



SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

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



Living Well Grows here



#BZP

CONGRATULATIONS
SALINAS, FOR
PUTTING WELL-BEING
ON THE MAP!

In Salinas, we are seizing every opportunity to move well-being in the right direction.

After launching Blue Zones Project® in our community, we've seen overall well-being, community pride, and exercise rates increase, while tobacco use, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure are on the decline. 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 resurgence is happening. Salinas 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 Salinas one of the healthiest communities in California, 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 2018, a broad base of Monterey County's leadership set an initial six-year course to do just that, beginning in Salinas.

The value of Blue Zones Project is measured by the engagement of its residents; 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 led to lower

medical costs, better workforce productivity, and a strengthened regional economy.

Since 2019, Salinas has undergone its own community transformation, exceeding targets set to engage individuals and organizations and to implement citywide policy changes. Well-being has reached new highs according to the most recent Sharecare Community Well-Being Index (CWBI) and other community indicators.

Our community improved in four key well-being areas measured by the CWBI — community, social, purpose, and physical — and overall well-being improved by 5.9-points.

A broad coalition has supported Salinas' efforts to adopt 40 policies and plans including Vision Zero, Safe Routes to School, Double Up Food Bucks, and smoking-control ordinances that will guide future decision-making toward an even more vibrant and active community. This work was bolstered by nearly \$21.7 million in funding secured with the support of Blue Zones Project.

The return on investment for the Project is and will continue to manifest. The semi-permanent and permanent changes already made will continue to compound over time to produce an even bigger future return for Salinas. The return on investment can be measured in a myriad

of ways, as the value captured is unique to each resident, family, and organization. In this way, Salinas has been enriched as a “choice community”—a place where more people and businesses choose to be. Conservatively, the four-year estimated healthcare and workforce productivity savings for Salinas measured from 2019 through 2023 totals \$43.8 million.

With sustained momentum, continued implementation of city policy and plans, and advancement of the project in key areas, Salinas stands to drive even greater improvements to community well-being in its next phase of work.

When Blue Zones Project first engaged Monterey County leadership more than six years ago, together we established an ambitious plan for the entire county to become a certified Blue Zones Community—beginning in Salinas. Today, Salinas stands as a new benchmark across the state and country for what bold leaders can achieve when they invest in the health and well-being of their residents. Congratulations for creating an even better Salinas!



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:

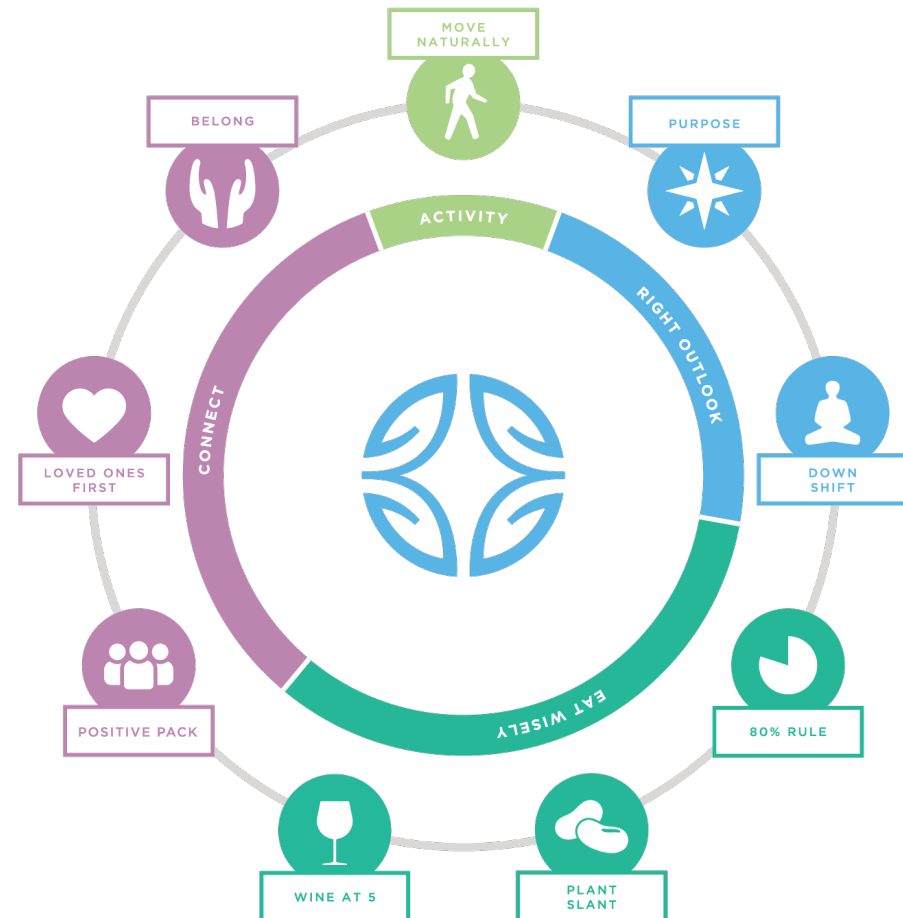
Move Naturally. Homes, communities, and workplaces are designed to nudge people into physical activity. Focus should be given to favorite activities, as individuals are more likely to practice them regularly. For example: gardening, walking, or biking to run errands, and playing with one’s family are 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
- Incorporating more plant-based options into your eating habits
- Enjoying coffee or a glass of wine with friends during regular social hours

Connect. Research indicates it is exceedingly important that people 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. Salinas is the first community in Monterey County, and the fourth in California, 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 Salinas, the overall community well-being sat at 61.7 according to Sharecare Community Well-Being Index (CWBI) data, falling below state and national averages. Today, overall well-being in Salinas is 67.6, a 5.9-point increase. This improvement highlights intentional efforts to improve the health of Salinas' residents.

Well-Being on the Rise in Salinas

	2019	2023	Point Change
Overall Well-Being Score	61.7	67.6	5.9 ↑
Community Well-Being	54.4	64.8	10.4 ↑
Social Well-Being	63.9	68.3	4.4 ↑
Purpose Well-Being	61.9	66.1	4.2 ↑
Physical Well-Being	61.2	68.8	7.6 ↑
Financial Well-Being	63.6	63.1	0.5 ↓





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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 SALINAS

A pioneer in innovation, Salinas is the first community in Monterey County to embark on its journey to transform well-being with Blue Zones Project.

Salinas 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, teachers, and community leaders have made tremendous strides in optimizing the places where we all live, work, learn, and play.

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



MOST, IF NOT ALL, OF THE PLANS OR INITIATIVES THE CITY IS LEADING HAVE SOME HEALTH COMPONENT OR CONNECTIONS. BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAS JUST BEEN SUCH A STRONG PARTNER— HAVING A VOICE AND BRINGING OTHER PEOPLE TO THE TABLE.

Sophia Rome, Salinas
Community Relations
Manager

A COMMUNITY IN ACTION

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

People of all ages and backgrounds across Salinas participated in Blue Zones Project: **some 18,527 residents**. Many attended free cooking demonstrations and Purpose Workshops. Thousands 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 98 organizations participated in Blue Zones Project and took steps to earn designation as Blue Zones Project Approved™**. 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 standpoint, Salinas is creating, supporting, and implementing:

- A Safe Routes to School plan, adopted by City Council, encourages students at 44 schools in and around Salinas to move naturally to school.
- Major investment in the Salinas Regional Soccer Complex and Gabilan Trail, which will foster community connection and promote active living for nearly 20,000 individuals every weekend.
- A Vision Zero and downtown Salinas enhancement plan that improves bicycle and pedestrian safety along street networks.
- Collaboration with local partners to maintain and raise funds for Natividad Creek Park Community Garden, allowing community members to plant, tend, and harvest their own produce for free.
- The establishment of the Monterey County Food System Coalition, focused on increasing access to healthy food, procurement of locally grown food in institutional settings, and engaging a school and community garden network.
- Aligning with community tobacco-control partners to identify opportunities to engage with youth, promote tobacco-control education, and advocate for stronger city ordinances.



THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Blue Zones Project Monterey County has attracted local and national recognition, with more than 1,270 media stories to date.

Blue Zones Project Monterey County has been heralded for innovative approaches to population health management in notable publications, including those noted below.

GALLUP®

MONTEREY COUNTY
WEEKLY

BECKER'S
HOSPITAL REVIEW



edible
MONTEREY BAY



King City Rustler



BLUE ZONES PROJECT MONTEREY COUNTY IN THE NEWS

1,270+

Total Mentions

3.7 Billion+

Total Reach

\$7.1 Million

Total Publicity Value*

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





POLICY

Blue Zones Project works with city leaders to implement evidence-based best 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

We generally exercise too hard or not at all. However, the world's longest-lived people don't pump iron, run marathons, or join gyms.

Instead, they live in environments that constantly nudge them into moving without thinking about it. They live in places where they 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.

Why It Matters

About 69 percent of the American population can be classified as overweight or obese.³ Our children's life expectancy is projected to be shorter than that of their parents for the first time in history. Obesity is not just a health problem, it's an economic one, too. **The estimated annual health care costs of obesity-related illness are a staggering \$190 billion, or nearly 21 percent of annual medical**

spending. Childhood obesity alone is responsible for \$14 billion in direct medical costs.⁴

The good news is there is a solution for this growing issue. Increasing simple movements like standing, walking, stretching, and bending can help burn an extra 350 calories a day. **Studies show that just by making our communities more walkable, the prevalence of obesity can decrease by more than 10 percent.**⁵

That adds up to even bigger possibilities like lowered incidences of heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues and increased productivity, vitality, and years of quality life.

Policies that support natural movement can shift the dynamics in any community toward physical activity. Salinas has made the move, with **16 built environment polices and plans** adopted.

Salinas underwent road audits with national experts and local planners, policymakers, and residents to discuss design options for improved safety, partnered with other city leaders to implement Vision Zero policies, and coordinated Safe Routes to School pop-up demonstrations and supported plan

development, among other initiatives and capacity building.



GRANT FUNDING FOR COMPLETE STREETS

More than \$20.4 million in grant funding has been secured for built environment improvements in Salinas. These awards are being invested in street and park beautification projects, road safety and accessibility improvements (including improved lighting, crosswalks, and other enhancements), and Safe Routes to School.

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

City planners, organizations, and individuals across our community have come together to create environments and support policies that help Salinas' residents move naturally and safely. This work has helped contribute to a 16.5 percent increase in residents exercising at least 30 minutes a day, three days a week.

A Downtown for Everyone

Downtown Salinas has experienced a remarkable transformation, thanks to the collaborative efforts of City staff, Blue Zones Project Monterey County, the **Salinas City Center Improvement Association (SCCIA)**, and other community partners. Their collaboration has helped revitalize Oldtown Salinas, creating a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly environment.

In 2019, Blue Zones Project Monterey County opened its downtown Salinas office and quickly aligned with SCCIA's vision to enhance the downtown corridor. This collaboration led to the creation of a one-mile urban walking loop, marked with arrow-shaped decals, encouraging exploration of local businesses along the newly revitalized Main Street.

The project, initiated by SCCIA in late 2019, coincided with downtown redesign efforts that began after property owners formed an improvement district in 2015. This initiative aimed to boost the business climate, increase foot traffic, and support the development of new residential units,

retail spaces, restaurants, and cafes. Beautification projects and redesigns with bicycle and pedestrian improvements have significantly contributed to a dynamic city center.

During the local Blue Zones Project discovery phase in 2018, it was revealed that over \$50 million had been allocated for street rebuilds as part of a major redevelopment program for Salinas' historic Oldtown. The city also secured a federal grant for a downtown Complete Streets project, aimed at making West Alisal Street and Lincoln Avenue safer and more efficient, with construction beginning in Spring 2020.

The Blue Zones Project Monterey County team has been crucial in forming partnerships, enhancing facilities, and organizing community activities like clean-ups and health fairs in and around the city center.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Downtown street improvements included a road diet to slow traffic by reducing vehicle lanes, converting Main Street to two-way traffic, adding bike lanes, pedestrian treatments and improved crossings, along with

improved lighting that helps enhance walkability and bikeability.

- The Blue Zones Project team supported the Vision Zero and downtown enhancement plans by organizing walk audits, demonstration projects, walking routes, and community engagement activities.
- Blue Zones Project walking decals, initially well-received, proved temporary due to wear and tear. This led to expanded collaborations for seasonal decor in key alleyways and the provision of blue bistro chairs and tables for main plaza areas, creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Downtown Salinas now boasts increased vibrancy and business activity, evidenced by weekly and monthly events, private investments, and a growing dining culture. New restaurants and businesses are still planned, further adding to the area's appeal. Active transportation has flourished, with a resurgence of walkers and bicyclists, and the area is safer for all.

Through these efforts, downtown Salinas has become a model of how urban improvements can foster a thriving, active, and engaged community.





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WE ARE TRYING TO CREATE THIS ENVIRONMENT FOR A CLEAN, SAFE, VIBRANT, LIVELY, BUSY STREETScape WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO BE. BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAS BEEN A BIG SUPPORTER OF THE ASSOCIATION, PROVIDING TABLES AND CHAIRS AND HOPSCOTCH TO HELP CREATE A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN.

Greg Hamer, District Coordinator,
Salinas City Center

Revitalizing Spaces for Community Connection

On November 18, 2014, the **Salinas City Council** unanimously approved a transformative project: the **Salinas Regional Soccer Complex (SRSC)**. This ambitious 68-acre, four-phase project broke ground on November 11, 2018, marking the beginning of a journey that would enhance community well-being, promote healthy lifestyles, and foster social unity in East Salinas.

Developed through the dedicated efforts of volunteers and community organizations and managed by the **Salinas Regional Sports Authority (SRSA)**, the SRSC is more than just a place to play soccer; it is a symbol of hope, health, and community spirit. The complex was meticulously designed to serve the residents of Salinas Valley and beyond, with a focus on engaging youth in soccer and other recreational activities. This initiative aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for fitness, life skills development, and athletic training for an estimated 10,000 local youth soccer players and future generations.

Additionally, the complex serves as an economic engine for local businesses and municipalities, attracting visitors and stimulating the local economy.

Phase one of the project saw the renovation of 11 existing soccer fields at Constitution Boulevard and East Laurel Drive. The full vision for the SRSC includes 21 tournament-quality outdoor fields, one indoor field, an indoor health and learning center, and various recreational facilities. Planned features also include two lit synthetic turf fields, a Celebration Plaza, stadium seating for 2,000 spectators, and rehabilitation of the Gabilan Trail.

While soccer is the heart of the complex, the SRSC offers much more. Walking trails, exercise paths, playgrounds, and picnic areas are all part of the comprehensive design. Access to such amenities encourages residents to engage in physical activity naturally and enjoy the outdoors. By providing safe, traffic-free, and crime-free zones, the SRSC enhances the overall quality of life for community members. The SRSC currently welcomes over 6,000 visitors each weekend, a number expected to grow to over 20,000 with the completion of future phases.

Blue Zones Project Monterey County is a key partner in the ongoing transformation at the complex. In collaboration with SRSC staff, the Project installed outdoor fitness stations and shaded benches adjacent to the walking trail, offering residents free fitness opportunities in a beautiful outdoor setting. Public fitness equipment is crucial for promoting healthier lifestyles, and shaded benches provide much-needed rest spots, contributing to mental and physical well-being.

In 2021, Blue Zones Project Monterey County initiated another enhancement to the complex: the Born Learning Trail, a United Way initiative. This 10-station circuit course provides interactive learning activities for children aged newborn to five years. Signs in both English and Spanish guide parents and caregivers through engaging activities, fostering early childhood development in a fun and educational manner.



POLICY: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Beyond its primary function as a sports facility, the SRSC offers passive recreation throughout the week and hosts community events like health clinics, providing essential services to residents. The complex also promotes natural movement and community gathering through:

- Providing outdoor exercise equipment and stretching stations.
- Hosting free activities including walking moais, expert-led and family walks with **Natividad** medical professionals and **Ecology Action**, and Zumba and U-Jam classes in partnership with **Salinas YMCA** to encourage physical activity.
- Providing water and fresh fruit during matches and practices to discourage sugary beverages.
- Collaboration with other organizations engaged with Blue Zones Project to bring well-being activities to the complex.

The partnership between the SRSC and Blue Zones Project Monterey County continues to thrive, with ongoing efforts to enhance the complex and promote

community well-being. One priority focus is the Gabilan Trail Project, identified in 2020 as a Marquee Project for Blue Zones Project in Salinas, which aims to connect people to recreation, transportation, services, and each other. The trail, which will link the SRSC to retail and neighborhoods, requires cleanup, better lighting, signage, and overall site design improvements. Despite challenges, such as relocating unhoused individuals along the creek, recent state grant funding has enabled cleanup efforts to commence, making the trail safer and more inviting.

Future projects that will continue to transform the complex include:

- Continued clean-ups to foster volunteerism and ongoing collaboration with Blue Zones Project Approved organizations to provide well-being activities.
- Health and well-being initiatives held in partnership with Natividad Hospital staff.
- Hiring a new community coordinator to lead activities and outreach efforts.
- Implementing similar walking trails and exercise paths, along with a skate

and BMX park, beach volleyball, and additional soccer fields in future phases of work.

- The addition of a health center, more shade and exercise structures, a food vendor park, and other placemaking for social gatherings.
- Continued improvements to the Natividad Creek Walk/Bike Path to ensure safe, accessible pathways for walking and biking, connecting schools, parks, and the regional soccer complex.
- A partnership with **Big Sur Land Trust** to transform Carr Lake, a nearby 73-acre property, into a multi-use park with a community center.



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THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED US WITH RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO HELP US GROW AND BETTER SERVE OUR COMMUNITY. THROUGH THEIR EVENTS AND INITIATIVES, WE HAVE ENHANCED THE SRSC TO MAKE IT A SPACE WHERE FAMILIES CAN ENJOY A SAFE AND HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE. BEING A BLUE ZONES PROJECT PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATION HAS GIVEN US CREDIBILITY AND RECOGNITION IN THE COMMUNITY.

Jonathan De Anda, SRSC Manager



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.¹⁰ Comprehensive community policies can limit exposure to second-hand smoke and lead to lower use of tobacco and e-cigarettes overall.

California is known for having robust statewide tobacco policies, but local partners knew they could take additional steps to help reduce local rates of tobacco use.



During the discovery process for Blue Zones Project in Salinas, the city (and more broadly Monterey County) were found to be highly prepared to engage in activities related to tobacco prevention and control. Both had demonstrated a long history of commitment to these efforts. They also had a deep bench of leadership from the public and private sectors who had consistently supported successful initiatives in a wide range of public health and health promotion efforts. This created strong confidence that Salinas had the right mix of people, resources, and passion to successfully implement tobacco prevention and control policy-based initiatives.

Blue Zones Project Monterey County partnered with the **Monterey County Health Department** to align tobacco policy work, including reduced tobacco use, smoke-free housing, and responsible

tobacco sales through **Monterey County Collaborates**. These collaborations helped the Blue Zones Project team develop relationships with the **Monterey County Office of Education, Sun Street Centers, STEPS Youth Leadership, Breathe California**, and the **American Lung Association**. Blue Zones Project Monterey County sponsors **Salinas Valley Health** and **Montage Health** were also involved.

Once the Blue Zones Project team established its partnerships, opportunities in the Project's blueprint were identified to engage with youth, promote tobacco-control education, and advocate for stronger city ordinances. These efforts aligned with our partners' efforts and priorities.



BY THE NUMBERS

According to CWBI data, the rates of tobacco use in Salinas have declined from 3.4 percent in 2019 to 2.8 percent in 2023.

Key Actions and Innovations

- The City Council approved updates to local ordinances to include electronic devices in no-smoking codes.
- Multiple tobacco litter clean-ups were organized with STEPS Youth Leaders and other volunteers. Activities were coordinated around national Take Down Tobacco Day and The Great American Smokeout.
- Advocacy at City Council meetings was conducted through public comments and letters.
- Public education events were co-hosted, such as “Ask the Experts” by Salinas Valley Health and “Vaping 101 & COVID-19” by Breathe California (of the Bay Area, Golden Gate, and Central Coast). These well-received events were conducted in both English and Spanish.
- Breathe California leveraged Blue Zones Project’s platform to gain community input on smoke-free outdoor dining in Salinas through tabling and outreach events, deepening their understanding of residents’ needs.
- Blue Zones Project-branded No-Smoking signs were created for participating worksites, restaurants, and other public places throughout Salinas.
- Pledge banners were developed for more than 20 school classrooms, which students signed to show their commitment to being tobacco and vape-free.



Blue Zones Project Monterey County joined community partners to advocate for the passage of the Resolution for Smoke-Free Monterey County Parks. In June 2021, the **City of Salinas** amended its smoking ordinance to include electronic devices, regulating them the same as traditional tobacco products. Blue Zones Project supported this amendment in partnership with local groups advocating for tobacco and vaping awareness, education, and policy.

Since the Project’s launch in 2019, at least eight cigarette litter clean-ups have been held in Monterey, Salinas, and Soledad. Student public comments were made at five city council meetings in Salinas, Monterey, Marina, Seaside, Gonzales, and King City. Council members noted the impact of hearing directly from local youth. There has been an increase in organizations connecting with the County Health Department, providing more opportunities for youth involvement stemming from Blue Zones Project’s partnerships.

Community tobacco-control policy partnerships have been crucial to the success of Blue Zones Project’s tobacco-related initiatives in Salinas. Blue Zones Project’s Tobacco Committee work has been integrated into the efforts of Monterey County Collaborates for long-term sustainability.

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NOT EVERYONE REALIZES THAT THEY CAN BE HEARD— THAT THEIR VOICE IS VALUED AND THAT THEY CAN EVEN ATTEND THESE MEETINGS (COUNCIL) AND TALK. GIVING THEM (YOUTH) A VOICE AND EMPOWERING THEM IS GOING TO BE A LIFELONG SKILL. THE MORE WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN DIFFERENT POLICIES, THE LESS LIKELY WE HAVE YOUTH TURNING TO TOBACCO AND VAPING.

Reyna Alcalá, Director of Prevention Services, Sun Street Centers



FOOD

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

A 2011 analysis of U.S. Census data by the Center for Social Inclusion reveals Latino, Native American, and African American communities are two to four times more likely than Whites to lack access to healthy foods.¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³

In addition to looking and feeling better, the benefit of healthy eating in the U.S. is financial, estimated to be \$114.5 billion per year (in 2012 dollars) in medical savings, increased productivity, and reductions in heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporotic hip fractures.¹⁴ Poor diet is a major risk factor for these five health conditions, all of which reduce life expectancy.

Blue Zones Project focuses on shaping food policy to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, in part ensuring access for all residents. To address the issue, **19 new food policies and plans** have been adopted so far in Salinas to improve the food environment for individuals and businesses.

Key Actions and Innovations

- During the Blue Zones Project discovery phase in Salinas, a food summit identified the creation of a food policy council as a key opportunity for Salinas and Monterey County, championed by Hester Parker, Executive Director at **Everyone's Harvest**. With an initial committee of 10-15 members, Blue Zones Project led an exploratory meeting in 2020 with 30 participants, forming an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion recruiting committee and acting as the backbone organization since November 2020. The **Monterey County Food System Coalition**, which first convened in September 2021, aims to enhance human, economic, and environmental health by mobilizing diverse food system actors, including local stakeholders from various sectors. The coalition focuses on food accessibility, nutrition, education, and communication, organized into three interest groups: increasing access to healthy food for underserved populations, promoting locally grown food in institutions, and supporting a garden network. In parallel, it also:



POLICY: FOOD

- Supported the implementation of a farm-to-cafeteria program for local schools in collaboration with area farms and **North Monterey County Unified School District (NMUSD)**.
- Provided instrumental support in the passage of SB-1383 Edible Food Recovery.
- Advocated for SB-907, a state bill that addresses EBT at farmers' markets. Three seasonal Salinas farmers' markets accept EBT as a form of payment, increasing access to fresh produce for participants.

Efforts like these to increase healthy food access and education helped contribute to a 54 percent decrease in high cholesterol rates among adults, which now sit at 8 percent in Salinas after a four-year period.



Double Up Food Bucks Expands Access to Healthy Food

In the heart of Salinas Valley, known as the salad bowl of the world for its abundant production of fresh produce, lies a paradox. Despite the region's flourishing agricultural output, with over half of the country's supply of lettuce, celery, and artichokes, and a third of its broccoli, spinach, and cauliflower grown in the region, a significant amount of Salinas residents face food insecurity. According to the 2022 Monterey County Community Health Needs Assessment, 43.8 percent of Salinas community residents have run out of food in the past year or worried about doing so, and one-third find it challenging to afford fresh fruits and vegetables.

Recognizing this disparity, the local Blue Zones Project team sought to address the issue by helping launch a Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) program in Monterey County. This initiative, aimed at making healthy food more affordable, secured funding to bring the program to four Salinas independently owned grocery stores: **La Princesa Williams, La**

Princesa Alisal, La Princesa Sanborn and **El Rey Fresh Produce**. DUFB, a nationally recognized nutrition incentive program, makes it easier for people to purchase healthy foods, especially in times of high food inflation.

Key Actions and Innovations

- In 2020, Blue Zones Project staff began engaging local grocery stores in Salinas to participate in the DUFB program in and connected with key state of California leaders in nutrition incentives to bring programs to Monterey County.
- Blue Zones Project Monterey County wrote the grant application for The California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP), administered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. The grant application, developed in collaboration with **Aspire Health**, received over \$1 million, including more than \$600,000 in nutrition incentives.
- Partnered with **Fullwell** (formerly SPUR), a leader in the Bay Area's DUFB initiative, to gain technical support.

- Blue Zones Project's role was crucial in obtaining the funding, introducing the program to partnering grocery stores and managing its implementation. Local Blue Zones Project colleagues oversee the weekly operations with Aspire Health to ensure the program's success.

Since its official Salinas launch in late 2023, DUFB has made significant strides. The program provides a 50 percent discount on California-grown produce for CalFresh shoppers, effectively doubling the value of their benefits. For instance, a \$30 purchase of California-grown fruits and vegetables costs only \$15. This initiative serves as a triple win: it supports low-income families by improving food security and health, boosts sales for local grocery stores, and benefits local growers by increasing demand for their produce.

As of July 2024, the four Salinas stores offer monthly discounts of nearly \$25,000 on California grown produce, benefiting more than 3,000 families.



Looking ahead, Blue Zones Project Monterey County plans to expand DUFB to additional grocery stores across the county. Concurrently, the local Blue Zones Project team advocated for state policies to embed programs like DUFB in the California State Budget. Thanks to state-wide advocacy from multiple partners, a one-time allocation of \$10 million from the General Fund in the 2024-2025 budget was allocated to sustain the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable Supplemental Benefits program, which helped over 45,000 CalFresh households (an estimated 51,000 individuals) across 44 counties afford fresh produce.



IF PEOPLE HAVE MORE MONEY FOR FOOD, THEY CAN EAT HEALTHY AND SHOP WITH DIGNITY. BARRIERS THAT HAVE HISTORICALLY EXISTED WITH EBT ARE NO LONGER THERE WITH AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM. IT IS OFTEN A CHALLENGE TO LEVERAGE COMMUNITY TRUST TO ENHANCE PROGRAM ACCEPTANCE AND PARTICIPATION, BUT THANKS TO BLUE ZONES PROJECT'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH GROCERY STORES, THIS WAS NOT AN ISSUE.

Grecia Marquez-Nieblas, Senior Manager,
Fullwell (formerly SPUR)

Growing Well-Being and Building Community at Natividad Creek Park

When seeds are planted at the intersection of people, places, and policy work, positive transformation can flourish. **Natividad Creek Park**, in the heart of East Salinas, is a sprawling green space that has blossomed into an epicenter of community spirit and environmental stewardship. This transformation is the result of a dynamic collaboration between the **City of Salinas**, Blue Zones Project Monterey County, **Local Urban Gardeners** led by Leticia Hernandez, and the dedicated volunteers of the **Green CADRE program**.

Natividad Creek Park, one of the largest parks in Salinas, features a dog park, walking paths, children's play areas, an outdoor amphitheater, and a vibrant community garden. Recognizing the park's potential to enhance community well-being, the Blue Zones Project team began partnering with the City of Salinas in 2021. This partnership led to monthly clean-ups throughout 2022, followed by quarterly clean-ups, rejuvenating the park and fostering a sense of ownership among residents.

At the heart of this revitalization effort is the **Natividad Creek Park Community Garden**. Established by Leticia Hernandez, a passionate advocate for community well-being, the garden serves as a communal space where residents can plant, tend, and harvest fresh produce. The garden operates on an open-source model, accessible 24/7, allowing community members to engage with the space at their convenience. It features sections with low-raised beds for children and two-foot raised beds for adults, making it accessible to all.

Blue Zones Project Monterey County recognized the garden's potential and reached out to Leticia in 2019 to bolster her vision. This collaboration brought together various organizations, including **MEarth**, **Xinampa**, and the **Green CADRE program**, which collectively secured \$30,000 in funding for garden improvements. The local Blue Zones Project team also introduced the garden to the CADRE initiative, engaging twenty young people who contributed nearly 1,000 hours of labor to support the garden. Their efforts resulted in the planting of four full garden boxes, providing fresh produce for local residents.

Key Actions and Innovations

- In 2019, Blue Zones Project team members facilitated a charrette to discuss the future of the space, engaging with a diverse group of community partners and leaders.
- Spearheaded a fundraising campaign throughout 2020-2021 to help raise close to \$20,000 for the garden and actively supported a SVH community grant application that awarded an additional \$10,000 in funding.
- Provided general budget management and invoicing support to Leticia Hernandez and collaborated with her on developing a Prescribe the Garden program.
- Aligned efforts with organizations participating in Blue Zones Project to encourage staff members and students to get involved with garden clean-ups.

POLICY: FOOD

One of the most innovative initiatives born from this partnership is the Garden Prescription program. This program aims to encourage healthcare providers to prescribe time in the garden for patients, particularly youth diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes. The goal is to promote healthy eating and lifestyles by providing hands-on gardening experiences. Through this program, participants will learn to grow their own vegetables, gaining valuable knowledge about nutrition and physical activity.

The garden's impact extends beyond physical health. It serves as a hub for education and lifelong learning, offering public workshops on topics such as composting and outdoor cooking. Volunteers from Blue Zones Project Approved worksites and the community have participated in over a dozen gardening opportunities, learning about natural movement and food cultivation. These activities not only promote physical activity but also foster a sense of community and environmental stewardship.

Since 2021, the partnership has hosted over 17 events at the park and community garden, involving a diverse group of community partners and

leaders. Notably, **AMOR Salinas** has been instrumental in this effort, working closely with Sophia Roma and other partners on clean-ups and gardening days. Additional partnership with **Sun Street Centers** and youth from the **STEPS program** supports annual tobacco litter clean-ups on National Take Down Tobacco Day and The Great American Smokeout.

Looking to the future, plans are underway to install a new shed for equipment storage and implement an irrigation system to replace the current manual watering method. These projects, supported by the **Resource Conservation District (RCD)** and the **Monterey County Food System Coalition**, aim to enhance the garden's sustainability and efficiency.

Through the combined efforts of Leticia Hernandez, Blue Zones Project Monterey County, and numerous community partners, Natividad Creek Park Community Garden demonstrates what can be achieved when people come together with a shared vision. It is a place where hard work, collaboration, and a passion for community well-being converge, creating a lasting impact on the lives of East Salinas residents.



PLACES

In Salinas, 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.



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.¹⁶ Some 70 percent of Americans eat at their desk several times a week.¹⁷ 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 28 worksites take actions to support employees, including things like establishing employee wellness committees and newsletters, improving cafeteria options, and starting worksite gardens to become Blue Zones Project Approved™.

Impact of Healthier Workplaces

- **Salinas Valley Health** and **Natividad** hospitals have become community well-being hubs by facilitating various onsite health and wellness activities such as Walk with the Doc, farmers' markets, volunteer opportunities for staff, and aligned internal communication.
- Taking steps such as adding Blue Zones parking spaces, providing healthy vending machine options, requiring 50 percent of food and beverage options to meet Blue Zones guidelines, and designating walking routes, contributed to a 6.5 percent reduction in employee turnover rates, improved RealAge Test results, and a 9.5 percent higher response rate in employee engagement surveys at SVH.
- **Taylor Farms** increased its contribution to Salinas' healthy food environment by donating thousands of snack packs, free salad coupons, and more. Their onsite efforts such as designating walking routes for staff and encouraging microbreaks have led to improved employee A1C and BMI measures and year over year decreases in health claims.
- Leadership at **Pacific Valley Bank** has seen increased participation in annual colleague engagement surveys thanks to efforts like improved company PTO policies to support well-being, establishing an internal wellness brand—Let's Get This Done, and their employee walking moai, which has been going strong for more than two years.
- More than 100 percent of staff (including part-time employees) at **Salinas Family YMCA (Central Coast)** have engaged in Blue Zones Project programming through the worksite. Taking steps to prioritize colleague well-being included adding an employee garden, offering self-monitoring equipment to staff, and developing new partnerships with other Blue Zones Project Approved organizations make staff feel more connected to the community.



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THE INVESTMENT IN OUR COMMUNITY BEGINS WITH AN INVESTMENT IN OUR EMPLOYEES- WE STRIVE TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL AND LIVE HEALTHY LIVES. OUR STRATEGY IS TO PROVIDE A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT ATTRACTS AND RETAINS PARTNERS WHO ARE CAPABLE, COMMITTED, AND EMPOWERED TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT. BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAS HELPED TAYLOR FARMS ELEVATE OUR EMPLOYEE INITIATIVE AND WE ARE EXCITED TO OFFER THEM NEW RESOURCES SO THEY CAN REACH THEIR WELLNESS GOALS THROUGH WALKING GROUPS, PURPOSE WORKSHOPS, AN EMPLOYEE ROOFTOP GARDEN, LUNCH AND LEARNS, AND COMPANY-SPONSORED WELLNESS EVENTS.

Bruce Taylor, CEO, Taylor Farms



Rancho Cielo Earns Double Designation

Nestled in the serene expanses of Salinas Valley, **Rancho Cielo** stands as a pillar of hope and transformation for the underserved and disconnected youth of Monterey County. Since its establishment as a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2000, this comprehensive learning and social services center has been dedicated to fostering self-sufficiency and self-esteem among its students, providing them with the tools and opportunities to build a brighter future. At the same time, Rancho Cielo has committed to creating a supportive and healthy work environment for its employees, reflecting its holistic approach to community well-being.

Rancho Cielo's sprawling 100-acre campus, complete with two ponds, mountain biking trails, and a cultivated garden, offers a haven away from the urban neighborhoods that can foster self-destructive lifestyles. Here, youth can build community while engaging in unique educational experiences not available on most campuses. Rancho Cielo's holistic approach wraps around the whole youth, offering diploma education

up to age 24, vocational training with industry professionals, mental health counseling, probation case management, job readiness, life skills, physical activity, enrichment activities, and connections to health, social, and family services.

Through deep partnerships and collaborations, Rancho Cielo reflects the broader community's support for its mission. From the early days when friends and family lined up with Judge Phillips to clear the land, to the volunteers who donate their time and skills, to those who believe in the mission and offer financial support, the community's commitment to Rancho Cielo is unwavering.

In partnership with the Blue Zones Project Monterey County, Rancho Cielo has continued to embrace a holistic approach to well-being that aligns with its vision of empowering disenfranchised youth and supporting its dedicated employees. The dual approval as a Blue Zones Project worksite and restaurant underscores Rancho Cielo's dedication to fostering a healthier, more connected community for everyone involved.

As part of its efforts to achieve designation as a Blue Zones Approved

worksite, Rancho Cielo has implemented several best practices to enhance the well-being of its staff.

Key Worksite Actions and Innovations

- Established a quiet place for employees to downshift
- Created internal well-being branding with a unique wellness logo
- Formed an employee wellness committee
- Designated walking routes to encourage natural movement
- Connected employees and community organizations to its healthy environment through events such as garden workshops and healthy meals

Rancho Cielo launched a Blue Zones Project walking moai, and 11 staff members participated in the 10-week activity. This not only encouraged natural movement but also fostered connection among colleagues. A pumpkin and succulent workshop also connected new staff members with tenured staff, sharing

PLACES: WORKSITES

creativity in the garden, and snacks made by students from the onsite Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant, the **Drummond Culinary Academy**.

These efforts have led to improved employee retention, greater engagement at gatherings and events, and increased utilization of campus trails for walks with students. Rancho Cielo's employees, through these initiatives, experienced enhanced well-being and a sense of belonging, which in turn positively impacts their work with the youth.

Transformative Culinary Education for All

At the heart of Rancho Cielo's culinary program is the Drummond Culinary Academy, which serves as a restaurant and a teaching kitchen. Here, low-income and at-risk youth gain hands-on culinary training, learning valuable skills that extend beyond cooking techniques. Under the guidance of Head Chef Estevan Jimenez (EJ), students are exposed to a diverse array of ingredients, particularly plant-based options, preparing them for future success in the culinary world.

The Drummond Culinary Academy implemented several well-being best practices on its path to earning Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant designation.

Key Restaurant Actions and Innovations

- Created two new Blue Zones-inspired dishes
- Sources produce from local farms and growers
- Priced plant-based options lower than meat dishes
- Avoids placing saltshakers on tables and serves dressings on the side
- Does not offer deep fried foods
- Provides raw vegetables or healthy samples before meals instead of free bread or chips

The academy's commitment to these principles has yielded impressive results, maintaining a perfect average rating of 5 stars on both Yelp and Google platforms since 2020. The steady growth in weekly

sales of Blue Zones-inspired dishes reflect the community's appreciation for these healthier options.

Rancho Cielo's partnership with Blue Zones Project has not only enhanced its programs and offerings but also cemented its role as a vital part of the Monterey County community. By fostering a culture of well-being, promoting sustainability, and emphasizing onsite plant-based cooking, Rancho Cielo continues to inspire and empower both its youth and its employees.



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RANCHO CIELO IS SO PLEASED TO BE RECOGNIZED AS THE FIRST COMBO BLUE ZONES WORKSITE AND BLUE ZONES RESTAURANT (IN MONTEREY COUNTY). WE CAN'T HELP OTHERS IF WE DON'T TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN HEALTH.

Susie Brusa, former CEO, Rancho Cielo



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.**¹⁹ Physical activity and stretch breaks during the school day can improve grades, increase concentration, and raise math, reading, and writing test scores.²⁰ Simple changes in lunchroom design can nudge students toward healthier choices.²¹

Across Salinas, 25 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.

Impact of Healthier Schools

- **Creekside Elementary School** has seen an 11.5 percent increase in attendance in

the time it has partnered with Blue Zones Project.

- **Gavilan Elementary School** started a walking group consisting of 15 families and dedicated, enthusiastic parents volunteer for school programs and events supporting Blue Zones Project initiatives.
- To ensure students have their social-emotional well-being needs met, students at **Central Bay High School** have access to alternative therapies such as garden and equine therapy as well as programs like Blue Zones Project Purpose Workshops that connect them to their gifts.
- Fifth graders at **Frank Paul Elementary School** saw improved outcomes on their state physical fitness test.
- Alisal Nutrition Service Directors have enhanced the food environment for their campuses by leveraging local farmers to source produce, engaging children to create healthy menu items, created cupcake alternatives for parents to bring to celebrations, and built upon previous efforts by educating students, staff, and parents around Blue Zones food principles.
- Schools including **Gavilan View Middle School, Frank Paul Elementary**, and

Creekside Elementary established gardens to educate students about nutrition, serve as a resource for school programs to promote healthy eating habits, leverage the produce to introduce new foods to students, and create volunteer opportunities for parents and staff.



WALKING HELPS KIDS

Children who walk to school are more alert and ready to learn, strengthen their social networks, and develop lifelong fitness habits. A Walking School Bus allows a group of children to walk to school under the supervision of an adult.^{22, 23}



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IT HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE PARTNERING WITH BLUE ZONES PROJECT TO SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS' WELL-BEING AND HEALTH. THE SCHOOL HAS INITIATED THIS APPROACH TO HELP MAKE HEALTHIER CHOICES AT THE SITE AND COMMUNITY. WHEN STUDENTS ARE HEALTHY, THEY DO BETTER ACADEMICALLY.

Cecilia Moreno, former Interim Principal,
Creekside Elementary School



Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds at University Park Elementary School

At **University Park Elementary School**, a vibrant community thrives from Transitional Kindergarten to 6th grade, serving 495 students. Among them, 68.1 percent come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, and 32.7 percent are English learners, creating a diverse and dynamic environment.

At the heart of this bustling school is Maribel Fregoso, University Park's devoted parent coordinator whose passion has sparked extraordinary parent engagement initiatives. Enthusiastic parents eagerly volunteer to improve the campus environment, from painting classrooms and decorating the cafeteria for holidays to assisting with school events. Seeking a meaningful activity for themselves, parents formed a walking moai, committing initially

to a 10-week journey but now continuing their walks at least once a month.

The campus garden project, championed by third-grade teacher Ms. Rich, became a key focus of Blue Zones Project's partnership with the school, along with student and parent collaboration. Blue Zones Project provided t-shirts for students to wear while working in the garden, along with other materials and supplies. The children have since transformed the garden into a thriving outdoor classroom. Following this success, a second-grade class also joined the initiative, contributing to the garden's upkeep and educational potential. And, drawing inspiration from the parents' walking moai, Ms. Rich invited her students to join the group one Tuesday each month for a morning stroll before school.

Investment in the school's gardens is just one step school leadership took as it worked toward becoming Blue Zones Project Approved.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Maintaining a healthy environment is a top priority at University Park, where a school policy regulates food and beverages, allowing only water in classrooms and hallways.
- School administration shares Blue Zones Project information with new families to foster a culture of well-being on campus.
- Provides diabetes awareness and prevention education modules empowering students with vital health knowledge. To date, 187 students have engaged in this learning opportunity.





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PARENTS HAVE BEEN WALKING WITH BLUE ZONES PROJECT FOR THE PAST 2 YEARS AND IT'S BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL THAT SOME CLASSES STARTED JOINING US IN OUR FUN MORNING WALKS ON TUESDAYS.

Maribel Fregoso, Parent
Coordinator, University Park
Elementary School

Since its approval, University Park has continually supported Blue Zones Project in Salinas. Parents declared Thursdays as BZP days, dedicating themselves to campus support tasks such as event preparation and trash cleanup.

The results speak for themselves. Since engaging with Blue Zones Project, **University Park Elementary has seen a 12.6 percent increase in attendance, a 1.7 percent decrease in disciplinary issues**, and a new playground structure added to the kindergarten recess area. The school serves as a model of the transformation that is possible at the intersection of community, health, and education.

RESTAURANTS

Restaurant meals can weigh us down or lift us up.

The typical American entrée weighs in at 1,000 calories.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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.

Residents and visitors of Salinas now have 28 Blue Zones Project Approved™ restaurants to choose from, and more than 150 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.

At **Portobello's on Main**, you can now order one of 12 new Blue Zones-inspired dishes off the menu, many of which include produce sourced from local farmers within the Salinas Valley. Through their participation in the Pigs and Pinot event, restaurants such as **La Cantina Brewing Company**, **Steinbeck House Restaurant**, and **Culturas Hidalgo y Oaxaca** are providing customers with more opportunities to build community around healthier eating. Blue Zones-inspired options are delivering results at high volume and mom-and-pop establishments alike.

Since partnering with Blue Zones Project in 2022, **La Plaza Bakery & Café** has watched healthy sales grow. With three locations across Salinas Blue Zones-Inspired dish sales equate to more than 17,000 units per year. Another restaurant located in downtown Salinas, **Patria** reports average weekly sales of 204 healthy meals—meaning their diners opt for the healthy choice more than 10,000 times per year.



At a broader level, the 28 Blue Zones approved **restaurants in Salinas collectively serve approximately 70,000 Blue Zones-inspired dishes annually**. This remarkable figure highlights the growing popularity and demand for healthier, Blue Zones-inspired meal options within our community.



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THE MOST REWARDING PART OF THE PARTNERSHIP WITH BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAS BEEN THE PEOPLE. INTERACTING WITH THE PEOPLE, ENGAGING WITH THE PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE OF THE COMMUNITY. THAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING. IT'S GREAT TO BE ABLE TO DESIGN NEW DISHES, NEW PLATES, BUT JUST GETTING THEIR REACTION, GETTING THEIR FEEDBACK, SEEING WHETHER OR NOT THEIR EYES LIGHT UP WHEN THEY SEE THE DISH COMING TO THEM, SEEING THEIR REACTION WHEN THEY GET THAT FIRST BITE, SEEING THEIR ENGAGEMENT IS THE REASON AS TO WHY WE'RE DOING THESE BLUE ZONES DISHES TO BEGIN WITH. IT IS HONESTLY ONE OF THE MOST FULFILLING THINGS THAT I'VE DONE SO FAR IN MY LIFE.

Ignacio Maravilla, Chef/Owner,
La Casa del Sazón



El Colibrí Serves Up Well-Being

El Colibrí Restaurant & Deli stands as a model for the power of family, community, and a shared vision for healthier living. Purchased with the dream of bringing great food, exceptional service, and a memorable dining experience to locals and visitors alike, El Colibrí has grown into a beloved fixture of the community.

Passionate owner and chef Maribel Monjaraz is at the heart of El Colibrí. Her culinary journey is rooted in her family's rich tradition of homemade soups, sandwiches, and cherished Mexican recipes. Under her leadership, El Colibrí has become a place where tradition meets innovation, offering dishes that are not only delicious but also promote healthier eating habits.

El Colibrí's partnership with Blue Zones Project was a natural fit, aligning perfectly with their vision of community and health. By contributing a vegetarian pozole recipe to the Blue Zones Project Monterey County community cookbook and offering plant-based dishes and half-size portions,

El Colibrí empowers individuals to make choices that align with the Blue Zones Power 9 principles centered around plant-based eating and moderation. The restaurant earned its Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant designation in July 2021.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Created nine new Blue Zones-inspired dishes
- Integrated a Blue Zones optimized menu into the regular menu
- Priced plant-based entrees lower than meat entrees
- Sources produces from local farmers in the Salinas Valley
- Offers half size portions and does not charge extra for split plates
- Posted Blue Zones Project no-smoking signage at the restaurant

Beyond the best practices implemented at the restaurant, El Colibrí is showing up to provide healthy options at community

events, including Pigs, Pinot & More in 2023. This vibrant festival benefits the **Salinas Downtown Rotary Club Foundation** and drew over 450 attendees, each eager to partake in good food and community spirit. During this event, El Colibrí introduced a special dish inspired by the eating habits in the original blue zones - a jackfruit mole. This unique creation was a testament to Maribel's commitment to offering flavorful and nutritious alternatives to traditional dishes.

El Colibrí's commitment to providing healthier options and creating a welcoming environment is evident in its steady growth and achievements. In 2023, the restaurant averaged 30 units of Blue Zones-inspired dishes sold weekly, up from 28 units in 2022, and zero baseline units in 2021. This consistent growth highlights El Colibrí's ability to attract and retain customers while maintaining high standards of service and quality.



El Colibrí Restaurant & Deli is more than just a place to eat. Through its innovative approach to traditional dishes, partnership with Blue Zones Project, and its unwavering commitment to community, El Colibrí continues to feed and nurture people across Salinas. With every delicious dish and customer interaction, El Colibrí is proving that a small family business can make a big difference in the health and happiness of its community.



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.**²⁶ 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.²⁷

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 Salinas created awareness around these issues, and five local grocers took steps to implement best practices and become Blue Zones Project Approved™ grocery stores.

By offering CalFresh/EBT benefits and nutrition incentives, healthy food education opportunities to customers and making design, display, and promotional changes that nudge people toward produce, whole grains, locally grown foods, and other healthy buys, partners like **La Princesa Market**—which has three Blue Zones Project Approved grocery store locations in Salinas—make healthy choices easier for shoppers.



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.²⁸



Corner Store Transforms into Healthy Food Hub

La Michoacana, a beloved staple for over 35 years, has become the first participant in the Blue Zones Project's pilot Market Makeover program in Salinas. Since October 2022, Victor Martinez, the store's owner, has been transforming his childhood neighborhood by providing healthier options to its residents.

Originally known for its fresh tortillas, La Michoacana was one of Salinas' first tortillerias. Over the decades, the store has evolved to meet the changing needs of its customers. Today, it offers shoppers in East Salinas a variety of nutritious foods that are easy to identify and choose.

One of the standout features of La Michoacana's transformation is the addition of new produce stands filled with a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. These stands often feature organic produce sourced from local ALBA farmers during special pop-up events. Despite the challenges in ensuring a consistent supply of local organic produce, Victor is unwavering in his commitment to connect with ALBA farmers and offer the freshest options possible. In the interim, he ensures that conventional produce is always available, guaranteeing that customers can find fresh, nutritious foods whenever they shop.

La Michoacana adopted several best practices to encourage healthy eating as it worked toward becoming a Blue Zones Project Approved grocery store.

Key Actions and Innovations

- Added "shelf talkers" to highlight healthier options on the shelves, making it easier for customers to make nutritious choices.
- Made Blue Zones-inspired recipe cards available on the shelves to provide customers with simple, healthy recipes they can prepare at home.

- Placed arrow decals on the floor to guide customers to the store's "healthy corner," where they can find a curated selection of nutritious foods.
- Provided resources help educate customers about managing and preventing diabetes through healthy eating.
- Added new outdoor signage to promote the store's healthy offerings and invite the community to explore its expanded produce section.

La Michoacana Market is no longer your average corner store. It has become a cornerstone of health and wellness in East Salinas, and through Victor's dedication and the store's innovative partnership with Blue Zones Project, La Michoacana is setting a powerful example of how small, community-focused businesses can make a significant difference.

As La Michoacana continues to grow and evolve, it remains committed to its roots and its mission: to provide the residents of Salinas with the healthy, affordable produce they deserve. With each new initiative and every fresh fruit and vegetable on its shelves, La Michoacana is proving that even the smallest changes can have a significant impact on community health and well-being.



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.



PEOPLE

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.²⁹

People of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds in Salinas have come together to create positive change in their community through Blue Zones Project. From the program launch in 2019 to community certification in 2024:

18,527

individuals involved in the Project.

1,837

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

1,281

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

257

people met up with a Moai for connecting to walk or eat healthier together.

935

individuals attended a plant-based cooking class or gardening demonstration.



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.



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 Salinas, we embrace the power of social connections to bring citizens together through groups, clubs, and community organizations.

Move more. Over 250 individuals joined Walking Moais throughout the community, building long-lasting friendships while exploring our community on foot. Groups like the **Creekside Terrace Walking Moai** have stayed together beyond the initial 10-week commitment and have been walking together for over two-and-a-half years.

Eat better. Cooking classes and demonstrations brought individuals together to learn to cook new plant-based dishes. Over 930 residents attended a plant-based cooking or gardening demonstration. Partnering with organizations like **CHISPA** and the **Salinas Public Libraries** to host cooking classes created opportunities to meet people where they are.

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.³⁰

Through volunteering, Purpose Workshops, and Purpose Moais, Blue Zones Project 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 1,280 people sought to discover their gifts at a Purpose Workshop and put their skills to work by giving back to Salinas through volunteer work. **With more than 5,600 hours donated, over 1,830 volunteers in Salinas—including all-star volunteers like Linnea Carlton, Maria Best, Vivian Leyva, and others—have generated over \$216,200 in value for the community.**³¹

Today, **66.6 percent of Salinas residents report they are thriving in life, compared to 58.8 percent in 2019.**



I'VE LIVED IN SALINAS MY WHOLE LIFE, AND THERE HASN'T BEEN AN ORGANIZATION THAT PROMOTES HEALTH LIKE BLUE ZONES PROJECT DOES. THEY MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL BY GIVING PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR HEALTH.

Jorge Rubio, Outreach Specialist, Sun Street Centers



WHY IT MATTERS

Residents across Salinas are showing up for each other in big ways. Today, 69.2 percent of adults report having someone in their lives who always encourages them to be healthy up from 58.1 percent in 2019!

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.³² 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.³³

Blue Zones Project's free plant-based cooking demonstrations were popular across the community, with more than 930 individuals learning to prepare healthy meals inspired by the longest living people of the world's blue zones. Deep local partnerships contributed to the successful program.

In the vibrant heart of Salinas, where the pulse of the community beats strongest in its public spaces, two libraries—El Gabilan and Cesar Chavez—have become the epicenter of an inspiring culinary movement. It all began with a simple idea: to bring people together through the universal language of food.

The seed for this movement was planted in May 2022 when Susanne Crichton from the **Salinas Public Library Literacy Program** reached out to Blue Zones Project Monterey County to host a Purpose Workshop for their tutors and students. The successful event sparked the desire for further collaboration. Around the same time, the Blue Zones Project team was searching for venues to host ongoing cooking demonstrations. When they proposed the idea to the library, the response was an enthusiastic “yes.”

The first cooking demonstration at El Gabilan Library exceeded all expectations, with over 40 participants attending. This success laid the foundation for a series of bilingual cooking classes that alternated between the **El Gabilan and Cesar Chavez Libraries**. Each event, themed around popular topics like Taco Tuesday and

Plant-Based BBQs, drew large crowds and fostered a sense of community.

These events were more than just cooking classes. They were collaborative efforts involving Blue Zones Project Approved restaurants like **La Casa del Sazón** and **La Cantina**, whose chefs generously shared their culinary expertise. **Hartnell College** nursing students also played a vital role, helping to lead the cooking sessions and engaging with attendees.

The impact of these events was far-reaching. As of December 2022, more than 240 residents have attended seven library cooking demonstrations. Participants eagerly anticipated future sessions, often inquiring about upcoming events. Library staff at El Gabilan noticed a surge in interest in healthy living resources, with Blue Zones cookbooks frequently checked out following the demonstrations. The increased interest in healthier cooking and plant-based meals was evidenced by more patrons visiting the library's reference desk, underscoring the positive impact of the events on community health awareness.

The collaboration between the libraries and Blue Zones Project Monterey County has opened doors to new partnerships

PEOPLE

and opportunities. The libraries, catering to the local Hispanic community where (pre) diabetes is prevalent, align perfectly with the Project's mission to promote healthy living. These connections have not only enriched the cooking demos but have also fostered unity and collaboration within the community.

In a bid to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, the Blue Zones Project team provided the libraries with cooking demo kits, enabling them to continue hosting events even when Project representatives cannot be present. Additionally, connections have been established between the libraries and Hartnell Community College, ensuring that future student cohorts can support these community events.

The bilingual cooking demos at El Gabilan and Cesar Chavez Libraries have woven a rich tapestry of community engagement, health awareness, and culinary education. Through the shared experience of cooking and eating together, residents of Salinas have discovered the joys of healthier living and the strength of community ties. As new collaborations and ideas continue to flourish, Salinas' cooking demos prove the power of food in bringing people together and inspiring positive change.

”

IT BRINGS ME IMMENSE JOY TO SHARE MY RECIPES WITH MY COMMUNITY. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY PROVIDED BY THE BLUE ZONES FOR MY FAMILY AND ME TO VOLUNTEER AND SHARE OUR KNOWLEDGE.

Marie Romero, Community Volunteer



”

THE COOKING DEMOS ARE ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR PROGRAMS AT THE LIBRARY, PATRONS ARE ALWAYS EXCITED TO COME, AND WE SEE THAT THEY WANT TO TASTE THE FOOD. WE ALSO ALWAYS HEAR PEOPLE ASKING WHEN THE NEXT COOKING DEMO WILL BE, AND FROM IT THERE HAVE BEEN MANY PEOPLE CHECKING OUT THE BLUE ZONES COOKBOOK. THE COOKING DEMOS ARE A GREAT ASSET TO THE COMMUNITY TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER TO LEARN HOW TO CREATE A HEALTHY RECIPE.

Kate Black, Librarian



Volunteers Give Back to Community, Find New Friends

In Salinas, Blue Zones Project has become a partner in health, wellness, and community connection. Central to this initiative are the dedicated volunteers whose stories of involvement and impact illustrate the transformative power of giving back. From long-time supporters to passionate newcomers, each volunteer brings a unique flavor to the vibrant tapestry of Blue Zones Project in Salinas.

Kay Lee has been a cornerstone of the Project since its 2019 launch in Salinas. A retiree with a passion for nutrition, Kay found a new purpose in volunteering with Blue Zones Project. Her journey began with organizing the office, helping with cooking demonstrations, and writing recipes for the monthly newsletter. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Kay collaborated with the Blue Zones Project team to create recipes that the community could enjoy at home. To date, Kay has created over 24 recipes that have been shared on Blue Zones Project Monterey County's blog and in the community cookbook.

Kay's involvement extends beyond the kitchen. She assists in setting up for cooking classes, supports Blue Zones Project grocery store initiatives, and brings her infectious enthusiasm to the office almost weekly. Her dedication and positivity light up the team, reminding everyone of the importance of their work. Recognized for her over 300 hours of volunteer service, Kay has been honored at Blue Zones volunteer appreciation events as a testament to her unwavering commitment.

831 Niner Empire, a local fan club chapter of the San Francisco 49ers, began volunteering with Blue Zones Project Monterey County in 2021, seeking to give back to their community beyond their love for football. Their involvement started with clean-up events at the Salinas Soccer Complex and Natividad Creek Park and soon expanded to other Project events like Hike and Wine walks and beach clean-ups.

With a mission aligned with Blue Zones Project's goals, the club has consistently engaged in various activities, supporting the community as a cohesive group. Their dedication has been recognized at volunteer appreciation events where members like **Annette Molina**, **Luis Pavon**,

and **Julio Manzo** were celebrated for their significant contributions. The club's involvement highlights the power of collective action and community spirit.

Linnea Carlton's involvement with Blue Zones Project began through the SVH Health Explorers program in 2022. Her initial volunteer work at the SVH Family Picnic led to further engagement, where she supported office tasks and created impactful flyers for Diabetes Awareness Month. Recognizing her talents, the local Blue Zones Project team offered her a formal internship, during which she contributed to cooking demonstrations, data entry, and the creation of the community cookbook.

Linnea's dedication and hard work, amounting to over 103 volunteer hours, have left a lasting impression on both Blue Zones Project staff and her internship coordinator. Her contributions, including significant edits to the community cookbook, demonstrate her commitment to promoting health and wellness. Linnea's journey reflects the growth and opportunities that come with active community involvement.



PEOPLE



The success of Blue Zones Project in Salinas is rooted in the dedication of volunteers like Kay, 831 Niner Empire, Linnea, and countless others. Their stories are a testament to the power of community engagement and the positive ripple effects of giving back. And, through partnerships with organizations like the **Salinas Downtown Rotary Club**, **United Way**, **Salinas Regional Soccer Complex**, **AMOR Salinas**, and **Ecology Action**, Blue Zones Project Monterey County continues to offer a platform for community members to find meaningful volunteer opportunities and make a lasting impact.

Our volunteers serve as a source of inspiration, reminding us of the importance of purpose, passion, and community. Whether it's through healthy culinary education, community clean-ups, yoga classes, or creative projects, every act of service contributes to a healthier, happier Salinas.

“
BLUE ZONES
PROJECT IS MY
INNER VOICE THAT
ENCOURAGES ME TO
MOVE, TO NOURISH,
TO CELEBRATE
IN HEALTHY AND
JOYFUL WAYS.

Kay Lee, Blue Zones Project
Ambassador

CONGRATS, SALINAS!

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 Salinas one of the healthiest cities in the nation, where residents are living better, together.**



CONCLUSION

WITH GRATITUDE

Blue Zones Project 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 five years.

The improvements we've seen would not have been possible without the passion and dedication of hundreds of volunteers, organizations, and our sponsors—Salinas Valley Health, Taylor Farms, and Montage Health.

Thank you to every community leader, committee member, ambassador, community partner, and organization for the countless hours invested, not just in the work of Blue Zones Project, but in making Salinas 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, Salinas is experiencing tremendous well-being improvement.



BROUGHT TO
MONTEREY
COUNTY BY:



Blue Zones Project Monterey County - Salinas Project Team

Antonio Vargas, Food Environment Lead (2022 - present)

Brenda Cabrera, Organizations Lead, Schools (2023 - present)

Cindy Ruiz, Sr. Marketing Manager (2021 - present)

Clarissa Delgado, Project Manager (2019 - present)

Genevieve LeBlanc, Sr. Policy Lead (2019 - present)

Kendra Howell, Sr. Policy Lead (2018 - present)

Mackenzie Fisher, Sr. Events and Office Specialist (2023 - present)

Maribel Roque, Sr. Organization Lead, Worksites (2020 - present)

Paola Delgado, Engagement Lead (2023 - present)

Tiffany DiTullio, Executive Director (2018 - present)

Alexis Diaz-Infante, Organization Lead (2020 - 2023)

Aline Reyna, Organization Lead, Schools (2019)

Ana Acosta, Food Environment Intern (2021)

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Christina Ferrante, Sr. Marketing Manager (2020 - 2021)

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Rachel Thompson, Sr. Events and Office Specialist (2022 - 2023)

Veronica Plascencia, Sr. Marketing Manager (2021 - 2023)

CONCLUSION

If there's one thing the story of Blue Zones Project 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 Salinas a healthier, happier community.

Governance Committee

Adrienne Laurent	Debie Montoya	Linda Taylor
Christiana Kearns	Laura Zehm	Liz Lorenzi

Steering Committee

Adele Frese	Jean Salcido	Mike LeBarre
Bruce Delgado	Joanna Oppenheim, MD	Monica Anzo
Carmen Gil	Joe Gunter (In Memoriam)	Noemy Loveless
Colby Pereira	Julie Edgcomb	Paul Farmer
Daniel Gonzales	Katy Castagna	Ray Corpuz
Debbie Hale	Ken Goebel	Rene Mendez
Deneen Guss	Kimbley Craig	Seaberry Nachbar
Elsa Jimenez	Laurel Lee-Alexander	Steve McShane
Gloria De La Rosa	Luis Alejo	Tim Nylen (In Memoriam)
Ian Olgesby	Luis Vargas	Tony Amezcua
James Gilbert	Mark Faylor	Yvette Irving
Jane Russo	Mary Ann Leffel	
Janelle Garcia Zaveche	Melissa Kendrick	

Leadership Team

Alfred Diaz-Infante (In Memoriam)

Amanda Meyer

Belinda Varela

Britt Rios-Ellis

Cali Stiles

Casey Grover, MD

Claudia Otero

Dana Armstrong

Daniel Meewis

David Diehl

David Jacobs

Emily Brandt

Ernesto Vela

Estevan Jimenez

Gene Fischer

Hester Parker

James Bogart

Jamie Stracuzzi

Jason Giles

Jose Rios

Kameron MacDonald

Karen Curtis

Karina Rusk

Kim Stemler

Marguerite Walker

Martha Martinez

Matthew Mogensen

Monica Sciuto

Niaomi Hrepich, RD

Paola Ball

PK Diffenbaugh

Rita Burks

Sheila Phan

Tina Torrez

Yasmine Elsherbini

Yesenia Velarde

Special Thanks

Blue Zones Project Engagement Committee

Blue Zones Project Worksite Committee

Blue Zones Project Schools Committee

Blue Zones Project Retail Food Committee

Blue Zones Project Built Environment Policy Committee

Monterey County Food System Coalition

Blue Zones Project Tobacco Policy Committee

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

Champions who led the work in over 98 organizations that are making healthy choices easier for those they serve.

Our many ambassadors who say “yes!” to well-being.

Designated Organizations

Blue Zones Worksites

Alisal Union School District
Alvarez Technology Group
Aspire Health
Blue Zones Project Monterey County
California Water Service Co
Central California Alliance for Health
City of Salinas
D'Arrigo California
Hartnell College
Leavitt Central Coast Insurance Services
Montage Health
Monterey County Office of Education
Natividad Medical Center
North Monterey County Unified School District
Ocean Mist Farms
Pacific Valley Bank
Pacific Valley Bank Corporation
Rancho Cielo
Salinas City Elementary School District
Salinas Family YMCA
Salinas Valley Health

Salinas Valley Health Foundation
Taylor Farms
Taylor Farms Food Service
Taylor Farms Retail Plant
Transportation Agency for Monterey County
VNA
Wald Ruhnke and Dost Architects

Blue Zones Schools

Alisal Virtual Academy
Bardin Elementary School
Boronda Meadows Elementary School
Central Bay High School
Creekside Elementary School
Dr. Oscar F. Loya Elementary School
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Academy
Echo Valley Elementary School
Frank Paul Elementary School
Gavilan View Middle School
Jesse G. Sanchez Elementary School
John E. Steinbeck Elementary
Kammann Elementary School
Lincoln Elementary School
Loma Vista Elementary School

Los Padres School
Monte Bella Elementary
Monterey Park Elementary School
Natividad Elementary School
Oasis Charter School
Prunedale Elementary School
Sacred Heart School
Sherwood Elementary School
University Park Elementary School
Virginia Rocca Barton Elementary School

Blue Zones Grocery Stores

La Michoacana
La Princesa – Alisal
La Princesa – Sanborn
La Princesa – Williams
Star Market

Blue Zones Restaurants

Culturas Hidalgo y Oaxaca
Drummond Culinary Academy
Eagle Restaurant
El Colibrí Restaurant and Deli
Emma's Bakery and Café
Guadalajara Grill

APPENDIX

James Dean Burgers and More
La Cantina Brewing Company
La Casa del Sazón - Romie Lane
La Casa del Sazón - Salinas St.
La Plaza Bakery - Bardin
La Plaza Bakery - Davis
La Plaza Bakery - Sanborn
Main Street Bakery
Mangia - Eat on Main
Natividad Hospital
Patria
Poke Bowl-Rrito
Portobello's on Main
Sabor Latin Fusion
Steinbeck House Restaurant
SVH - The Salad Bowl Café
Tacos Don Beto
Villa Rivera Café

Salinas Regional Sports Authority
Salinas Downtown Rotary Club
Salinas Seventh Day Adventist Church
Tatum's Garden
The Parenting Connection of Monterey
County
United Way Monterey County

Other Participating Organizations

CHISPA
iHeart Media
Independent Transportation Network
Monterey County
Kairos Learning Solutions
Meals on Wheels of the Salinas Valley

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