



Well Connected Communities Wave 2

CALDWELL - UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

Community Profile

Well Connected Communities (WCC) is a national well-being initiative of America's Cooperative Extension System in partnership with National 4-H Council with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. WCC launched in 2017 and is using the power of combined youth-adult voice and action to recognize and address systemic health inequities. It is scaling successful innovations from this work across the Extension network to catalyze changes at the local, state, and national levels, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to live a better, healthier life.

As part of the evaluation of Well Connected Communities, the Center for Community Health and Evaluation conducted "virtual site visits" with four WCC communities in 2021 to elevate promising practices and gain a deeper understanding of how Extension and communities are working together to advance health equity and wellbeing. Caldwell, in partnership with the University of Idaho Extension (Extension), has participated in WCC since its inception in 2017.

Location: Idaho

WCC participant since 2017 (self-funded for Wave 1, grant-funded for Wave 2)

Extension partner: University of Idaho

Type of community: Urban

WCC health priorities: Healthy eating/nutrition/food security, physical activity



Caldwell Health Coalition

The Caldwell Health Coalition formed in 2018 with support from the University of Idaho Extension to build a healthy community through collaboration, access, and education. They organize their work under six pillars of health:

- Access to health care
- Improving food access
- Addressing mental health
- Housing options
- Supporting underserved micro-neighborhoods
- Built environment

The coalition is co-facilitated by the Southwest District Health Department and Extension with membership from around 40 organizations, including the City of Caldwell and local hospitals, which are also providing funding support. They have consistent engagement of 10-15 organizations with other partners participating when agendas and activities align with their interests and priorities. Providing volunteer opportunities like the Master Volunteer program have fostered engagement, provided networking opportunities, and built relationships. Approaches to support longer-term sustainability of the coalition, in addition to securing partners who contribute funding, include incorporating coalition involvement in city job descriptions (planner and communications specialist).

Caldwell - University of Idaho

Caldwell youth leadership

A significant element of Caldwell's WCC work is focused on youth leadership development and supporting youth in contributing to various health and wellbeing activities. In addition to participating in the coalition, Caldwell youth have been involved in the mayor's youth advisory council, the local farmer's market, and creating a statewide public service announcement about teen vaping.

For youth and adults alike, this work is most powerful when youth are engaged in leadership roles and have equal decision-making influence in coalition activities. Participation in the Youth Summit on Healthy Living in 2020 and 2021 set Caldwell up for success by helping youth understand the bigger picture of community work and providing adults with new ways of engaging youth. The summit offered an opportunity to travel across the country and youth felt proud presenting their work at a national level. The role of adults in Caldwell's model is to be mentors and encouragers to youth and youth shared that they enjoy being full members of the coalition with equal voice and potential to support the work. Both youth and adults shared that providing youth with opportunities to be involved in activities that align with their interests fosters engagement and youth feel a sense of pride when they can see the difference they made in the community.

Key ways Caldwell youth are involved in local community health improvement efforts beyond the coalition include:

- Attending the 4H Healthy Youth Summit
- Staffing the Senior Produce Program in the local farmer's market
- Participating in the mayor's advisory council
- Creating a statewide teen vaping prevention PSA through Project Filter
- Distributing food in partnership with Idaho Food Bank and Team Rubicon
- Facilitating and planning social activities
- Presenting and providing nutrition education
- Writing Hope letters as part of the 2C Hope Letters campaign—letters are disbursed through the community as post cards to develop protective factors against Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Participating in the Community Wellness Volunteer program

"It's a slow-moving process, this coalition development, but we have seen a lot of growth in the coalition and are actually seeing outcomes and impacts from it, which is encouraging...to our members and I think we're seeing more engagement and participation in the coalition."

Even with their success in promoting youth leadership, Caldwell coalition leaders also grappled with common challenges:

- Youth graduate from high school and move on to other things, requiring ongoing outreach and recruitment for the coalition.
- Logistical challenges including: competing priorities for youth, meeting times and availability, and transportation to coalition meetings/activities.
- Fatigue with virtual activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Extension is exploring attaching a small stipend to the volunteer training for youth to encourage participation and potentially mitigate some of these challenges.

Caldwell - University of Idaho

Coalition Impact

The combination of health coalition and youth leadership in partnership with Extension has resulted in various community-level impacts from providing fresh produce to seniors to safety improvements near the local school (e.g., expanding the school zone and adding crosswalks). Additionally, doing this work has made coalition partners more competitive for other related funding. Although the COVID-19 pandemic shifted coalition work to more immediate needs such as food drives, the strong partnership with the City of Caldwell has positioned the coalition to more formally engage in local policy in the future.

In addition to strengthening local community health efforts, Extension continues to internally strengthen its work on equity through staff training including a 6-week intensive course on race and critical conversations. Extension continues to “change the way it sees itself” and, like in WCC, promote partnership across program areas to better deliver to the community.

Key community contributions of the Caldwell coalition:

- Contributed to the City’s Comprehensive Plan on housing and zoning issues
- Conducted a needs assessment, integrating the coalition with the Community Wellness Volunteer Program
- Conducted a Walkability Project that addresses environmental changes in school zones
- The Senior Nutrition Pilot Program provides seniors with free produce vouchers for the farmer’s market
- Coalition social media posts have reached more than 2,000 people

“So really redefining partnership along the way as we’re evolving as a coalition, that changes from the beginning of ‘hey, can you just come to a few meetings and listen and we can start talking about things’ to ‘no, I really need you to invest your time and this isn’t going to get done if you all don’t do it.’ Because that’s not [Extension’s] place to do it all.”

What is a Well Connected Communities virtual site visit?

In 2021, the WCC evaluation selected four participating communities for more in-depth data collection to better understand how WCC activities were being implemented. Selected communities had to demonstrate active coalition and youth engagement and an orientation to policy, systems, and environmental change work and be willing to participate in additional data collection activities (i.e., interviews with local Extension agents and community members, youth focus group). Virtual site visits occurred in August – October 2021.