 individuals on average use the space per hour, five to six cyclists pass through, and 182 pedestrians move through the plaza, marking an increase from data collected in 2022 during the temporary road closure pilot project.

Going forward, oversight of the plaza will be integrated into the Parks and Recreation strategic plan, and the plaza will be considered a park like much of

downtown Walla Walla. Because of this, funds will be allocated each year for upkeep and maintenance. Valley Transit will continue the same level of area service so individuals without vehicles have equitable access to public spaces downtown.



EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN

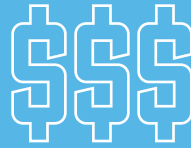
In 2023, Walawála Plaza received “The Excellence on Main Award” from the Washington State Main Street Program. The honor is the top award at each annual ceremony and recognizes “outstanding projects and people that reflect an attitude of perseverance and dedication to community revitalization.”

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THE CREATION OF THE WALAWÁLA PLAZA HAS GREATLY EXCEEDED THE EXPECTATIONS OF THOSE WHO ENVISIONED IT AS A RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC. IT HAS BECOME A COMMUNITY GATHERING SPACE THAT HAS BEEN IMMENSELY ENJOYED BY ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY. WALLA WALLA’S AWARD-WINNING DOWNTOWN NOW HAS A PUBLIC PLAZA THAT HAS INCREASED THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG CITIZENS AND, AT THE SAME TIME, HAS HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WALAWÁLA PLAZA IS A FACILITY THAT THE COMMUNITY AND VISITORS HAVE COMPLETELY EMBRACED AND WILL ENJOY FOR DECADES.

Andy Coleman
Parks and Recreation Director
City of Walla Walla





COMPLETE STREETS DRIVE ECONOMIC VALUE



LOCAL BUSINESS

Walkers and bicyclists tend to spend more money at local businesses than drivers. Complete Streets are more accessible to walkers and bikers, which improves traffic to local businesses. Residents are more likely to shop locally along Complete Streets, which invests in local businesses and creates job growth.⁶



PROPERTY VALUES

Walkable communities with tree-lined streets and slowed traffic increase neighborhood desirability and property values. Homes located in very walkable neighborhoods are valued \$4,000 to \$34,000 more than homes in neighborhoods with average walkability.⁷



EMPLOYMENT

Complete Streets projects that add pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure can double the amount of jobs created in an area. Complete Streets projects create 11-14 jobs per \$1 million spent while automobile infrastructure projects create only seven jobs per \$1 million spent.⁵



WALKABLE COMMUNITIES THRIVE

55%

of Americans would rather drive less and walk more.³

73%

currently feel they have no choice but to drive as much as they do.⁸

66%

of Americans want more transportation options so they have the freedom to choose how they get where they need to go.⁸

TOBACCO

City policies have a lasting, community-wide impact on shaping our environments to support well-being.

Smoking-related illness in the United States costs more than \$300 billion each year, including nearly \$170 billion for direct medical care and more than \$156 billion in lost productivity.⁹ Comprehensive community policies can limit exposure to second-hand smoke and lead to lower use of tobacco and e-cigarettes overall.

Despite tobacco use rates running lower than state and national averages, Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley and local partners knew they could deter smoking at city properties and provide tobacco risk education to the area's youth.

Tobacco cessation. Blue Zones Project supported capacity building work to promote tobacco cessation tools and resources across the valley. This included actions like placing bilingual radio advertisements for the state's Quitline and promotion of the 2morrow Health App. Successful reduction in smoking rates has the potential to reduce healthcare costs by nearly \$6,000 per smoker, per year.

Tobacco-free ordinances. With support from Blue Zones Project, the Cities of Walla Walla and College Place implemented new policies and practices to ensure that city-permitted events are tobacco- and smoke-free.

Engaging young people in tobacco messaging. As part of capacity-building work to discourage youth tobacco and vape use across the Walla Walla Valley, Blue Zones Project and partners worked with students to develop signage and messaging to place in schools like Walla Walla High School.

Going forward, Walla Walla County's Youth Cannabis and Commercial Tobacco Prevention program will continue to pursue tobacco policy, systems, and environmental changes including

tobacco-free spaces, updated signage, and more prevention efforts. **These initiatives will continue to positively influence the rate of tobacco use across the Walla Walla Valley, which sits at a low 7.2 percent.**



Tobacco Policy Grows Smoke-Free Environments

Robust tobacco policies create healthier public spaces and curb smoking-related costs.

To help create healthier environments, the Tobacco Policy Committee decided to pursue tobacco-free event policies and practices in both Walla Walla and College Place. Partners critical to the initiatives' success included **Walla Walla County Department of Community Health, Trilogy Recovery Community, SonBridge Center for Better Living, American Lung Association**, and **the Cities of College Place and Walla Walla**.

In College Place, the Blue Zones Project team met with the City Administrator to discuss the feasibility of such a policy and conducted research into other cities that have successful smoke-free events policies.

Language was adapted from existing ordinances to create a draft for College Place, and partners worked with the City Attorney to finalize it. To encourage City Council to adopt this change, Blue Zones Project developed an informational

document to outline the positive impact of the policy and worked with partners to submit letters of support. The team presented to City Council at two different meetings and answered questions about the final proposed ordinance.

In addition to updating language in the special event permit application, the City of College Place now has 15 English/Spanish tobacco-free event signs that say: Young lungs at play! The new signage is used at all city events. Since the city passed this ordinance, there have been over 50 permitted tobacco-free events in College Place. This policy change was bolstered with language added to the special events permit application requiring applicants to agree to host tobacco-free events.

The Tobacco Policy Committee also prioritized adding updated signage in tobacco-free spaces throughout the community to emphasize they are tobacco and vape-free. Including "vape-free" in the messaging was important, as much of the existing signage did not include this language.

In an effort to reduce second-hand smoke exposure and promote positive community

norms through healthy public spaces, Blue Zones Project partnered with Walla Walla County Department of Community Health, prevention coalitions, Valley Transit, the Cities of Walla Walla and College Place, the school districts, and local businesses to place the new signage and remind residents and visitors about tobacco-free areas.

Blue Zones Project and partners co-designed the signs to fit within each unique environment. For example, they worked with a high school health class to design informational signage about synthetic nicotine, vaping, and the mental health impacts of vaping which were then posted in middle and high school buildings.



WHY IT MATTERS

According to the CDC, nearly nine out of ten adults who smoke cigarettes daily first try smoking by age 18.¹⁰

Current use of any tobacco product among U.S. high school students sits at 12.6 percent.¹⁰

POLICY: TOBACCO

Signage was also translated into Spanish to accommodate the 25 percent of Walla Walla Valley's Spanish-speaking population.

To date, **784 signs have been added or updated** including:

- Bilingual decals in all Valley Transit bus stops and signs in all buses
- Signs along the exterior of school grounds and decals and posters in school buildings
- Decals at drive-through windows of coffee shops and restaurants
- Signs in parks

Walla Walla County will continue to update signage as needed and re-distribute across the community. The partnership between prevention coalitions, the Cities of Walla Walla and College Place, and local school districts has been strengthened and signs will be maintained through this collaboration.



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IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF YOUNG LUNGS AS WELL AS PROVIDE HEALTHY ROLE-MODELING EXPERIENCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR VALLEY. OFFERING TOBACCO-FREE EVENTS GIVES ADULTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MODEL HEALTHY BEHAVIOR BY NOT SMOKING OR USING NICOTINE PRODUCTS.

Norman Thiel
Executive Director
SonBridge Center for Better Living

FOOD

Food policy has the power to improve the availability of produce across neighborhoods.

Collaborative, community-based policies can foster a healthier local food system, improving access and making produce more visible via schools, corner markets, farmers markets, neighborhood gardens, mobile businesses, and more.

It is estimated that by 2030, if current eating and exercise habits remain the same, 86 percent of the American population will be overweight or obese.¹¹

Plate sizes are growing (from 9.5 inches to 12.5 inches over the last century) and so are our appetites: we're eating 27 percent more than we used to!

Food is fuel, and what we eat impacts our productivity too. A 2012 study revealed that unhealthy eating is related to a 66 percent increase in the risk of lost productivity. Health-related employee-productivity loss accounts for 77 percent of all productivity loss and costs employers up to three times more in annual healthcare expenses.¹²

In addition to looking and feeling better, the benefit of healthy eating in the U.S. is a financial one. It's estimated that the economic cost of four nutrition-related chronic diseases between 2011 to 2020 was \$16 trillion (or nearly 9 percent of gross domestic product annually) after accounting for direct health care costs, lost productivity, and lost wages related to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and as many as 13 types of cancer.¹³ Poor diet is a major risk factor for these serious health conditions, all of which reduce life expectancy.

Blue Zones Project focuses on shaping food policy to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and ensuring access for all residents.

During Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley's three-year transformation phase, local partners and champions helped the Cities adopt policies and programs that remove barriers and improve

access to healthy foods across the community.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Partnered with schools in both Walla Walla and College Place to improve food environments for students and staff. Both public school districts had their Nutrition and Wellness Policies reviewed by a national food policy expert and implemented improvements. In addition, Blue Zones Project and Farm to School received three grants to fund Davis Elementary's garden development and employ a Garden Education Manager at the school.
- Piloted a successful six-month Produce Rx program in partnership with Providence St. Mary Medical Center and the Walla Walla Food Hub. Produce Rx provides free produce, and nutrition education and resources to patients at risk or in treatment for diet-related chronic disease. In conjunction, a series of healthy cooking demonstrations were held at the hospital, and attendees were provided with ingredients to take home and prepare the recipes themselves.



POLICY: FOOD

- Blue Zones Project collaborated with BMAC Food Bank to create and enact a Nutrition Policy for both the Food Bank and partner pantries. This policy establishes targets for client produce and locally sourced food procurement. In 2023, BMAC distributed a total of 816,045 pounds of produce to clients and partner pantries throughout Walla Walla County.

These initiatives are already impacting the community in a positive way. **In 2023, 867 cans of unsweetened seltzer water were served instead of soda during city-sponsored events in Walla Walla.** Participating Produce Rx patients reported having more energy, improved biometrics, and were inspired to try new healthy recipes. And **Blue Zones Project helped Farm to School raise \$26,120** to pay for the Garden Education Manager's (GEM) time and materials, including a hydroponic tower at Davis Elementary. The GEM has provided summer garden education programming to 150 students, helping set the foundation for a lifetime of healthy habits.



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THE COMMITTEE HAS COME SO FAR FROM THE EARLY BEGINNINGS, PARTNERSHIPS HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS, PLUS THE CATALYTIC NATURE OF A PROGRAM THAT COMES IN WITH A LOT OF RESOURCES. NONE OF US ALONE WOULD HAVE HAD THE BANDWIDTH TO ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS LIKE THIS.

Erendira Cruz
Blue Zones Project Food Policy Committee
Co-Chair & Sustainable Living Center
Executive Director

Growing Well-Being

Founded in 1971, the **Walla Walla Senior Center** serves seniors of all generations and backgrounds. Their mission? To empower older adults to live healthy and happy lives with a focus on combatting social isolation and hunger in the senior population. A partnership with Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley was a natural fit.

Given the focus on nutrition and connection, Walla Walla Senior Center seemed like a prime candidate for a community garden. Blue Zones Project's Food Policy Committee conducted an informal feasibility assessment of several different garden locations and partnerships. Establishing new community gardens was a key goal of the Blue Zones Project team knowing that low fruit and vegetable consumption is a top health risk factor in the Walla Walla Valley.

Blue Zones Project worked with the City Parks and Recreation Department, Sustainable Living Center/Farm to School, and Walla Walla Senior Center to come up with a plan that would work for all parties.

Adding a garden at the Senior Center has provided the center's kitchen

with fresh herbs and produce for the congregate dining and meals on wheels food that they cook. The garden is also maintained by the Adult Day Center, or memory care members, who spend their days at the Senior Center. Caring for the garden provides natural movement, social connection, and increased produce consumption. The garden also helps beautify Jefferson Park around the Senior Center building, which is in a low-income neighborhood.

To get the garden up and running, Blue Zones Project staff and volunteers:

- Convened partners to determine feasibility; roles and responsibilities; and drafted and finalized the partnership memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure project sustainability.
- Helped win two grants to fund the garden beds.
- Worked with Farm to School to design the garden layout and order beds.
- Partnered with Senior Center kitchen staff to pick plants, worked with volunteers from a nearby church to prepare the site and install the beds,

and worked with Senior Center ADC volunteers to plant the garden with starts donated from four local farms.

Around 15 individuals from the Adult Day Center regularly tend to the garden, spending about an hour each morning weeding, caring for herbs, and harvesting tomatoes. They eagerly check the garden's progress every Monday, appreciating the growth after weekends away. Gardening particularly benefits chronically depressed participants, offering a break from worries, light exercise, social interaction, and fresh air. Experienced gardeners pass on their knowledge to younger staff from the Senior Center, fostering a sense of contribution and empowerment.

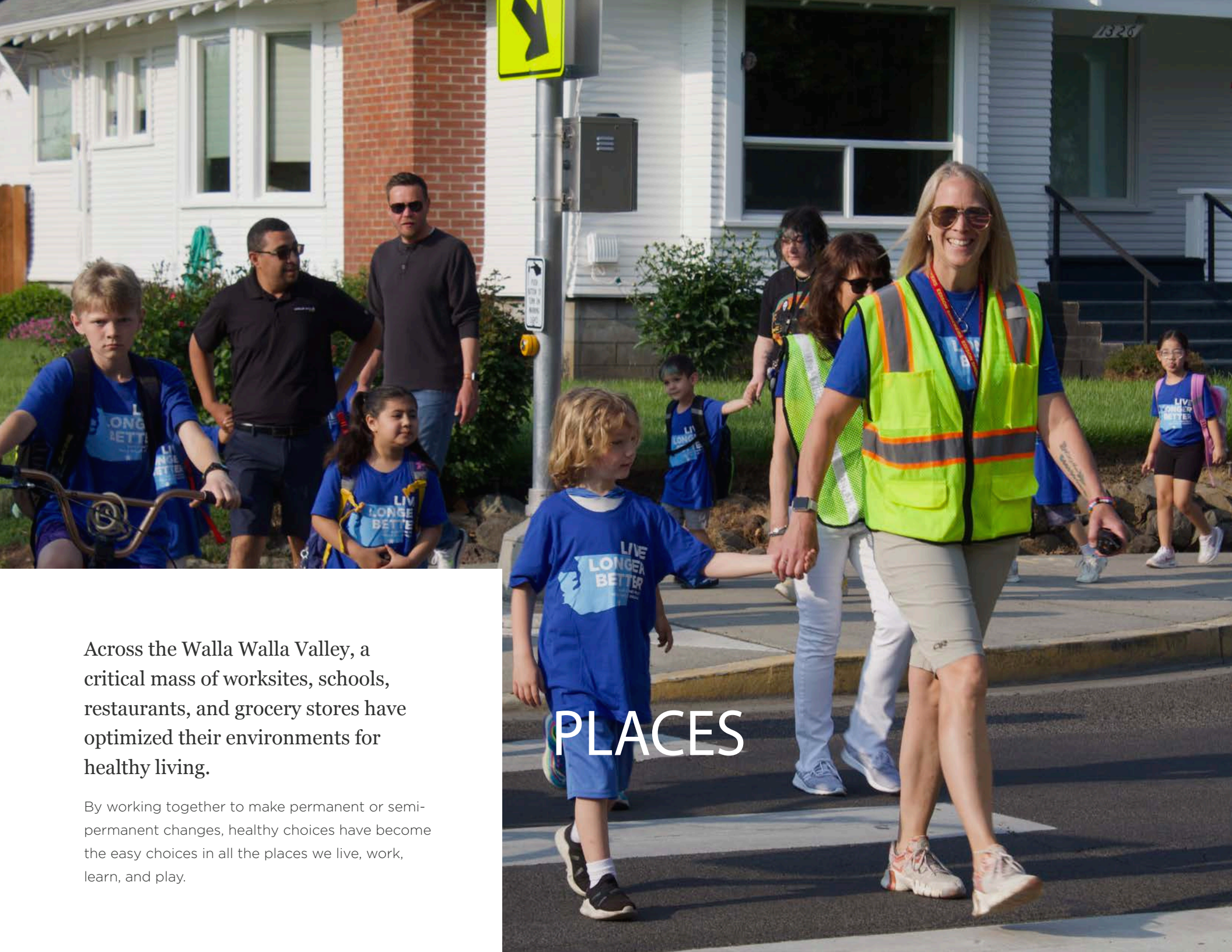
While developing the garden plan, all implementation partners were consulted and agreed upon the language in the MOU which laid out roles and responsibilities for installation, site preparation, long-term maintenance, and daily use. To ensure sustainability, partners compromised on the size and scope of the garden. It was important that all partners felt good about the final product and believed it would be feasible to sustain.

”

HAVING OUR BLUE ZONES GARDEN AT THE SENIOR CENTER BRINGS LOTS OF JOY AND SENSE OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE ADC PARTICIPANTS. THOSE WORKING IN THE GARDEN ARE ALL PAST AVID GARDENERS THAT FOR WHATEVER REASON, MOBILITY BEING THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE, ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO GARDEN AT HOME BY THEMSELVES. GIVING THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING THEY'VE ALWAYS LOVED GOES A LONG WAY FOR THEIR OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH. THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE BEDS GOES A LONG WAY ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE IN WHEELCHAIRS AND THOSE USING WALKERS, THEY ARE GRATEFUL THAT THOUGHT WAS PUT INTO THAT ASPECT.

Alex Sanchez
Adult Day Center Program Manager
Walla Walla Senior Center





Across the Walla Walla Valley, a critical mass of worksites, schools, restaurants, and grocery stores have optimized their environments for healthy living.

By working together to make permanent or semi-permanent changes, healthy choices have become the easy choices in all the places we live, work, learn, and play.

PLACES

WORKSITES

Worksites engage employees and support healthy choices.

Employers are in a powerful position to help us move more, eat better, and connect. About one-third of our waking hours are spent at work. Fewer jobs require moderate physical activity, a percentage that has fallen from 50 percent in 1960 to 20 percent today.¹⁴ Some 70 percent of Americans eat at their desk several times a week.¹⁵ As waistlines expand, so do medical costs for employers. Creating healthier work environments can shift that trend, trimming costs and enhancing productivity.

Our community saw 15 worksites take actions to support employee well-being, and **ten of these worksites took extra steps to become Blue Zones Project Approved™ worksites.**

Participating worksites implemented a variety of Blue Zones Project best practices to engage employees. Actions included things like providing employees access to self-monitoring equipment (e.g. scales, blood pressure monitors, glucose testing), making food-related improvements, and establishing quiet spaces to downshift during the workday, and more.

Impact of Healthier Work Places

- Thanks to new investments in programming and an active employee wellness committee, colleague engagement is on the rise at **Valley Residential Services**. More than 120 individuals attended the organization's virtual health fair and 40 attended a Blue Zones Project Purpose Workshop.
- **Baker Boyer Bank** is creating stronger connections with a staff Walking Moai group enjoying natural movement together each week for nearly three years.
- To allow employees a quiet space to de-stress and relax during workday breaks, **The City of College Place** created a designated Downshift space with comfortable furniture, softer lighting, and a ping pong table.



WHY IT MATTERS

According to a Quantum Workplace report, employees are 14 percent more engaged when given time off to recharge, 18 percent more engaged when given time for healthy activities, and 10 percent more engaged when provided healthy good options at the workplace.¹⁶



The City of Walla Walla Helps Employees Eat Better, Move More, and De-stress

The City of Walla Walla is driven by its mission to enhance the quality of life in Walla Walla and strive to be the best of the best of the Northwest. They accomplish this through modeling core values, continuous improvement, and beginning to utilize data to drive decision making. The City employs roughly 280 employees year-round, adding an additional 50-60 seasonal employees annually. They have an active and vibrant Wellness Committee made up of representatives from each department.

A day-one supporter of Blue Zones Project, the City of Walla Walla contributed to the Project's Discovery and Foundation phase and has staff volunteers that serve on the Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley Steering, Leadership, Worksite, Policy, and Engagement Committees.

As one of the larger employers in the community, the City wanted to set an example and become one of the first Blue Zones Project Approved worksites in Walla Walla Valley. Pam Taylor and her team in Human Resources led this charge with

ample support from then City Manager, Nabil Shawa, and Deputy City Manager, Elizabeth Chamberlain. The City saw the partnership with Blue Zones Project as an opportunity to enhance their established wellness policies, programs, and committee in addition to staying up to date on current worksite well-being trends.

Inspiring changes like these earned the City of Walla Walla the distinction of becoming a Blue Zones Project Approved worksite:

- Installed eight Blue Zones Project parking spaces, one in each employee lot and additional spots in public parking lots downtown and at Pioneer Park. These parking spaces are further away from building entrances and encourage individuals to get more steps in their day.
- Updated both their vending and catering policies to include a commitment to following the Blue Zones Food Guidelines whenever possible.
- Includes Blue Zones Project news and information into the weekly "Friday Feed" email newsletter sent to all employees. The City promotes Blue Zones Project community

programming in addition to worksite-specific events.

- Provides regular opportunities for City employees to volunteer in the community during work hours. Some of the most popular activities include trail clean-ups, volunteering at the local food bank, and participating in Dr. Suess Day at area elementary schools.

The City of Walla Walla has offered the RealAge Test to employees for the past three years. Baseline results indicated the top health risk among City staff was sitting for long periods of time. Micro-breaks, flexible sit-to-stand furniture, Walking Moais, and other initiatives helped reduce the prevalence of this risk. **Between the 2021 and 2022 assessments, the City saw a 10 percent decrease in employee health risks associated with sitting for long periods of time.**

While the City already had an active Wellness Committee, their partnership with Blue Zones Project has reinvigorated the group and encouraged them to expand program offerings to employees. Since their Blue Zones approval, the City has offered Cooking Demonstrations and Purpose Workshops for employees, chair

PLACES: WORKSITES

massage appointments with a professional massage therapist, lunch and learn programs, family-friendly craft nights and BBQ gatherings at Fort Walla Walla Park or the City pool, and much more.

Through the momentum created during the approval process, the Wellness Committee kept employee well-being top of mind for City leadership. The committee meets monthly to discuss well-being priorities of their departments and programming that could support those needs. City Council and City leadership also prioritize maintaining their Well City status—an annual renewal of well-being policies—and review administrative policies each year, some of which were enhanced by their work with Blue Zones Project.



INVESTING IN WELL-BEING

The City of Walla Walla used money saved (2 percent) from reduced healthcare costs to reinvest in their company-wide Wellness Committee.



HAVING THREE CHILDREN AT HOME MEANS CONSTANT SCHOOL EVENTS, SPORTS PRACTICES, AND APPOINTMENTS. THE CITY HAS CREATED AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE I CAN WORK WITH MY SUPERVISOR TO FLEX MY SCHEDULE WHEN NEEDED SO I CAN STILL BE THERE FOR THOSE MOMENTS WITH MY FAMILY, BUT ALSO GET MY WORK DONE HERE IN THE OFFICE. KNOWING WE HAVE THE SUPPORT TO DO SO MAKES FOR A MORE POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND IS ONE OF THE REASONS I LOVE WORKING FOR THE CITY.

Rikki Gwinn
City Support Services
City of Walla Walla

”

THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR ALL OF US AND EDUCATION WAS HIT HARD. I FOUND MYSELF LACKING EFFICACY AND MOTIVATION TO DO MY JOB. I LOST MY ‘WHY’ IN A WAY. THE PURPOSE WORKSHOP HAS CHANGED THAT FOR ME TREMENDOUSLY. THIS SCHOOL YEAR HAS BEEN MUCH BETTER, I HAVE GROWN SO MUCH IN MY CRAFT, AND I CREDIT THAT DIRECTLY TO MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE PURPOSE WORKSHOP. NOT ONLY DID IT REMIND ME THAT I HAVE GIFTS TO SHARE, BUT IT REMINDED ME WHY THOSE GIFTS MATTER TO ME AND MY HEART. IT GAVE ME BACK MYSELF AND MY DESIRE TO EXCEL!

Ambra Bryant
Assistant Principal
College Place High School



Creating a Culture of Well-Being

College Place Public Schools (CPPS)

District educates a diverse population of more than 1,550 students from Pre-K through 12th grade. The district is comprised of one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school. CPPS offers a broad range of course offerings and programs that align with Washington State Learning Goals and are offered to students at all grade levels. College Place Public Schools employs 200 full-time employees and dozens of part-time and temporary employees.

The district's culture is the heart of the school system. It makes College Place Public Schools a special place to learn and work, and it gives them a unique advantage. Building and sustaining the College Place culture requires intentional effort from everyone in the district. The CP Way is part of that effort.

Once employees returned to working in person during the 2020-2021 school year, it became very evident that prioritizing and supporting the well-being of employees at CPPS was at the top of the administration's list of priorities. Without its employees, in

this case teachers and staff, the worksite would not function. CPPS was already engaged in Blue Zones Project's work with schools and policymakers, so they quickly recognized that partnering with the Project to enhance worksite well-being was the support they needed for their employees.

Through their Blue Zones Project partnership, CPPS aimed to provide resources and opportunities for their employees to focus on their health and well-being which would allow them to continue to pursue their professional purpose as educators. Steps taken by CPPS to become a Blue Zones Approved worksite include:

- Added resources and posters to all common spaces to remind employees about the benefits of breaks throughout the day.
- Provided information about local farmers markets and produce stands available in the community and encouraged employees to visit these growers with their families.
- Created a new logo and brand for their Wellness Committee and the well-being initiatives they offer to employees.

- Began hosting a Blue Zones Project Purpose Workshop for administrative leadership team as part of professional development before the start of the school year, and incorporated Purpose Workshops into onboarding for new employees.
- Provided opportunities for employees to give back to the community by volunteering during work hours. Many employees are involved with a service project during the first week of school with students.
- Started offering walking routes to employees during the school year to encourage staff to take breaks and walk around various campuses.
- During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the district developed a PTO sharing policy allowing staff to donate extra paid time off or sick leave to colleagues in need. This policy remains in effect today.

Efforts like these, combined with monthly professional development meetings, lunch and learn workshops, and ongoing communication keep well-being top of mind for district leadership and employees.

PLACES: WORKSITES

College Place Public Schools has seen an increase in employee retention over the past year and an uptick in engagement in community activities and programs.

During the 2023-2024 school year, CPPS was one of eight district teams selected to participate in a cohort through Kaiser Permanente, Healthier Generation, and OSPI to apply the Multi-tiered System of Supports framework to staff well-being. The district credits its work with Blue Zones Project as a driving force behind them becoming a viable candidate for the program.

As part of their ongoing commitment to workplace well-being CPPS leadership meets with Blue Zones Project team members quarterly and the Human Resources team continues to leverage monthly well-being resources provided by the Project.





WELL-BEING SAVES EVERYONE MONEY



THRIVE, DON'T SUFFER

For employees with the highest levels of well-being — those with the highest scores in the “thriving” category — the cost of lost productivity is only \$840 a year. Among the “suffering” employees — those with the lowest scores in the “thriving” category — the annual per person cost of lost productivity due to sick days is \$28,800.¹⁷



WHAT IS DISEASE BURDEN?

Disease burden cost is how much money a person spends due to disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, back pain, diabetes, depression/anxiety, and sleep apnea/insomnia.¹⁷



IT PAYS TO BE HAPPY

Respondents in the “thriving” category averaged \$4,929 per person annually in disease burden cost versus \$6,763 a year for respondents in the struggling and suffering categories. For an organization with 1,000 workers, thriving employees would cost their employers \$1.8 million less every year. Furthermore, the average annual new disease burden cost for people who are thriving is \$723, compared with \$1,488 for those who are struggling or suffering.¹⁷

SCHOOLS

Area schools get students moving and learning more.

Schools can shape healthy habits for life. Over the past 40 years, rates of obesity among children have soared. **Approximately 25 million children and adolescents (more than 33 percent) are now overweight or obese, or at the risk of becoming so.**⁴ Physical activity and stretch breaks during the school day can improve grades, increase concentration, and raise math, reading, and writing test scores.¹⁸ Simple changes in lunchroom design can entice students toward healthier choices.¹⁹

Across the Walla Walla Valley, six schools earned the designation Blue Zones Project Approved. Schools implemented policies and introduced food options that encourage healthy eating on campus, integrated physical activity into the day, and incorporated other Blue Zones Project principles into the curriculum and campus space for more than 3,225 students.

Impact of Healthier Schools

- Thanks to changes in the nutrition program, **Davis Elementary School** saw the number of students reporting hunger twice per day

drop by 28.8 percent, and the number of students reporting hunger all day dropped by 12 percent to 0.

- On average, more than 70 Davis Elementary School students (10 percent of the student body) walk or bike to school each day.



WALKING HELPS KIDS

Children who walk to school are more alert and ready to learn, strengthen their social networks and develop lifetime fitness habits.^{20, 21}

A Walking School Bus allows a group of children to walk to school under adult supervision.



”

I WAS SURPRISED AT HOW IMPACTFUL THE PURPOSE WORKSHOP WAS FOR ME. I REALIZED WHAT I LIKE TO DO THE MOST AND WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME. THIS WAS HELPFUL AND LED ME TO A WORK CAREER THAT I COULD POSSIBLY PURSUE.

Junior Year Student
College Place High School



Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds at CPHS

College Place High School (CPHS)

is a four-year comprehensive high school focused on striving to do school differently. Administrative staff and teachers set their sights high to create an environment that will not only teach kids but inspire them to be lifelong learners. Thirty-four classroom teachers educate 490 students.

The school operates by its guiding principles: providing students with positive, personalized relationships where they feel connected, valued, and inspired to learn; responsive, learner-centered environments; connecting students to their community through real-life experiences, mentorships, and adult advocacy; and teaching through relevant, project-based, and collaborative experiences.

During the discovery process College Place Public Schools Superintendent, Jim Fry, noted that College Place High School was poised and ready to work with Blue

Zones Project to enhance their support of student well-being, which later expanded to the school district joining the initiative as a worksite. The school board also adopted a resolution of support for the partnership with Blue Zones Project.

Administrators at CPHS wanted to bolster their well-being programs in the classroom, lunchroom, and in extracurricular activities. Principal Robert Aguliar and Assistant Principal Ambra Bryant were fully engaged and encouraged teacher and staff involvement as CPHS worked towards becoming the first Blue Zones Project Approved school in the Walla Walla Valley.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Created the “Healthy Hawks” Wellness Committee comprised of teachers, staff, students, and community partners who meet monthly to discuss the well-being needs of the campus.
- Encouraged student clubs to hold fundraisers that either do not involve

food or where food is paired with a physical activity.

- Optimized the school's lunchroom with new signage containing reminders to make healthy food choices, upgraded equipment to allow for more scratch cooking, and stocks a popular fruit and salad bar for every meal.
- Teachers added stretching and walking breaks to fuel creativity in the classroom.
- Built and maintain an active greenhouse and hydroponic garden. The program strives to teach students about the dynamic ecological system of a garden and make the connection between growing and cooking fresh foods.
- Incorporated Purpose Workshops into the Junior English curriculum. Students use their reflections from the workshop during the spring semester and in college admission essays when appropriate.



From the first to second year of engagement with Blue Zones Project, CPHS saw a 5 percent increase in attendance and a 12 percent decrease in disciplinary cases. The graduation rate remained steady at 95 percent, well above the state and national averages of 82.3 percent and 87 percent respectively.

With the creation of the Healthy Hawks Committee, the Purpose Workshop curriculum, and the ongoing school garden program, the future for continued well-being is clear for CPHS.



BY THE NUMBERS

College Place High School offers a fruit and vegetable bar at the beginning of every lunch line and a salad bar at the end of every lunch line. Since opening the salad bars in Fall 2021, CPHS has seen a 15 percent increase in usage according to the Nutrition Services Clerk.

Berney Elementary Turns Up Well-Being

Berney Elementary School originally opened its doors in 1904 as a four-room schoolhouse serving students up to the eighth grade. The school was named for U.H. Berney who served as chairman for the school district for over 25 years. Mr. Berney donated the land for the school's athletic field and the bell for the bell tower, which is still in use today.

Berney Elementary has a long-standing tradition as a community school, with 50 caring staff members committed to the success of the school's 410 students. Everyone at the school is guided by its core values: respect, communication, fun, flexibility, and compassion.

Mindy Gonzales, Communities in Schools Advocate, and Michelle Carpenter, Principal at Berney Elementary, were early champions of Blue Zones Project. They participated in Discovery process interviews, focus groups, and voiced interest in becoming an approved school early on.

While Berney Elementary staff have made student well-being a priority for years, they

looked at the partnership with Blue Zones Project as a way to update and enhance their approach and lay a foundation for even better well-being going forward. They focused on best practices that supported the culture of Berney as a place where people care about each other, have fun, and are always growing. They were also motivated by the goal to become the first Blue Zones Project Approved elementary school in the Walla Walla Valley.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Ensures that all relevant fundraisers meet Smart Snack Guidelines and offer non-food related fundraisers such as selling Berney socks and shoelaces to add some school spirit to natural movement.
- In support of the district policy to encourage drinking water over sugar sweetened beverages, a new water bottle filling station was installed on the playground—a complement to the indoor filling stations—for students to use during recess and for community members who enjoy the playground on weekends and during the summer.
- Established a more robust beverage

policy for the building, by only allowing water in classrooms. Beverages like juice, soda, or energy drinks are prohibited indoors and must be consumed before entering the building. Packing juice or other beverages in student lunches is acceptable, but energy drinks and sodas are discouraged.

- While Berney has maintained a flourishing garden for many years led by WWV Farm to School, they sought to enhance the program through their partnership with Blue Zones Project. They expanded garden programming to the afterschool program with 21st Century and added a spring family engagement day which included preparing the garden for spring plantings.
- Launched the first Walking School Bus (WSB) in the Walla Walla Valley in May of 2022. The school organized two “bus stops” about a half mile from the school in different directions, and over 50 students and their families joined in the fun. The Walking School Bus was escorted down Pleasant Street by two teachers on horses as well as Principal Carpenter on her scooter.

PLACES: SCHOOLS

After the success of the WSB launch, the “bus” also ran on national Bike to School Day, with over 40 students riding their bikes and scooters to school. Participants were greeted at the school by local baseball mascot Sweet Lou and the Berney Bulldog. The school hosted a family breakfast, and local first responders joined in on the fun by handing out stickers and taking pictures with attendees. Berney continues to offer a Walking School Bus chaperoned by the PTA and a staff committee every Friday, making it a new school tradition.

Ensuring that all are modeling well-being for the students, school staff created a “Jan-You-Ary” campaign for teachers and administrators to encourage positive self-care practices like walking, eating healthy meals, taking time to downshift through reading and art, and getting plenty of rest. Having adults walk the talk helps instill a lifetime of healthy habits in the school’s young students.



”

THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS WAS EASILY ONE OF THE THREE MOST IMPACTFUL EVENTS I’VE BEEN A PART OF AS AN EDUCATOR. THE SCHOOL WAS BUZZING ALL DAY LONG AND WE’VE HAD MANY PARENTS ASK IF THIS WILL BE A REGULAR PRACTICE GOING FORWARD ON FRIDAYS. WE’RE EXCITED TO SAY, YES!

Michelle Carpenter
Principal
Berney Elementary School



RESTAURANTS

Restaurant meals can weigh us down or lift us up.

The typical American entrée weighs in at 1,000 calories.²² For the average adult, eating one meal away from home per week translates to gaining about two additional pounds a year. Evidence indicates people appreciate healthy changes. In a five-year study of sales at U.S. restaurant chains, those that increased their better-for-you/low-calorie servings saw a 5.5 percent increase in same-store sales, while those that did not suffered a 5.5 percent decrease.²³

With nearly one-half of every food dollar spent on food prepared outside the home, it's important that restaurants make it easier for their customers to make the healthy choice by offering healthy entrees.

Walla Walla Valley residents and visitors now have seven Blue Zones Project Approved restaurants to choose from, and 12 Blue Zones-inspired dishes to enjoy.

In these restaurants, patrons may find smaller portion and split-plate options, healthier offerings highlighted through signage and staff-customer interactions, expanded use of local produce, and more.

In these restaurants, patrons may find smaller portions and split-plate options, healthier offerings highlighted through signage and staff-customer interactions, expanded use of local produce, and more.

Locally-owned restaurants stepped up to make healthy food choices easier—things like creating new healthy entrees for adults and children and serving healthier sides as the default option.

The Express, Walla Walla's only completely vegetarian restaurant, created a kids' menu that includes multiple entrees that meet the Blue Zones healthy dish guidelines, ensuring younger diners have appealing, healthy choices.

Cleveland Commons Cafe is one of the healthiest restaurants in Walla Walla, serving both Whitman College students and the public. They are a plant-forward

eatery that features vegetarian options before meat options on the menu and at a lower price point. To help customers make educated choices, Cleveland Commons labels foods with icons indicating foods that are vegan, vegetarian, farm-to-table, and more. They prioritize scratch cooking, even making many of their condiments, sauces, and other "extras" themselves.

As part of their partnership with Blue Zones Project, Cleveland Commons hosted a Cooking Demonstration for Whitman College faculty and staff, and Chef Jon Sodini has shared his knowledge at many Blue Zones Project community events as well.



Rogers Bakery and Café Serves Up Well-Being

Rogers Bakery and Café has been a fixture in College Place, Washington, for over 55 years. Started in 1962 by Russell and Ruth Rogers, the business became famous for its maple bars and apple fritters. Multiple generations ran the operation until 2002, when the café was purchased by Lenny and Kelli Leen. To this day, customers come in with memories of the 10-cent maple bars.

Located in the heart of College Place, Rogers Bakery and Café serves as a beloved gathering space for the community. Students, retirees, and city officials meet there often, and the business booms on Wednesday evenings for their spaghetti nights.

During Blue Zones Project's Discovery and Foundation phase, owner Kelli Leen learned about the initiative and met with the local team to share her knowledge about the needs of the retail foods community in the Walla Walla Valley.

Work began when Kelli learned the Project could help the restaurant support the community's health. Both the café's owners and staff took steps to help the business

become a Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Developed a children's menu that features three Blue Zones-inspired options.
- Provides whole grain alternatives to classic menu items.
- Highlights locally sourced produce to support area growers and provide fresher options to the community.
- Trains staff each quarter on the enhancements made to the restaurant through their engagement with Blue Zones Project.
- Installed a bike rack to encourage natural movement to and from the restaurant.

With support from the Blue Zones Project team, word about the enhancements happening at the restaurant got out to more than just its regulars. Community members quickly discovered that Rogers is more than just maple bars.

Since becoming a Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant, Rogers Bakery and

Café has joined the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce and gained greater recognition throughout the community. Over the past two years, the restaurant's online reviews have grown substantially, resulting in an average of 4.5 to 5 stars.



GROCERY STORES

Local grocery stores promote healthy foods and cooking skills.

Grocery stores influence food decisions. The actions we take to determine what we eat begin at the store. **About 60 percent of the food we purchase is highly processed, fatty, salty, or sugary.**²² Grocery store promotions and design layout can influence those choices for the better.

In the U.S., healthy eating could generate an estimated savings of \$114.5 billion per year through reduced medical costs, increased productivity, and decline in heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporotic hip fractures.²⁴

Americans visit the grocery store almost twice a week on average, and their food choices impact their health and productivity. The design of many grocery stores and the deals they promote often point people to unhealthy foods. Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley created awareness around these issues, and a local grocer took steps to offer healthy food education opportunities to customers and made design, display, and promotional changes that point people toward produce, whole grains,

locally grown foods, and other healthy buys.

Two Walla Walla grocery stores took steps to become Blue Zones Project Approved.



WHY IT MATTERS

Sixty percent of purchases are unplanned. Placing attractive produce or other healthy products at the front of the store, at the deli, or at the checkout area can encourage “impulse” purchase of these healthy items.²⁵



Family Grocery Keeps Up With Changing Times

A hip urban market located in downtown Walla Walla, **The Market by Andy's** is the second location for long-established grocers, the Anderson family. DeLaine and Walter Anderson founded Andy's Grocery in 1968, in College Place. The family's desire to provide their community with healthy food options was the spark that launched their business more than 50 years ago.

The Market by Andy's is in the heart of downtown Walla Walla, frequented by locals, college students, and area visitors. The store features a focus on local produce, fresh-made grab and go options, a wide variety of bulk food offerings, and a delicious smoothie and juice bar.

Vicki Zanes, the Manager at The Market by Andy's, was a crucial

partner during the Discovery and Foundation phases of Blue Zones Project. She provided her experience, expertise, and passion for all things related to grocery stores and helped the Project better understand the needs of the community through a food access lens. The store's team was excited to work towards becoming the first Blue Zones Project Approved grocery store in the Walla Walla Valley.

Through the approval process, The Market by Andy's hoped to achieve greater exposure throughout the Walla Walla Valley, highlighting the range of healthy, affordable, and delicious foods available. The store supports many local farms and growers and was excited to promote their products. They also offer many plant-based grab and go options like soups, smoothies, sandwiches, salads, and snack packs. Ultimately, the staff enjoys educating the public on the healthy options available and saw the partnership with Blue Zones Project as an opportunity to further this mission.

Best practices implemented during the approval process included:

- Adding signage to the drink coolers to encourage the selection of healthy beverages, specifically water.
- Ensure cereals displayed below 60 inches do not include excessive sugars and are not

marketed to children.

- Added new signage both inside and outside the store indicating their acceptance of EBT and WIC benefits for payment.
- Placed adhesive floor signs to point shoppers towards the produce area.
- Indicates healthy Blue Zones-inspired product offerings throughout the store with shelf talker and endcap signage, calling attention to options like whole grains, plant-based milks, healthy snacks, and non-sugar sweetened beverages.

Because of the positive response, the Market has added a new member to their team focused on social media and marketing to continue promotions and education to the community. The store also has capacity to host continued programming on-site as well.



BY THE NUMBERS

Since becoming a Blue Zones Project Approved grocery store, The Market by Andy's customer reviews have increased from 4.1 stars to 4.8 stars.



BABY FOOD NAPKINS
BATH TISSUE

DOG FOOD CAT FOOD
AUTO SUPPLIES
HARDWARE BOOKS

MELON Cantaloupe
1.99 0.99



BLUE ZONES PROJECT





PEOPLE

Blue Zones Project encourages people to optimize their homes and social environments, provides opportunities for individuals to discover meaning at Purpose Workshops, facilitates volunteer experiences to help people connect with the community, and offers programs that deliver support through healthy social networks.



Strong Social Connections Help Residents Move More, Eat Better, Connect, and Downshift

Our connections to friends, family, and those around us are very powerful. They can shape our lives in more ways than we realize.

Research shows that even your friends' friends' friends—people you don't even know—can affect your health, happiness, and behaviors.²⁶

People of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds across the Walla Walla Valley have come together to create positive change in their community through Blue Zones Project. From the program launch in 2021 to community certification in 2024:

6,777

individuals involved in the project.

957

residents donated their time, skills, and passions toward volunteer opportunities tracked as part of Blue Zones Project.

1,009

residents participated in Purpose Workshops to rediscover and apply their gifts in their daily lives.

325

people met up with a Walking Moai for connecting to move naturally together.

953

individuals attended a plant-based cooking class.



WHAT'S A MOAI?

Moai is a concept from Okinawa, Japan, that roughly means coming together for a common purpose. When you find your Moai, you find your personal board of directors — a committed group of individuals supporting each other and working collectively to improve well-being, for life.



THE RESULTS ARE IN

Measures from the Sharecare Community Well-Being Index reveal the impact:

- Physical well-being among residents engaged in Blue Zones Project is up 7 points since baseline measures in 2021.
- New connections are being made. 73.1 percent of residents report participating in group activities, which is up 8.6 percent from 2021.

PEOPLE

The world's longest-lived people in blue zones areas have always understood the power of social connectedness. In Okinawa, "Moais"—groups of about five people who commit to each other for life—provide social connection, emotional, and sometimes financial support in times of need. Moai members have the stress-shedding security of knowing there is always someone there for them.

Spending time with people who positively influence one another is crucial. In the Walla Walla Valley, we embrace the power of social connections to bring citizens together through groups, clubs, and community organizations.

Move more. More than 29 Walking Moais were created throughout the community, building long-lasting friendships while exploring our community on foot.

Eat better. Cooking classes and demonstrations brought individuals together to learn to cook new plant-based dishes. Over 953 residents attended a plant-based cooking demonstration.

Connect and have the right outlook. Blue zones centenarians also put an emphasis on connecting with their reason for being. Whether through family, career, or community, living with

purpose pays off. Blue Zones researchers have found that people who have a clear sense of purpose in life tend to live about seven years longer than those who don't.³

Through volunteering, Purpose Workshops, and Purpose Moais, Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley encourages individuals to discover their innate gifts. We help our community members match their passions and commitment to volunteer opportunities that deepen their sense of purpose.

More than 1,009 people sought to discover their gifts at a Purpose Workshop and put their skills to work by giving back to the region through volunteer work. **With more than 4,000 hours donated volunteers in Walla Walla Valley have generated \$133,960 in value for the community.**²⁷



BY THE NUMBERS

More than **5,886 Walla Walla Valley residents** attended educational events focused on well-being



Local Partners Make it Easier for Volunteers to Give Back

The **Blue Mountain Volunteer Corps (BMVC)** committee began when Blue Zones Project and **Whitman College** and **Walla Walla University** saw a need to streamline volunteerism in the valley. Local residents found it difficult to navigate volunteer opportunities in the area.

The entities partnered with BMVC and **United Way of the Blue Mountains** to begin leveraging GetConnected, a platform that helps match volunteers with local nonprofits and civic groups. The committee continues in-person volunteer fairs and outreach to educate the public and the local agencies about the platform. The goal is to get as many individuals and organizations using GetConnected as possible and remove barriers to volunteerism in the valley.



Moais Make Healthy Neighborhood Connections

Connections to friends, family, and others around us have the ability to shape our lives in more ways than we realize. If your friends are smokers, unhappy, or obese, you're more likely to adopt these same traits. On the positive side, you are 20 percent more likely to succeed at new behaviors if you do them with a buddy.²⁸

Residents across the Walla Walla Valley embraced the idea of Moais: gathering and supporting each other in ways that raise well-being for all.

Melanie Plantaric recently moved to Walla Walla after retiring from her 31-year career as a second-grade teacher. She chose to retire in the Valley because, as she says, "Walla Walla is a small town, but it attracts a diverse population of people that are approachable."

"I spent a year walking by myself in Mountain View Cemetery, and I felt very lonely during COVID," remembers Walla Walla resident, Melanie. "I saw the advertisement for the Blue Zones Project

Walking Moais and I thought, 'Oh my gosh!'"

Melanie attended a Walking Moai launch in June of 2021 because she wanted to meet other people to walk with. Her friendly personality and leadership abilities made Melanie a natural choice to organize and lead a group, which became known as the **Mountain View Moai**.

The Moai members became a strong support system for each other. A few members, like Melanie, were new to the area and joined the group to find connection and friendship. One member had recently lost her husband. Not only did walking with the group help her through that difficult time, but they became friends and spent time together outside of walking by going to lunch and other social outings.

More than two years after launching, Mountain View Moai participants continue walking together every Wednesday morning in the cemetery. Group member Susan Monahan is a retired professor who has written books about the history of Walla Walla. Her extensive knowledge of the area, combined with her cemetery research—and subsequent sign posting—provides interesting historical accounts during walks. "She makes the walks very interesting,"

explains Melanie.

The Mountain View Moai have not only befriended each other, they have befriended the park as well. They enjoy observing the work city employees do to maintain the grounds and witnessing the love and devotion of those visiting the cemetery. The Moai cares for the park so much, they have donated money toward the historic signs Susan creates for people to enjoy.

The Mountain View Moai is not just a walking group; it's a network of friends, a source of support, and advocates for their beloved cemetery.



”

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND EXERCISE, A WALKING MOAI IS THE PERFECT COMBINATION. IT'S SUCH A TREASURE.

Melanie Plantaric
Walking Moai Member



Plant-Based Cooking Catches Fire

Eating together makes a big difference. Obesity is associated with significantly increased risk of more than 20 chronic diseases and health conditions that cause devastating consequences and increased mortality.

Adolescents who eat dinner with their families are 15 percent less likely to become obese.²⁹ A report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse points out that teens who eat dinner with their families more than three times a week are less likely to do poorly in school.³⁰

Blue Zones Project's monthly plant-based cooking demonstrations attracted high interest among community members of all ages and skill levels, providing the opportunity to learn how to prepare fresh, healthy, and delicious meals with plant-based ingredients.

Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley built relationships with local chefs like **Heidi McFarley**, owner of Red Reina, who met with local team members in the Project's early days and offered to teach some cooking classes. When Blue Zones Project combined its cooking classes with Providence St. Mary's Produce Rx pilot, attendance increased from an average of 10 participants up to 60 per class. Because of the uptick, Blue Zones Project staff worked with local farms to purchase in-season produce to distribute to participants.

The popularity of Heidi's monthly classes with Blue Zones Project grew thanks to her infectious love and knowledge of healthy scratch cooking. Partnering with the Project rekindled her passion for teaching and reinvigorated her business, where she teaches in-person and virtual cooking lessons.

In addition to ongoing community classes, Blue Zones Project worked directly with organizations like Baker Boyer Bank, the City of Walla Walla,

and Valley Residential Services to offer Cooking Demonstrations, allowing the Project to reach many employees interested in plant-slant eating.

More than 953 Walla Walla Valley residents have attended a Blue Zones Project Cooking Demonstration featuring healthy, plant-based foods.



BY THE NUMBERS

1,000 CALORIES

in a typical American entree in a restaurant.²²

2 EXTRA POUNDS

gained a year by eating one meal away from home a week.²³



”

BLUE ZONES PROJECT HELPED AWAKEN MY PASSION WITH COOKING CLASSES. I SEE HOW PASSIONATE MY FELLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE AND HOW MANY PEOPLE WANT TO IMPROVE THEIR LIFE THROUGH HEALTHY FOOD AND EXERCISE.

Heidi McFarley
Red Reina Owner and Cooking Demonstration
Instructor



Volunteers Give Back to Community, Find New Friends

Volunteers are at the heart of any community initiative. Research shows that people who give back experience better overall health, greater life satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and a greater ability to manage their own chronic illnesses. Donating your time and energy to your community can even reduce your risk of high blood pressure, depression, and chronic pain.³¹

Roger Esparza is a native to the Walla Walla Valley. His parents immigrated from Mexico, and he is well-known and respected across the community. Roger hit a rough patch, sending his health and well-being on the decline. He heard about Blue Zones Project and began implementing Power 9 practices in his daily life. He lost weight, but more importantly, he rediscovered his purpose. As part of his desire to give back to the community, Roger joined the Blue Zones Project Steering Committee and served as a Project ambassador at its 2022 Connect Summit.

Lucinda Richards is another Walla Walla Valley resident putting her gifts and passions to work in the community. She works with area teenagers who are trying to overcome addiction as a School Recovery Support Ally and Advocate for Trilogy Recovery Community.

She meets with teens one-on-one at College Place High School and Trilogy Recovery Community using techniques to help students manage their mental health in positive ways, instead of turning to substance use. Lucinda also leads a recovery group called SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) for nicotine, vaping, drinking, and drug abuse.

After learning more about Blue Zones Project at a community outreach information fair, Lucinda volunteered to join the Project's Tobacco Policy Committee.

"I love how organized it is. You come out of a meeting feeling like you've done something, and my word really matters—what I said is validated. It's local, and I really feel like I'm making a difference. It feels like a second family now," she says of her committee work.

Becoming more involved with the Project, Lucinda began incorporating Power 9 principles into her own life and prioritizing her well-being. In addition to adding more natural movement and healthy foods to her daily routine, Lucinda attended a Purpose Workshop.

"I cried. I was able to heal a little bit. It was a breakthrough. I was able to acknowledge my gift of helping others. It confirmed my path and social work is all about that," she said.

Lucinda was so moved by the experience, she went through training and now volunteers as a Purpose Workshop facilitator, providing opportunities for others to learn and grow.



”

I HEAR FROM A LOT OF PEOPLE, 'ROGER, YOU'RE OVEREXTENDING YOURSELF'. BLUE ZONES PROJECT WAS THE LAST ORGANIZATION I'VE JOINED, AND IT MADE THE BIGGEST IMPACT. MY HEALTH IS WHERE IT'S AT BECAUSE OF BLUE ZONES PROJECT. IT WASN'T EASY. I WAS IN BAD SHAPE HEALTH-WISE AND MENTALLY. GOING THROUGH COVID, I GOT HIT WITH IT AND EXPERIENCED DEPRESSION FOR THE FIRST TIME. I AM A TOUGH GUY AND I HOLD STUFF IN, BUT I WAS SAD, EMOTIONAL, AND SUICIDAL. BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAD A WAY OF SAYING 'THIS IS GOING TO HELP YOU. PAY ATTENTION. LISTEN.

Roger Esparza
Blue Zones Project Volunteer





GOOD FRIENDS AND FAMILY MAKE EVERYTHING BETTER



FRIENDS ALWAYS SHARE

Friends provide more than good times, memories, and companionship — they also share healthy habits and other traits with one another. Did you know that if your friends are smokers, unhappy, or obese, you're more likely to adopt these same traits? You are twice as likely to be overweight if your three closest friends are overweight,³² and inversely, you are 20 percent more likely to succeed at new behaviors if you do them with a buddy.²⁸



SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The amount of time you spend socializing each day has a direct impact on your well-being. To have a good day, a person needs around six hours of socializing. So, get connecting!³³



EAT TOGETHER BETTER

Adolescents who eat dinner with their family are 15 percent less likely to become obese.²⁹ Additionally, a report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse points out that teens who eat dinner with their families more than three times a week are less likely to do poorly in school.³⁰



DON'T GO AT IT ALONE

It's getting harder to be connected. In 2004, 25 percent of Americans felt they had no one to confide in. A lack of social connectedness leaves people vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and anti-social behaviors.³³ Social isolation and feelings of loneliness can increase the chance of premature death by 14 percent — nearly double the risk of premature death from obesity.³⁴

CONGRATS, WALLA WALLA VALLEY!

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

We did this together. By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone. **Here's to making the Walla Walla Valley one of the healthiest regions in the nation, where residents are living better, together.**



CONCLUSION

WITH GRATITUDE

Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley is a testament to the effectiveness of collective impact. We have seen tremendous improvement in the health and well-being of our community and its residents over the past three years.

The improvements we've seen would not have been possible without the passion and dedication of hundreds of volunteers, dozens of organizations, and our sponsor: Adventist Health.

Thank you to every community leader, committee member, volunteer, ambassador, community partner, and organization for the countless hours invested, not just in the work of Blue Zones Project, but in making the Walla Walla Valley a healthier place to live, work, learn, and play.

Thank you for believing in the dream of a healthier community, and for putting your passions and resources to work. Because of you, the Walla Walla Valley is experiencing tremendous well-being improvement, and we've set the foundation for continued success in the years ahead.



POWERED BY
WALLA WALLA
UNIVERSITY
WITH SUPPORT
FROM:



CONCLUSION

If there's one thing the story of Blue Zones Project Walla Walla Valley demonstrates, it's that many people and many organizations play an essential part in community success. Those recognized here contributed significant time, effort, and resources to the cause. Special thanks to these leaders—and applause to all who continue to help make the Walla Walla Valley a healthier, happier community.

Steering Committee (Past & Present)

Lori Asmus	Kol Medina
Sarah Archer	Peggy Needham
Elizabeth Chamberlain	Mike Rizzitiello
Susie Colombo	Healthier Schermann
Tim Copeland	Wade Smith
Roger Esparza	Norman Thiel
Mike Fredrickson	Amanda Trejo Perez
Daniel Kaminsky	Kathryn Witherington
Noah Leavitt	
David Lopez	



CONCLUSION

Special Thanks

- Blue Zones Project Leadership Team
- Blue Zones Project Engagement Committee
- Blue Zones Project Volunteer Committee
- Blue Zones Project Worksite Committee
- Blue Zones Project Schools Committee
- Blue Zones Project Retail Food Committee
- Blue Zones Project Built Environment Policy Committee
- Blue Zones Project Food Policy Committee
- Blue Zones Project Tobacco Policy Committee

Community planners and elected officials who are implementing best practices to make our community safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and cars.

Champions who led the work in 56 organizations that are making healthy choices easier for those they serve and our many volunteers and ambassadors who say “yes!” to well-being.



APPENDIX

Designated Organizations

Blue Zones Worksites

Baker Boyer National Bank
Baker Boyer Bank, Plaza Branch
City of College Place
City of Walla Walla
College Place Public Schools
Columbia REA
Key Technology Inc.
Providence Medical Group
Valley Residential Services
Walla Walla University

Blue Zones Schools

Berney Elementary
College Place High School
Davis Elementary
Garrison Middle School
Pioneer Middle School
Sharpstein Elementary

Blue Zones Restaurants

Cleveland Commons Cafe
Graze

Rogers Baker and Cafe
Stone Soup Cafe
The Express
The Happy Wanderer
Walla Walla Bread Co.

Blue Zones Grocery Stores

Southgate Center Market
The Market by Andys

Participating Organizations

Blue Mountain Community Foundation
Blue Mountain Humane Society
Bread Head
Communities in Schools
Destination Community Fitness
Total Motion Fitness
SonBridge Center for Better Living
Walla Walla Senior Center

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