

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Community wellness volunteers learn skills to build a culture of health in communities

AT A GLANCE

Youth and adult residents in three Idaho communities increased their health knowledge and learned new skills to improve their communities' overall wellness and access to health resources.

The Situation

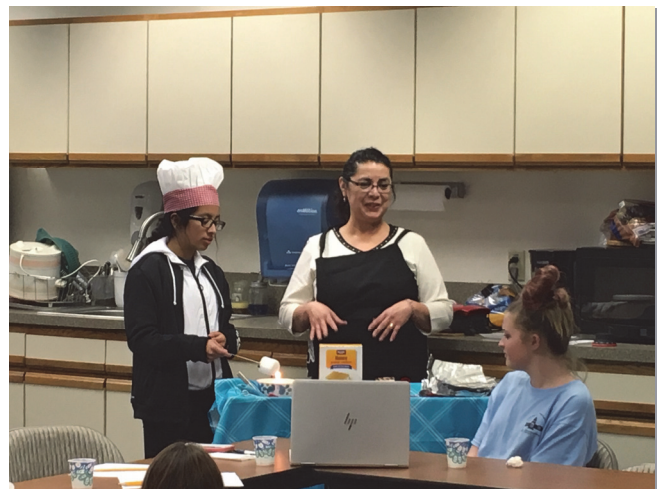
University of Idaho Extension extends evidence-based programming through the recruitment, training and retention of volunteers. Well-trained volunteers support Extension education programs that engage community members. These programs not only help to educate and develop individuals, but also increase Extension's outreach efforts to the larger community.

With 12% of the population in Idaho being uninsured and 29% of Idahoans being obese, community health continues to be a high priority area for Extension programming.

Three Idaho communities are actively involved in Well Connected Communities (WCC), a national health initiative with a focus on building a local culture of health. WCC provides several avenues for community members to participate, one of which is the Community Wellness Volunteer program.

Our Response

The Community Wellness Volunteer program was developed in 2018 to train youth and adult residents to become community health and wellness advocates. Youth and adult participants were trained as peers. The program was piloted in 2019 and offered again in



Canyon County volunteers leading a food demonstration at the 2019 Community Wellness Volunteer training in Caldwell.

2020. The program structure includes two hours of in-person training and two hours of online coursework each week for seven weeks. The participants had flexibility to attend in-person or virtually via Zoom, as needed. This was especially helpful in 2020 for participants who completed their training virtually during Idaho's stay-at-home orders due to COVID-19.

The program was implemented in three Idaho counties: Canyon, Owyhee and Franklin. Extension educators connected with participants virtually via Zoom during the live (originally in-person) two-hour weekly sessions to allow for cross-county engagement.

Program content consisted of the national Well Connected Communities curriculum, three online interactive modules developed by UI Extension educators,

and regionally focused health data and education. Specific program topics included education on social determinants of health, health equity, finding reliable health data and information, nutrition education, chronic disease prevention and management, physical activity, and youth and adult partnerships. A pre-program evaluation and post-program evaluation were provided to measure knowledge and behavior change.

The volunteer program was designed to provide a pool of youth and adult volunteers who have committed to give-back hours within their communities supporting the overall goal of the WCC initiative.

Program Outcomes

A total of 17 volunteers (11 adults and six youth) have completed the training to become community wellness volunteers. Of these volunteers, one identified as male and 16 as female; five identified as Latinx and 11 as white.

A total of 14 outcomes were measured using a pre- and post-evaluation. Listed in the table are six outcomes with the greatest mean score increase (1.3-1.5 points).

Volunteers gained the most confidence in their ability to find reliable health and wellness information on the internet. Volunteers also gained an understanding on how environment and circumstance influences health, the ability to read and use city and county health statistics and data, and how to modify activities to teach people of different cultures other than their own. These findings are aligned with the central focus of the program of building health equity in communities. Volunteers work directly within diverse communities ensuring that the community is receiving quality, evidence-based and equitable health information, and health resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Table 1. Mean pre/post evaluation confidence statement scores (possible five points)

Statement (I am confident in my...)	Mean Pre-	Mean Post-
Knowledge and basic nutrition and health concepts.	3.1	4.4
Understanding of health and how environment and circumstance impact health.	3.2	4.6
Ability to read and use county and city health statistics and data.	3.0	4.4
Ability to modify activities and programs to teach adults of all ages.	3.0	4.4
Ability to modify activities and programs to teach people of different cultures than my own.	2.8	4.1
Ability to find reliable health and wellness information on the internet.	3.2	4.7

Community Wellness Volunteers, following completion of the training, completed give-back hours in 2019 and 2020. These hours included participation in community coalitions, health fairs and other area events.

The Future

This program will continue to be offered and adapted for sustainability. The program will expand to offer more volunteer opportunities with various community partners to increase our reach. Also, the development of an advanced program beginning in April 2021 for current community wellness volunteers will ensure continued access to current evidence-based information and recommendations.